




2014

# Identities and Inbetweens: The Vietnamese and Assimilation Strategies in Germany

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***Identities and Inbetweens:***

*The Vietnamese and Assimilation Strategies in Germany*

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in  
International Studies.

By  
Carson Downs

Under the mentorship of Danielle Smith

**ABSTRACT**

Multiculturalism has met with opposition in Germany as many of its native citizens have expressed their dissatisfaction with the country's immigrant population. The problem, however, really lies in the system of integration utilized by Germany. The German government claims multiculturalism has failed, yet the integration approach the country utilizes is actually somewhere between multiculturalism and assimilation. This research suggests that Germany has not attempted true multiculturalism. The supposed failure of multiculturalism is often blamed on the apparent unwillingness of immigrants to integrate, but Germans are hesitant to accept even the better integrated immigrant groups, such as the Vietnamese. To illustrate this reality, popular opinions of Germans towards both the Vietnamese and immigrants in general are analyzed via the distribution of surveys. Questions gathered demographic information of the survey-takers and examined opinions toward the Vietnamese and immigrants in general. Responses indicated that opinions towards immigrant groups varied based on the focus of the question. Responses to questions regarding the acceptance of immigrants as members of both the community and nation contradicted each other. Germans willingly accept immigrants as members of the community, but showed great hesitancy to accept them as a member of the German nation. If the level of assimilation dictates the ability of multiculturalism to function, better assimilated groups, such as the Vietnamese should be overwhelmingly well-received. The Vietnamese are viewed no more and no less positively than other immigrant groups, despite their evident assimilation, therefore, other factors must exist as to why multiculturalism is ostensibly "failing".

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April 2014  
International Studies  
University Honors Program  
**Georgia Southern University**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and expertise of Professor Danielle Smith. Her availability and flexibility provided me with endless opportunities to critique and better my work. The Honors Program of Georgia Southern University as well provided the amazing opportunity to gather data while abroad in Germany. Finally, thanks to my father, Dr. Alan Downs, for spending years and countless hours proofreading hundreds of pages and teaching me how write academically.

## INTRODUCTION

During an infamous speech to the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*<sup>1</sup> in October 2010, Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed multiculturalism “has utterly failed.” Merkel represents a growing, popular sentiment among ethnic Germans today as issues of integration continue to grow. Political actions taken by the government to pressure immigrants to assimilate have proven to be quite popular with the German people, and as a result, German society is unable to escape a reputation of intolerance as it is often cited as a country in a state of tension over assimilation issues with its immigrants. What many in the international community do not realize, however, was Merkel's remarks were specifically meant to refer to the Turkish population, as it is by far Germany's largest minority group. Germany believes multiculturalism with its Turkish failed, but the attitude towards the other minority groups present is uncertain and cannot be assumed based on that of the Turks. General conceptions about immigrants in Germany perceive the population to be Turkish, so much so that the words “Turkish” and “immigrant” are often used interchangeably. The reality of Germany's immigrant population is one of notable diversity. Thanks to the sheer size and impact of the Turks, many minority groups get left in their shadow. European and Asian immigrants came to live and work in Germany, but they are still largely understudied in the field of German society.

Nationhood is generally thought to be based on culture. Pride in a nation's cultural uniqueness is celebrated and often central to an individual's opportunity to participate in the state. When immigrants wish to become citizens, in the United States for example,

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<sup>1</sup> Weaver, Matthew. "Angela Merkel: German multiculturalism has 'utterly failed'." [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed). <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed> (accessed March 29, 2014).

they must pass a test to indicate their knowledge of American culture and history. Germany's previous citizenship laws, however, created a different source for national acceptance. Prior to the current citizenship laws put in to place in 2000, to become a German citizen, one must have German blood. Only children with parents of German heritage were able to attain citizenship. In the new laws, those who do not possess citizenship may apply for it after eight years of residing in Germany and owning a permanent residency permit. Due to this precedent, nationhood has strongly built up around the idea of ethnic identities and groups.

One of the non-German ethnic groups residing throughout the state is the Vietnamese. With the diaspora beginning with the Vietnam War era, many Vietnamese expatriates from both North and South found themselves living and working in German society. The *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (BRD), or former West Germany, offered study opportunities to Vietnamese of high academic standing. These students arrived and were educated in BRD universities in varying fields. Many would find employment and decide to stay in Germany. *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR), or former East Germany, would later offer contract workers the promise of education and training. While excelling in occupational training, education would ultimately be neglected in favor of more time spent laboring. Many South Vietnamese “boat refugees” would ultimately end up in refugee camps spread across Europe throughout the course of the Vietnam War. In 1978, the BRD vowed to host 40,000 Vietnamese refugees, while the DDR vowed to train and educate 10,000 Vietnamese a decade. Growth would be controlled until the acceptance rate was significantly lowered in 1987 by the BRD. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, the new German government would decide to repatriate the East German contract

workers via mass deportation. Interestingly, considering its integration issues today, the BRD would depict the deportations as an unjust action, resulting in the government begrudgingly granting citizenship to 30,000 former Vietnamese contract workers. With 125,000 Vietnamese residing in Germany as of 2005, the population is once again growing as the community attracts friends and family.<sup>2</sup> (Whole paragraph can be cited as book by Pipo Bui)

