

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Social Lives of Numbers: Statistics, Reform and the Remaking of Rural Life in Turkey* by Brian Silverstein

Review by: Bengü Çelenk

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to the overlook of an important dynamic that is effective in Türkiye's relations with Central Asia and the caucasus. Another criticism is related to the section in which Türkiye is analyzed. In this section, it is noteworthy that the author makes a one-sided reading with respect to any discussions about the Armenian Question. Had Türkiye's theses on the Armenian question been included, the academic flexibility of the author would have

been strengthened. A final criticism comes to the fore regarding the author's approach. The fact that he puts neo-liberal values in the center and evaluates the four states here as abnormal actors deviating from these values naturally leaves out questions that different theoretical approaches can answer. For this reason, the discussions initiated by the author in this book should be evaluated with other theoretical approaches.

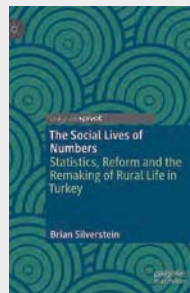
The Social Lives of Numbers: Statistics, Reform and the Remaking of Rural Life in Turkey

By Brian Silverstein

Palgrave Macmillan: Springer Nature Singapore, 2020, 125 pages, €49.99, ISBN: 9789811591952

Reviewed by Bengü Çelenk, Kırşehir Ahi Evran University

Ensuring food security is essential in terms of strategic significance for a nation as well as protecting the public's health throughout the entire food production and consumption process. Due to reasons like the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years, Russia's occupation of Ukraine, the "breadbasket" of many nations, mainly Europe, and climate change, it is imperative to painstakingly collect data on agricultural productivity and formulate strategic strategies in accordance with that data. By considering statistics and data analysis-based agricultural reforms implemented in the agricultural sector, based on Türkiye's EU accession process within a framework of the relationship between techno-politics and society, Brian Silverstein, in his brief piece, has sought to demonstrate the power of numbers to transform societies and politics. The central claim of this book, which describes how agricultural and rural lifestyles have changed par-



ticularly in recent years, as a result of statistical reforms, is that even if the political integration phase of Türkiye's EU accession process has stopped, infrastructure and technical harmonization initiatives are still ongoing and reshaping society. In this context, he asserts that statistical changes affect people's behavior, ideas, and even emotions. In this regard, he describes as "performative" the act of creating links between agricultural statistics and social and political dynamics. However, Silverstein did not use the term "performative" in his study in a theatrical sense. He defines performativity as "to emphasize that an act of description can have effects that rearrange the relationship between the description and the phenomena the description is purportedly about" (p. 3).

In particular, Silverstein, a scholar in anthropology with research interests in Türkiye,

Europe, and the Middle East, questions why the “statistics” chapter was opened in the Türkiye-EU negotiating processes in this study and ponders the EU’s expectations for reform in this regard. In other words, he emphasizes the critical necessity of statistics in terms of comparability in Türkiye’s harmonization effort within the framework of EU norms and standards. However, in this book, he refers to the statistics reforms as “not ‘neutral’ in the effects they have, and that they might even be seen as ‘having’ politics.”¹

Silverstein briefly but thoroughly discusses the concept of statistics in the book’s introductory sections. Starting with the basic definition of statistics, he gives information about the use and application of statistics and conducts a persuasive argument from an anthropologist’s point of view about whether it is unbiased or not. At this point, he adopts a realistic and constructivist approach, influenced by Hacking,² Porter,³ and Desrosières⁴ among the scholars who contributed to the literature on statistics (p. 19). Using a qualitative research method, the study attempts to understand the effectiveness of quantitative data. In addition to observations and analysis of documents, Silverstein interviewed farmers, agricultural engineers, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry experts, and field officers to better understand how Türkiye implemented statistics-based agricultural reforms, how statistics were collected, and how they were used. In his own words, he created “a fairly traditional fieldwork-based anthropological study” (p. 18).

The author conceptualizes his arguments through three stages. In the first stage, institutions implementing statistical reforms agreed upon during EU negotiations were scrutinized. While the efforts to standardize the agricultural data production process through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and

the processes of sharing the data held by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry were examined, it was emphasized that the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and Ministry of Science, Industry, and Technology are also involved in the standardization processes through audits, certificates, and regulations. Although the author emphasizes that these processes sparked neoliberalism debates, he limited the scope of this discussion. The second stage highlights the data-gathering initiatives of the institutions implementing the statistical changes made within the scope of EU discussions. This stage relies strongly on interviews and observations. However, the fact that the author did not specify how many people he interviewed and supports his arguments through a small number of interviewees suggests that he had a relatively small number of interviews. The problems encountered throughout the field data-gathering procedure and the roles of high-tech and low-tech advantages were constructed based on the author’s direct observations and interviews. Official explanations could also be utilized on this issue, but the author preferred not to. Silverstein analyzed the practical reflections of the ‘performative’ concept, which he placed at the center of the study in the third stage. To that aim, he questions whether the new agricultural statistics reforms have altered farmers’ existing patterns. As a result, he claims that while generating data with the information received within the scope of statistics reform, this process changed agricultural practices and the ideas and routines of farmers.

In terms of narration, the book is written simply and understandably. A comparative approach with official documents and statements and a more detailed expression would have enriched the study even more. However, this potential may be utilized for upcom-

ing research. This book is recommended for those who want to qualitatively study the concept of statistics on any subject.

Endnotes

1. Nikhel Anand, *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

2. Ian Hacking, "How Should We Do the History of Statistics?" in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 181-196.

3. Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

4. Alain Desrosières, "How Real Are Statistics? Four Possible Attitudes," *Social Research*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (2001), pp. 339-355.

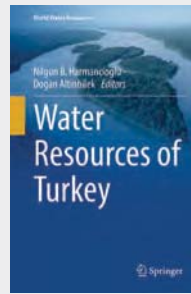
Water Resources of Turkey

Edited by Nilgün B. Harmancıoğlu and Doğan Altınbilek

Texas: Springer, 2020, 545 pages, \$64, ISBN: 9783030117283

Reviewed by Dilnaz Saipedinova, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University

Given the important place that Türkiye occupies in world geography, it can be said that the book, edited by Professors Harmancıoğlu and Altınbilek, answers many needs regarding the discussion of factors affecting Türkiye's water resources, their availability, and distribution. The purpose of this scientific work is to develop a comprehensive understanding of Türkiye's water resources, as well as planning and managing its water resources. The paper also clearly expresses the problems associated with the inefficient use of resources, the impact of climate change, and environmental degradation. In total, the book consists of 17 chapters, it examines in detail the use and consumption of water, as well as management, legislation, sustainability and security, climate change, as well as ancient waterworks, and future prospects. The book contains a sufficient amount of information reflecting the extensive and rich experience of not only the editors but also the authors of the chapters. It can be noted that while studying the book you will see a detailed description of



the water resources of Türkiye, this book is offered as one of the first volumes that complement the series of books *World Water Resources* edited by Professor Vijay P. Singh of Texas A&M University, U.S. I

It can be divided into three main parts, the first part being devoted to the physical characteristics that form the country's water resources, such as geography, topography, geology, hydrology, meteorology, climate, etc. The second part deals with the use and consumption of water, including the three main uses of water in Türkiye, which are domestic (drinking and industrial), agriculture (irrigation), and hydropower (hydroelectricity). The third and final section of the book deals with different issues and problems, all of which are of great importance in terms of water management. In addition, there is a separate section that is dedicated to the transboundary river basins of Türkiye.

Despite the rich and detailed content in the work, the reader may find some common-