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Competing contexts of reception in refugee and immigrant incorporation: Vietnamese in West and East Germany

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have long recognised the importance of contexts of reception in shaping the integration of immigrants and refugees in a host society. Studies of refugees, in particular, have examined groups where the different dimensions of reception (government, labour market, and ethnic community) have been largely positive. How important is this merging of positive contexts across dimensions of reception? We address this through a comparative study of Vietnamese refugees to West Germany beginning in 1979 and contract workers to East Germany beginning in 1980. These two migration streams converged when Germany reunified in 1990. Drawing on mixed qualitative methods, this paper offers a strategic case for understanding factors that shape the resettlement experiences of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in Germany. By comparing two migration streams from the same country of origin, but with different backgrounds and contexts of reception, we suggest that ethnic networks may, in time, offset the disadvantages of a negative government reception.

KEYWORDS

Contexts of reception; refugees; contract workers; ethnic social capital

Introduction: migrating to Germany

Since the 1990s, scholars have analysed how 'the context that receives immigrants plays a decisive role in their process of adaptation, regardless of the human capital the immigrants may possess' (Portes and MacLeod 1996, 257). These contexts of reception include 'the policies of the receiving government, the character of the host labor market, and the features of [migrants'] own ethnic communities' (Portes and Rumbaut 2014 [1990], 139). Three ideal-type contexts of reception are: *hostile*, when '[t]he government apparatus takes a dim view of the inflow and attempts to reduce or suppress it altogether' (Portes and Böröcz 1989, 618); *neutral*, when immigrants may freely compete with natives, as on educational measures; and *positive*, when the host government provides material assistance and the public receives the migrant group favourably. In particular, scholars have noted the significance of a pre-existing co-ethnic community in supporting the integration of immigrants (Landolt and Da 2005; Reitz 2002).[1] Of special relevance to us is Min Zhou

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and Carl L. Bankston's (1998) study of a Vietnamese refugee community in New Orleans. The authors propose a theory of ethnic social relations, wherein social capital that is generated by the ethnic community facilitates the educational attainment of the second generation, despite low levels of human capital among refugee parents. Yet, for refugees like Vietnamese and Cubans to the United States, the government, labour market, and ethnic community contexts receiving them were largely positive.[2] In this paper, we therefore ask: *How important is this coincidence of positive contexts across different dimensions of reception?* While we focus on local- and national-level factors shaping the integration of forced as well as voluntary migrants, the structured comparisons across this special issue collectively offer insights into refugee integration that overcome methodological nationalism (Gisselquist 2020).

This article draws on a strategic comparison of Vietnamese refugees to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the West and contract workers to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East. These migration streams converged on Cold War Germany at roughly the same time: while 35,000 refugees arrived in the FRG beginning in 1979, 70,000 contract workers began to arrive in the GDR in 1980 (Schwenkel 2014, 234; Wolf 2007, 8). These migration streams crudely correlate with regions of origin in Vietnam, with many refugees hailing from former South Vietnam and contract workers from former North Vietnam. Yet, many refugees originated from the North, having moved southward when Vietnam divided in 1954; and it was not uncommon for labour contracts to be awarded to those from the former South, as the bilateral labour programmes began after Vietnam reunified. Thus, our comparison provides a natural experiment that largely controls for cultural and social attributes from the homeland (i.e. language). We focus on Berlin as a crucial site for analysing the development of Vietnamese communities because of its role as the centre of German reunification.

This paper compares Vietnamese refugees with coethnic, non-refugee migrants who went abroad as contract workers. We thus gauge how important the confluence of positive contexts is by comparing involuntary migrants with voluntary ones from the same origin country. One factor shaping the different integration experiences of refugees and contract workers was their prospect for return at the point of emigration: while refugees left Vietnam intending to never return, contract workers expected to do so after their employment contracts expired (Hillmann 2005). Importantly, they varied in the contexts that received them. Vietnamese refugees arrived in West Germany with tremendous government and public support to integrate them. Here, we consider governance institutions (Gisselquist 2020) that include non-governmental actors. Refugees also entered a strong West German economy, albeit with durable rising unemployment. Due to their limited size and dispersal across the country, however, refugees did not form the robust ethnic communities seen among their coethnic counterparts in the United States, France, and Canada. Meanwhile, contract workers did not encounter a government apparatus committed to integrating them, as their stay was to be temporary. The workers' relationship with their host government changed from neutral to negative as the East German economy grinded to a halt. Those who chose to remain in reunifying Germany drew on ethnic economies to navigate a discriminatory labour market (Schmiz 2013). They also formed vibrant ethnic associations to navigate life in the reunified country (Bösch and Kleinschmidt 2017, 7; Bui 2003). We therefore consider the extent to which ethnic social capital can overcome an otherwise negative context of reception.

Drawing on historical sources from government administrations, media, and qualitative interviews, we first trace the arrival of Vietnamese in West and East Germany, respectively. We examine how the arrival of Vietnamese forced the host country of West Germany to change its integration strategies, and contrast this with how East Germany dealt with its resident Vietnamese. Next, we analyse the outcomes and social dynamics of Vietnamese in reunified Berlin after 1990. Thereafter, we span out to a statistical portrait of integration outcomes in Germany, considering other regions in addition to Berlin. We highlight intergenerational comparisons to provide additional evidence of factors that shape integration. Where appropriate, we contrast the experiences of Vietnamese with those of other migrant groups as well as with German natives, gesturing toward the horizontal inequality (Gisselquist 2020) that characterises the experiences of different groups in the same country. We then conclude with what our comparative study suggests about the forces shaping integration and inequality.