When Merkel makes a comment as bold as multiculturalism “has utterly failed,” it cannot possibly cover the entire scope of immigrants. With over thirteen times more Turks in Germany, the Vietnamese are easily overlooked as all attention is placed on the significantly larger Turkish population. The real question is not just the Vietnamese's ability to integrate, but German society's willingness to let it occur. It is clear that much of Germany is pessimistic about the future of the Turkish integration into German society, but sentiment towards other minorities is not so obvious. The reputation of Germany is one of negativity towards immigrants, but it is important to know whether this is the German attitude towards all immigrants or if the Turks are an anomaly. Ethnic minorities in Germany are consistently regarded in a similar manner to the Turkish. While the Turkish hold a significantly more negative connotation, they are not anomalous. The cause of multiculturalism's lack of success lies in the German attitude towards immigrants, rather than the immigrants themselves.

To understand this, one must examine the picture of immigration in Germany by removing the lens of the Turkish and replacing it with that of the Vietnamese. By applying the known beliefs and sentiments of German society about Turks as an

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<sup>2</sup> Bui, Pipo. *Envisioning Vietnamese migrants in Germany: ethnic stigma, immigrant origin narratives and partial masking*. Münster: Lit, 2003.

immigrant group on to the Vietnamese, one can easily see German sentiment towards immigrants as a whole, rather than a single group. Opinions of Germans as members of a host culture and Vietnamese as an ethnic minority show the level of integration Germans believe they have acquired and Vietnamese attitudes toward integration.

Germany's approach to multiculturalism, along with many other Western European states, requests the assimilation of its immigrants as it fears the changing of its culture. Assimilation requires the ethnic group to rid itself of their previous country's culture and adopt that of their new country. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is the concept of the coexistence of various cultures in a given society. These two systems are distinct from each other and generally thought to be mutually exclusive. Germany seems to have blurred the line between these two antithetical methods and refers to them interchangeably. In the application of assimilation, success most strongly relies on immigrants learning the language of the host country. The ability to communicate and operate in society is central, providing the main avenue for the host country's culture to be taught and transferred. After the language barrier is broken, the rest of the culture may follow suit. Immigrants often have trouble with this process or do not wish to assimilate at all. This is often cited as the root of Germany's issues with immigrants and integration. Standards seem set to a degree that much of the immigrants, namely the Turkish, do not wish to reach.

Following the destruction of the Second World War, Germany lacked the appropriate manpower to fill the jobs of the thriving “economic miracle.” To fill the factories and keep up with the flourishing economy, the German government formally instated the *Gastarbeiterprogramm*, or Guest Worker Program. Through this program,

migrants were invited to temporarily stay in Germany as “guest workers” with the intent of them leaving after they were no longer needed. It was through this program that most of the Turks in Germany originated. Following the completion of their contracts, many Turks chose to stay in Germany due to the presence of their families and a better job market. Germany's dispute with its Turkish can be traced back to this point, when the migrant workers chose to stay in their new country.

The Vietnamese, as stated earlier, originally came to Germany for a variety of reasons that were, for the most part, different from that of the Turks. Refugees fleeing from war-stricken South Vietnam and students invited to receive a strong education and new opportunities, are both conditions that imply a longer period of stay. In the victory by North Vietnam, it became clear the repatriation of South Vietnamese refugees would be difficult and dangerous if at all possible. Bearing this in mind, the BRD shrank the numbers of refugees it accepted and was not relatively strict on granting them citizenship. The North Vietnamese contract workers of the East however, like the Turks, were expected to leave at some unspecified point. While accepting a large amount of workers in to the program, very few would manage to be granted citizenship following the mass deportation of 1990. In these respects, refugees in the BRD had difficulty gaining entrance, but once done so, could more easily become a citizen. Contract workers in the DDR could easily arrive, but have great trouble staying.<sup>3</sup>

This difference in the original reason of immigration creates a different approach to integration in German society. Those who have found asylum in their new country are bound to be more willing and susceptible to assimilation. Fleeing a war-stricken area,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid



refugees wishing to build a new life can create a fresh start in their new country and host culture. This more positive attitude naturally allows the methods of assimilation to be more effective.

Guest workers, however, were not welcomed from the beginning and resulted in them being less receptive of German society and culture as a whole. Turks were treated as outsiders and consequently became marginalized in German society. As more and more Turks arrived, cultural enclaves began to form and Turkish culture was strongly preserved. Much of the Turkish population was not only choosing to stay permanently, but they were not assimilating. Germany requests that its immigrants learn German language and customs to operate in society while leaving those elements of their previous country behind, allowing them to become “German.”

If the German government and society cites the Turkish immigrant's lack of assimilation as the source of today's tension, then the reception of better assimilated ethnic groups, such as the Vietnamese, should be significantly more positive. Whether or not this is true can be tested by placing the standards of assimilation on the Turkish on to the Vietnamese as well and gathering opinions of its success from both Vietnamese and Germans. The results will show if German society's lack of acceptance of the Turkish is anomalous, or is consistent with all immigrant groups.

Much of the primary data collected for this study was collected in Germany, specifically in the city of Trier, located in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. The main method of data collection was a large, standardized, anonymous survey. Surveys provided people the opportunity to speak their full opinion with anonymity and create consistency in data and responses.

The survey contained a variety of questions about both the participant and their opinions. Demographic questions such as race, age, and religion were collected for use in comparison. Answers were examined to see if trends or similarities were visible in any particular category. There were no demographic qualifications for participants to take the survey other than having been residing in Germany at the time. The goal was to find and compare feelings of both ethnic and non-ethnic Germans, therefore people of many different backgrounds were questioned.

As for the actual ideologies of participants, carefully worded questions regarding the Vietnamese and integration were asked. Most questions utilized a list of responses from which to choose an answer or a scale to gauge agreement or disagreement. Several short answer questions and areas for extra remarks were given as well.

After the results were gathered, surveys were analyzed for trends in answers regarding race, age, religion, level of education, and political ideology. Answers from and about the Vietnamese were compared to questions from and about those of ethnic German descent.

The negative preconceptions held by ethnic Germans about the Turkish population are strong and fairly common. They are firmly rooted into the minds of many, tracing back decades to their origin during the economic miracle. While the opinions of ethnic Germans on Vietnamese immigrants do vary from their Turkish counterparts, the difference is predominately due to lack of attention, rather than their level of assimilation. This lack of attention is created by the massive difference in the size of the populations.

There is lack of consensus in the minds of ethnic Germans on the role of Vietnamese in German society. With the Turkish earning the majority of German

animosity, popular opinions are generally higher of those of Vietnamese origin. It can be inferred, based on observations and results of the survey, that Germany holds similar opinions towards the Vietnamese and immigrant groups in general to that of the Turkish. The Turkish, however, are anomalous in the severity of anti-immigrant sentiment due to the immense size of the population.

## CHAPTER 1

The manner in which states attempt to integrate their minority populations varies greatly by country. The stance of host governments and peoples towards immigrants is reflected in infrastructure and policies directly affecting minority populations. A national population that is anti-immigrant will likely possess different naturalization laws, immigration requirements, and cultural enclaves than a country that is pro-immigrant. Other than completely closing borders, these pro- and anti-immigrant countries can be divided in to two approaches to immigrant integration: multiculturalism and assimilation. A multicultural doctrine is utilized by countries creating a pro-multiculturalism approach policy. Multiculturalism can best be defined as several different cultures coexisting peacefully and equitably in a single country.<sup>4</sup> In a multicultural system, the host government allows its immigrants to, for the most part, retain the culture of their former country while adapting to that of their new host society. Immigrants are not expected to give up their way of life when moving to their new country, but rather coexist in a society containing immigrants from a variety of cultures.

Assimilation is the direct opposite of multiculturalism. The process of assimilation integrates an immigrant by removing the individual's former culture and customs and replacing them with that of the host culture. Governments utilizing assimilation attempt to force their immigrants into adapting through several avenues. Language, for example, is taught to allow immigrants to communicate with the local population and interact with society. Eventually, the immigrant is expected to become fully a member of the host culture. Assimilation, understandably, can be a very difficult

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<sup>4</sup> "WordNet Search - 3.1." WordNet Search - 3.1. Princeton University, n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2014. <<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=multiculturalism>>.

process for most immigrants. Depending on factors such as age, completely ridding oneself of the culture they were raised in can be painful and even impossible, making life difficult for immigrants in countries with assimilationist approaches.

The willingness of countries to accept immigrants, and, more importantly, the integration approach they use to incorporate them into society depends on multiple factors, such as the degree of homogeneity of the host population and the number of jobs available in the receiving country. The multicultural approach, for example, is rather intimidating to countries and societies as it brings new challenges and difficulties presented by cultural pluralism. Problems arise as attributes that can define a culture, such as religious practice and gender roles, can be drastically different between two populations which now must live amongst each other. With the assimilation approach, host populations attempt to preserve the status quo. Assimilation is easier and simpler for the host population and is, therefore, the default approach of most countries. Historically, majority populations, such as that of Germany, commonly show xenophobic tendencies towards immigrants. Many citizens of Germany, and other countries, fear their long-standing, celebrated cultures will be altered by foreign cultural practices brought by immigrants.

Germany's current integration approach lies somewhere in between both multiculturalism and assimilation. Germany seems to have realized it must incorporate its immigrants, whether it wants to or not. Consequently, political action seeking to do so is met with great opposition, and policies illustrate Germany fighting both for and against easier integration for immigrants. New citizenship laws created in 2000 made attaining German citizenship far more feasible for immigrants, yet eligibility requirements and

examinations keep the process rigorous and the success rate lowered.

The quote from Angela Merkel's speech, "Multiculturalism has utterly failed," is very misleading. To say multiculturalism "has failed" is to put the blame on immigrants. Such a statement implies Germany attempted to live side by side with its immigrant population, but immigrants are incapable of doing so. Germany, however, has not truly attempted multiculturalism, but rather their own mix of assimilation and multiculturalism. In order for multiculturalism to fail, it must first be attempted.

Germany had been a sending state of immigrants throughout its history. During the 1800s, several million immigrants came to America from Germany seeking economic opportunity. The number of outbound immigrants from Germany to the United States alone has totaled over eight million.<sup>5</sup> After centuries of sending immigrants across the world, Germany suddenly made a sharp transition to receiving immigrants. After the conclusion of the Second World War, Germany was left in a state of total destruction. With the introduction of the Deutsche Mark and numerous economic reforms, Germany's economic miracle soon brought the country back to prosperity. A massive labor force was required to run the new economic machine, but the German population alone could not provide the manpower. The government then turned to importing labor through the implementation of the Guest Worker Program which led to an immediate increase of immigrants. The program was originally meant to return guest workers to their home countries after a period of one to two years. By the 1970s, it became clear that many immigrants would choose to stay in Germany due to a lack of jobs in their home countries. The increasing numbers of immigrants now permanently residing in Germany

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<sup>5</sup> "The Germans in America." Chronology : (European Reading Room, Library of Congress). United States Library of Congress, 23 Apr. 2014. Web. 24 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.loc.gov/tr/european/imde/germchro.html>>.

prompted the creation of an integration system. The former citizenship laws only granted citizenship to those of German descent, only allowing non-Germans citizenship through a very difficult set of qualifications. This system effectively prevented most immigrants from reaching full naturalization.

As Germany's integration approach continued to stifle immigrants movement up the social ladder, the policies and practices began to garner international attention. Under pressure from the European Union (EU), Germany switched to its brand of multiculturalism. Contrary to the traditional concept of multiculturalism, Germany did not truly strive to create a society that allows immigrants to retain former cultures. The switch to multiculturalism came as weak politics and rhetoric rather than strong political action. The policy makers who created the new citizenship laws claimed they gave an equal opportunity for immigrants to obtain citizenship, though the new requirements are lengthy and quite difficult, effectively blocking portions of the immigrant population. Immigrants are only eligible to take the citizenship test if they have resided in Germany a total of eight years, have learned the German language, and no criminal record. Meeting these requirements does anything but guarantee success. According to a recent investigative report conducted by BBC, many test-takers and immigrant educators alike feel the citizenship test is divisive and too difficult.<sup>6</sup> Even people born from immigrant families and raised in Germany find the test difficult. Many immigrants were unable to obtain an extended education in their country of origin and consequently see the test as an insurmountable challenge. Many view the test as a thinly veiled attempt to block a

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<sup>6</sup> Gezer, Özlem, Peter Müller, Maximilian Popp, and Jörg Schindler. "Dual Citizenship: Merkel Government Ponders Who Is a German - SPIEGEL ONLINE." Der Spiegel Online. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-efforts-at-dual-citizenship-hit-crossroads-a-951626.html> (accessed February 7, 2014).

portion of immigrants from obtaining citizenship.

Even before passing the examination, if someone wishes to become a German legally, they are confronted with the choice between German citizenship and that of their previous country. Germany only allows for single citizenship, with extremely few exceptions. The current government is making strides, however, to allow dual citizenship. The Social Democratic Party of Germany, or SPD, in 2013, campaigned under the premise that immigrants would be able to attain dual citizenship. While the SPD managed to secure the immigrant vote, the action has been met with opposition from the conservative party of Angela Merkel, the Christian Democratic Union, or CDU. The law has effectively lost much of what it originally promised as it now limits dual citizenship eligibility to children born in Germany who have resided there at least twelve years and have completed German high school. These new restrictions are far from the original claims made during the SPD's campaign, and the conservatives still wish to tighten the eligibility requirements.<sup>7</sup> The creation of dual citizenship is a step in the right direction, but political parties, such as the CDU, greatly hinder progress by limiting the number of people it applies to.

A large portion of Germany's government is adamant against further multicultural policies and believe multiculturalism has come too far already. Fear grows for many Germans as immigrant communities continue to swell. Some of these communities have grown large enough to be considered ethnic enclaves. Ethnic enclaves are areas with a high concentration of immigrants and are culturally distinct from the larger host culture. For those opposed to multiculturalism in Germany, ethnic enclaves represent a perceived

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<sup>7</sup> Moore, Tristana. "German citizenship is put to test." BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7597534.stm> (accessed January 29, 2014).



threat to German culture. One of the chief arguments made by opponents of ethnic enclaves states the residing in such a community deters the integration of minorities into their host society. Author Anita Drever explains the argument as “spatial separation of minority communities reinforces their social and economic isolation”<sup>8</sup> This theory was so popular that several policies were put into place in Germany during the 1970s and 80s that prohibited immigrants from residing in areas with a disproportionately sized minority population. These policies have since been removed and greater emphasis has been placed on research into the impact of ethnic enclaves on social and economic participation of minority communities. In Anita Drever's 2004 study, results indicated living in an ethnic enclave, opposed to an ethnic German neighborhood, does not play as large of a role as previously assumed. One's workplace and school contacts showed to have a greater effect than the neighborhood in which an immigrant lives.<sup>9</sup>

As new research continues to emerge, the argument made by opponents of ethnic enclaves for the negative impact of residing in ethnic communities is steadily weakening. Despite this research, integration literature and political rhetoric still commonly cite the existence of ethnic enclaves as an obstacle of multiculturalism. The motive behind an anti-enclave agenda, therefore, points more towards xenophobia than social and economic participation. Ethnic enclaves allow minorities to retain cultural customs at home even when adopting that of their host country in public. To some, this indicates a lack of complete assimilation and consequently can create fear, ultimately leading to the

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<sup>8</sup> Drever, Anita. "Separate spaces, separate outcomes? Neighbourhood impacts on minorities in Germany." *Urban Studies* 41, no. 8 (2004): 1423-1439.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

desire to eliminate cultural enclaves.<sup>10</sup>

Politicians throughout Germany claim multiculturalism has failed. Upon examining the nature of multiculturalism, however, it is clear that Germany's current integration approach is far from conducive to the coexistence of German and immigrant cultures. Through political devices, the German government has effectively created a social division between ethnic German people and a much of its immigrant population. Most of the new policies do nothing to aid multiculturalism but rather stifle it. Many of these policies, such as current citizenship requirements, attempt to separate immigrants from their culture and community while blocking social movement. Multiculturalism is failing because the many of those in the German government will not allow it to occur. People and cultures must be encouraged to mix and coexist in a multicultural state, and, consequently, Germany currently has only managed to create social tension rather than multiculturalism

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<sup>10</sup> Quinn, Stephen. "Why do so many Canadians see ethnic enclaves as a threat?." The Globe and Mail. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/why-do-so-many-canadians-see-ethnic-enclaves-as-a-threat/article4226087/> (accessed February 25, 2014).

## CHAPTER 2

Ethnic enclaves can be loosely defined as a physical space with a high ethnic concentration. In the case of Germany, many people of a similar origin reside in a large area, such as the Turks in Kreuzberg. These ethnic enclaves represent the fear held by anti-immigrant German citizens of a changing Germany under growing immigrant numbers. Immigrants are able to practice much of their country of origin's culture in the privacy of their homes and neighborhoods alongside other immigrants of similar backgrounds. Enclaves allow culture, language, and lifestyle to survive even in the most anti-immigrant of societies. The fear created by these cultural communities naturally creates opponents to their existence. Many German citizens believe these ethnic enclaves greatly hinder the integration of immigrants, stating the environment prevents the learning of German language and culture and fosters social and economic exclusion. Research is continually being conducted on the matter, though results regularly conflict with those of other research projects. Consequently, the topic continues to be a matter of great debate, but it is still commonly used as a central argument of anti-enclave proponents despite a lack of solid proof. Researchers like Anita Drever continuously investigate the repercussions of ethnic enclaves on the greater society of a state. The results of Anita Drever's research projects suggest the argument of ethnic enclaves hindering integration to be false, claiming one's workplace and school contacts have a far greater impact, both positively and negatively, on their level of integration and ties to the culture of their country of origin. In one such study, Drever goes even further, stating "minorities living within ethnic neighborhoods appear no more likely to maintain ties to their country of origin culture than those living outside ethnic neighborhoods," effectively challenging the most

widely accepted beliefs towards ethnic enclaves.<sup>11</sup>

The survey distributed to the German population, ethnic and non-ethnic, was designed to collect information regarding sentiment towards immigrants on a variety of topics. Several questions specifically addressed the acceptance of immigrants, particularly the Vietnamese, into the German community and nation. The survey aimed to find the opinions of Germans in regards to the Vietnamese, immigrants as a whole, and their place in society. The participant then rated their answer on a scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” One such question, for example, directly asked how the participant would feel living in a neighborhood with Vietnamese families. This question, coupled with an earlier question asking whether or not the participant avoids socializing with the immigrant community, examines the survey-taker's sense of community with the immigrant population, if one exists at all. When questioned whether or not they would willingly live in a neighborhood with Vietnamese families, the participants answered extremely positively. On a one to five scale, around one hundred answers averaged out to a score of 4.42. Such a high average indicates many Germans feel comfortable enough around the Vietnamese population to live in the same community with Vietnamese families. The responses indicate the Vietnamese are, for the most part, willingly accepted as members of a German community.

Other questions in the survey aimed to find the participant's opinion to immigrants in regards towards the German nation. Becoming a member of the German nation, historically, has been a task of great difficulty and exclusivity for immigrants. After the creation of the new citizenship laws, of the immigrants that managed to become members of the state, few managed to be recognized as a member of the German cultural nation.

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<sup>11</sup> Drever, Anita. Separate spaces, separate outcomes? Neighbourhood impacts on minorities in Germany.

To directly address whether or not this reluctance to accept immigrants as part of the German nation still remains today, one question of the survey aimed to find whether or not the participant viewed immigrants who attained full citizenship to be a member of the German nation. These responses yielded more mixed results than the question concerning the German community. The answers regarding the statement “I consider immigrants who attain full citizenship to be a member of the German nation” averaged out 3.22, or essentially halfway between “Agree and Disagree”. The responses greatly varied and lacked the consistency of the question relating to a sense of community. It seems as though this question is highly debated among both Germans and immigrant groups, as the answers from specifically the Vietnamese lacked consistency as well. Answers from Vietnamese participants indicated both strong agreement and disagreement. German society is willing swiftly to accept the Vietnamese into their communities, but shows much greater hesitancy to accepting immigrants on a national level. Germany's nationhood for nearly one hundred years was based on the concept of blood, and consequently a strong mental tie between ethnicity and nation formed. If an immigrant can obtain citizenship, which requires a stable job, knowledge of the language, no criminal record, residency, knowledge of German history, and still not be accepted as part a nation, how can multiculturalism possibly work? Multiculturalism requires the coexistence and acceptance of two cultures, but Germany's integration system promotes assimilation into German society and citizens are still hesitant to accept immigrants.

### **CHAPTER 3**

The German government contains multiple political parties ranging from the far

left, like *Die Linke*, or “The Left”, all the way across the political spectrum to the far right with parties such as the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or the NPD. These parties represent the wide range of conflicting political interests of the German people in matters such as public, economic, and foreign policies. These parties disagree entirely on many subjects, but the position of most left and right parties on immigration, however, are fairly negative. Most political parties across the spectrum are unenthusiastic towards the influx of immigrants and their growing populations. The major difference lies in the severity of the parties' beliefs, political action, and rhetoric. The *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, or CDU, and the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or the SPD are the most popular political parties in Germany, yet neither are welcoming to immigrants. Both parties, for example have supported raising the aforementioned German language requirements for immigrants wanting to attain residency permits.<sup>12</sup> The German language requirement originated from the 2002 Immigration Law passes by the SPD and Green Party coalition to overcome the CDU.<sup>13</sup> The language requirements have steadily increased in difficulty as Germany seeks to curb its immigrant influx. The current party in power, the CDU, has played a central role in the continual push for higher language standards, effectively blocking more immigrants from attaining the right to stay in Germany.

The survey distributed for this study requested several demographic characteristics of each survey taker. Among these questions was an inquiry on the

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<sup>12</sup> Der Spiegel. "Guttenberg Blues: Embattled Seehofer Calls for Immigrants to Learn German - SPIEGEL ONLINE." Der Spiegel Online. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/guttenberg-blues-embattled-seehofer-calls-for-immigrants-to-learn-german-a-750131.html> (accessed March 2, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Oezcan, Veysel. "German Immigration Law Clears Final Hurdle." [migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org). <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/german-immigration-law-clears-final-hurdle> (accessed April 29, 2014).

participants political orientation. The participant was allowed to choose one of the answers provided, which were “Very Conservative”, “Conservative”, “Moderate”, “Liberal”, “Very Liberal”, and “Unsure”. The surveys were analyzed based on correlations between specific answers to opinion questions with those of the demographic questions. Demographic questions of age and income level were also used to find a correlation between certain sections of the German population and common opinions on immigrants.

Most participants in the survey were liberal or politically moderate. The wealth of liberal participants most likely originates from the large amount of college students present in the sample population. The answers to many of the questions were unexpectedly positive and most likely due to this large percentage of liberal survey-takers in the sample.

Developing German policies on matters of immigration and integration show mixed signals for future laws affecting immigrant populations. Policies such as the attempted increases of the difficulty of permit tests allude to a future of continuing attempts to exclude immigrants from German society. Positive strides, however, like that of the new dual citizenship law, show progress and relaxing restrictions of residency and citizenship, although policymakers seemed reluctant to pass the law.<sup>14</sup> The future of integration policy appears to be difficult but slowly heading in a direction favorable to immigrants. More immigrant-rights advocates are appearing alongside intellectuals originating from the immigrant populations and both are creating more difficulty for

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<sup>14</sup> Gezer, Özlem, Peter Müller, Maximilian Popp, and Jörg Schindler. Dual Citizenship...

those proposing the increase of difficult policies set on immigrants.<sup>15</sup> Multiculturalism has not “utterly failed”, but the coexistence of ethnic-Germans and Germany's minority populations is far from perfect. The “failure” of multiculturalism lies in the German government's approaches to integration rather than the minorities' reluctance to take part in German society. Integration will continue to falter until German politicians cease to use multiculturalism as a political tool and make a true attempt to create a multicultural Germany.

#### CHAPTER 4

Vietnamese originally began immigrating to the *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (BRD), or former West Germany, in the 1960s for education and vocational training. Numbers magnified in 1976 following the creation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and the BRD, consequently, accepted 40,000 “boat refugees” seeking asylum per year.<sup>16</sup> The massive influx of various migrant groups fueled the West German “Economic Miracle.” The *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR), or former East Germany, sought to emulate the success of the BRD by implementing its own guest worker program. In 1980, DDR officials signed a bilateral agreement with Vietnam and began importing Vietnamese labor.<sup>17</sup> Vietnam, along with other communist countries like Cuba

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<sup>15</sup> "Antirassismus." Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. [http://web.archive.org/web/20090609073651id\\_/http://www.im.nrw.de/sch/410.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20090609073651id_/http://www.im.nrw.de/sch/410.htm) (accessed March 25, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Nghi Ha, Kien. "Zwischen Grenzen - Vietnamesische Diaspora in Berlin." Jewish Museum Berlin Journal, December 2012.

<sup>17</sup> "Agreement between the GDR and Vietnam on the Importation of Contract Labor (April 11, 1980) ." German History in Documents and Images. <http://ghdi.ghi->



and North Korea, was a prime source of labor for the BRD due to its communist ties. The two countries amended the agreement in 1987 to increase the total incoming number of Vietnamese to 30,000 per year.

The German media frequently portrays its minority groups as single entities despite the great differences that exist within populations. The Vietnamese populations in Germany cannot be seen as a single homogenous group due to their variety of backgrounds. The sizable populations existing in both former East and West Germany originate from different socioeconomic and political circumstances. Those who sought asylum in the BRD primarily consisted of Southern Vietnamese fleeing the Vietnam War. Those employed and imported by the DDR tended to be poorer and originated from North Vietnam. Refugees frequently faced great discrimination despite residing in the more prosperous, politically-left BRD, although they often came from a more favorable economic background than their DDR counterparts. The Vietnamese employed by the DDR would undergo the most difficulty as they lived in the poorest region and more frequently fell victim to racist actions.

The Vietnamese in the DDR faced discrimination frequently based on race. Living in dormitories located in close proximity to their place of work, these workers were not presented with the opportunity to completely participate in German society. The new workers were given only several months of German language classes and vocational training upon their arrival in Germany before being immediately put to work.<sup>18</sup> Permission was required before any laborer was allowed to leave their residence along

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dc.org/sub\_document.cfm?document\_id=854 (accessed January 30, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Kolinsky, Eva. "Former Contract Workers from Vietnam in Eastern Germany between State Socialism and Democracy 1989- 1993 ." *German As A Foreign Language* 3 (2004): 1-20.

with the disclosure of all details of their trip. Forced into a situation without sufficient language training and familiarization with the host culture, migrants hardly found reason or opportunity to leave their place of residence. This system of isolating a community from the rest of Germany creates the total segregation of a minority group from greater German society. Without interaction between minority groups and the host population, integration cannot occur. The “failure” Germany's system of multiculturalism was inevitable due to its origins of this segregation. The DDR government forcibly created Vietnamese ethnic enclaves at such dormitories by discouraging interaction between Vietnamese and ethnic Germans.

The most difficult times for the Vietnamese came in the 1990s following the reunification of Germany. With the DDR government dissolved, the bilateral agreements between Germany and Vietnam became void and 59,000 Vietnamese lost residence permits, as well as their jobs. By 1991, the new German government deported around two-thirds of the former East German-Vietnamese work force. Germany continually attempted to repatriate the former DDR laborers, though Vietnam, unable to support the migrants with its struggling post-war economy, refused until bowing to an agreement under economic pressure.<sup>19</sup> The remaining 15,000 contract workers of the DDR were allowed to stay for the duration of their original contracts. The migrants were given the opportunity to be granted a permanent residency permit if they could show proof of a stable income, payments into social security, proof of residence, German language competency, and no arrest record. These requirements were exceedingly difficult for migrants to achieve as most DDR Vietnamese were recently unemployed and lacked

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<sup>19</sup> University of California, Davis. "Germans Consider Immigration Policy." Migration News | Migration Dialogue. [https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=994\\_0\\_4\\_0](https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=994_0_4_0) (accessed February 15, 2014).

fundamental German language education. The residential areas of the Vietnamese had massive unemployment rates, and finding a job in such a market was a monumental task. The economic requirements of the residency permit, such as income and social security payments, were nearly impossible to reach due to the difficult post-reunification job market. Many Vietnamese failed to meet the language requirement as well due to the very brief training workers were originally given upon their arrival to the DDR. The standards required for the permanent residency permit were deliberately set high and effectively removed a large portion of the migrant workers in the DDR while providing the illusion of a fair opportunity for migrants to stay. Around 40,000 Vietnamese could not reach these requirements and were repatriated after their contracts ended.<sup>20</sup>

Many Vietnamese squatted in the dormitories of their former workplace after being left homeless and unemployed. Some Vietnamese were forced to resort to participation in the illegal informal economy, as they were presented with no alternative employment opportunities. Those caught participating in these illegal activities, such as smuggling, were sentenced to deportation. The most infamous case of Vietnamese participation in the black market involved cigarette smuggling, leading the German media to refer to the Vietnamese as a whole as the “*Zigarettenmafia*” or “Cigarette Mafia.” Numerous Vietnamese gangs formed, particularly in Berlin, alongside the growth of the smuggling industry. Gang violence once again brought the attention of the media, resulting in increased social tension between the Vietnamese and ethnic Germans.

The 1990s proved to be dangerous for all minority groups across Germany as racially motivated hate crimes rapidly increased. Right-wing extremists and neo-Nazi

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<sup>20</sup> Bui, Pipo. Envisioning Vietnamese migrants in Germany...

groups found support in desperate areas as the DDR region struggled. The growing popularity of these groups led to a rise in racist violence during a surge of anti-immigrant sentiment in 1992 and 1993. Fifty to one hundred racist incidents were reported in Germany on a daily basis during the span of these two years.<sup>21</sup> Tensions culminated in August 1992 when xenophobic riots broke out in the city of Rostock. The central refugee shelter of Rostock, known as the “Sunflower Tower,” mainly housed refugees of Roma and Vietnamese backgrounds. The building was originally built to hold 300 refugees a month, but began averaging 11,500 per month by the summer 1992.<sup>22</sup> Due to severely limited space and staff, many refugees were forced to squat outside the building, taking shelter under balconies. The Sunflower Tower and its inhabitants were the primary targets of neo-Nazi rioters during the three days of the Rostock riots. Many refugees were evacuated after a very delayed response after the second day, but a neighboring building housing 115 Vietnamese immigrants was left without evacuation. The immigrants barricaded themselves in as the rioters lit the building on fire and climbed balconies to reach the Vietnamese hiding inside. Nobody was killed during the riots, however, the events at Rostock and the lack of police action both during and after the event, mark the severity of immigrant-related issues in Germany immediately following the reunification.

Much of this tension between ethnic-Germans and immigrants still exists today, but the anti-immigrant sentiment appears to be shifting focus to specific ethnic groups. Most anti-immigrant sentiment tends to be directed towards the significantly larger

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<sup>21</sup> Kil, Wolfgang, and Hilary Silver. "From Kreuzberg to Marzahn New Migrant Communities in Berlin." Brown University.

[http://www.brown.edu/Departments//Sociology/faculty/hsilver/documents/kil\\_and\\_silver-kreuzberg-marzhan.pdf](http://www.brown.edu/Departments//Sociology/faculty/hsilver/documents/kil_and_silver-kreuzberg-marzhan.pdf) (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> "Der Göttliche Auftrag." Das Stigma Lichtenhagen.

[http://www.montys.de/dateien/themen/antifa\\_u\\_g\\_rechts/2007\\_08\\_22\\_svz\\_stigma\\_lichtenhagen.pdf](http://www.montys.de/dateien/themen/antifa_u_g_rechts/2007_08_22_svz_stigma_lichtenhagen.pdf) (accessed March 15, 2014).

Turkish population. Even Thilo Sarrazin, author of the infamous *Deutschland schafft sich ab* in which he claimed Turks and Arabs are genetically less intelligent than ethnic Germans, compared immigrant groups and stated Turks were “bad migrants” and Vietnamese were “good migrants.” Sarrazin argues Vietnamese have integrated more successfully than the Turks and their children excel academically.<sup>23</sup> If the face of Germany's ideologically far right publicly expresses this sentiment, does the average German possess a similar sentiment towards two of the immigrant populations?

Several questions from the survey were meant to target directly how survey-takers felt about the Vietnamese, how they assimilate, and over immigrant groups in general. The first of the three questions asked participants to rate the statement, “I believe the Vietnamese assimilate better than other immigrants.” Answers, overall, were positive, averaging out at 3.73. Participants did ultimately believe Vietnamese immigrants assimilated better than other immigrants, but not overwhelmingly so.

The next question proposed the statement, “I believe immigrants contribute positively to German society.” The answers to this question were surprising as they averaged out to 3.86. Scores of three or lower were expected based on prior research. This was originally thought to have occurred due to snowball sampling where Vietnamese survey-takers referred the survey on to more immigrant-friendly participants, but when averaging only those randomly surveyed using mTurk, the average still appeared around 3.61.

The most interesting aspect of the survey results lies in the responses to the question “I believe Vietnamese contribute positively to German society.” The answers

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<sup>23</sup> Fuechtner, Veronika. *Imagining Germany Imagining Asia: Essays in Asian-German Studies*. Rochester: Camden House, 2013.

averaged out to 3.95. While this is higher than the view of immigrants in general, it is only marginally so. When looking at the answers of just those surveyed using mTurk, however, the average is 3.39, which is actually lower than their responses to the question referring to immigrants overall, which averaged out to 3.61. The opinions of those randomly selected by mTurk, which contains no Vietnamese participants, felt Vietnamese contribute less positively than immigrants as a whole. Overall, however, the answers to both questions essentially equal out. On average, those who took the survey believe the Vietnamese contribute no more or less positively to German society than immigrants in general.

If German society believes the Vietnamese assimilate better than other immigrants, one would logically assume they are viewed as more of a positive to German society than other immigrant groups that do not assimilate as well. However, the research data collected from the survey shows otherwise. If the level of assimilation dictates the ability of multiculturalism to function, better assimilated groups, such as the Vietnamese should be overwhelmingly well received. Because the Vietnamese are viewed no more or less positively than other immigrant groups, despite their assimilation, other factors must exist as to why multiculturalism is “failing”.

Multiculturalism is so far unsuccessful in Germany because it has not yet truly been attempted. In order for multiculturalism to work, Germany must make more of an effort to allow immigrant cultures to coexist inside German society and eliminate policies that inhibit immigrants from integrating.

This research is important as it expounds on a very understudied section of German society. Smaller ethnic groups in Germany need academic exposure but easily

become overshadowed by the sheer size of the Turkish population. Studying the Vietnamese shows that the immigrant community of Germany cannot be generalized as one homogenous entity. The community is extremely diverse with cultures and people from across the world and various backgrounds. Integration methods must reflect this diversity and take into account the capabilities and difficulties of each group if they are to be successful. Multiculturalism has not failed in Germany, nor has it been attempted. If Germany truly wants multiculturalism to flourish, it must accept the coexistence of its immigrant's home cultures alongside German culture. Germany's brand of multiculturalism will continue to fail until it pushes away from its more assimilationist practices and allows for cultural cooperation.

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