Support and solidarity: refugees in West Germany

The exodus of Southeast Asian 'boat people' refugees in the late 1970s roused solidarity among West German politicians and civil society actors. On the eve of Vietnamese reunification in 1975, only about 1,600 Vietnamese lived in West Germany, the majority of them students from South Vietnam.[3] Some received asylum in West Germany after the victory of North Vietnam over South Vietnam. After the war, the US government demanded that West Germany accept 3,000 Vietnamese refugees, but only 1,300 arrived because West Germany rejected the idea of being a country of immigrants.[4] Only 200 orphans from Vietnam had been adopted by West Germans, though this group became very prominent because one the adoptees, Philipp Rösler, became Vice Chancellor and Federal Minister of the economy in 2009. By 1979–80, the situation of Vietnamese in both German states had changed dramatically. First, due to public pressure from the media and UNHCR, the West German government in 1979 reluctantly accepted a quota of an additional 10,000 boat refugees (Bösch 2017). The number of accepted people eventually increased threefold for several reasons. First, journalists participated in campaigns to help rescue and resettle boat people. For example, the weekly, *Die Zeit*, raised funds to bring 274 refugees to Hamburg, covering travel costs, housing, and other social benefits.[5] With the support of fellow journalists, intellectuals, and politicians, radio journalist Rupert Neudeck secured donations to hire a boat to sail around Southeast Asia. The *Cap Anamur* rescued more than 10,000 boat people at sea in the early 1980s. Because the ship sailed under the West German flag, the government felt formally obligated to offer admission to the shipwrecked refugees.[6]

Second, members of then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl's party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), proposed initiatives to fly refugees from their Southeast Asian camps to the federal states. Many conservative politicians supported Vietnamese refugees, whom they saw as fleeing communism.[7] The CDU also supported the integration of refugees to underline that it was a party with global solidarity. Even the former Christian Democrat Alexander Gauland – nowadays leader of Germany's anti-refugee right-wing party, Alternative für Deutschland – visited refugee camps in Hong Kong and returned to Frankfurt with 250 Vietnamese.

Third, civil society groups offered broad solidarity and support for Vietnamese. Refugees' exodus reminded many West Germans of the flight of 12 million Germans from their

former eastern territories after 1945 (Bösch 2017, 21). At the same time, discussions about the US mini-series, *Holocaust*, led many to compare Vietnamese to the Jewish refugees of the 1940s.[8] Feeling culpable for that devastation, many Germans claimed that a rich democratic country like West Germany should assist refugees.[9] Individuals offered donations, jobs, and housing to the refugees. The first 1,000 Vietnamese in the Friedland refugee camp in Lower Saxony received 14,000 parcels from the public within the first month (Bluche 2017, 194). Racial prejudices against Vietnamese were much lower than against refugees from Islamic or African countries because (South)East Asians were stereotyped as diligent and hard-working.

Fourth, boat refugees in West Germany received generous government support compared with other migrants. They first arrived in central camps in West Germany and were later distributed across the federal states by a fixed quota based on the population and economic power of each state (the 'Königsteiner Schlüssel'). Refugees could choose towns where they had family relations. Many remain in the north and southwest to this day, leading to a distribution of the refugee population. They likely also received more assistance with social integration than did their co-ethnic counterparts in countries of resettlement such as the USA: refugees received an initial aid of 1,000–3,000 Marks and a monthly stipend of 1,200 Marks (a bit less than the average income at the time). Their integration process included long, mandatory language and civic courses as well as labour market support (Blume 1988, 378ff). Students had financial assistance for their studies, while those not attending university received support for vocational training through the German Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) (Gyapay 2012, 9). Unlike ordinary asylum seekers, Vietnamese quota refugees could work after six months. As recognised refugees, they could sponsor their relatives through family reunification policies. Because of these factors, Vietnamese in West Germany had excellent external preconditions to start their new lives, relative to other foreign-origin groups.

Despite this manifold support, however, the social integration of Vietnamese refugees remained more difficult than expected. One obstacle concerned the German language.[10] Those fleeing Vietnam may have had some familiarity with French and English through, respectively, colonisation and the presence of American military in the South. Thus, many opted to go to French- and English-speaking countries such as the USA, France, Canada, and Australia. West Germany seemed a less obvious option for Vietnamese, but many chose it because they were saved by the *Cap Anamur*, or had few options in the overcrowded camps in Southeast Asia. Within the camps, West German officials and organisations tried to choose people with a moderate level of education.

Data from German cities such as Munich show that more than half of all Vietnamese over the age of 16 held jobs in the early 1980s, two-thirds by the late 1980s, and three-quarters by 1989.[11] This is a high rate even when compared with native Germans. Yet, a study of Vietnamese in Hamburg concluded that they were not qualified to work in their former jobs (i.e. as mechanics or tailors) because they lacked the required technical skills (Beuchling 2003, 107). Many had been shopkeepers in Vietnam, but strict German laws against late-opening corner shops made self-employment difficult until the 1990s. Vietnamese, including those with university degrees, opened Chinese restaurants. This was not only because of the ethnic Chinese background of some refugees, but also because they understood Chinese culture to be more familiar to Germans than was Vietnamese. There are no precise statistics on the profiles of Vietnamese in West Germany;

however, some local-level statistics suggest that many Vietnamese encountered more socioeconomic difficulties than expected in the 1980s.

State- and national-level data corroborate these trends. The federal state of Lower Saxony found that in 1985, at least half of Vietnamese could secure employment, albeit below their level of qualification.[12] After a decade, a majority had jobs. In 1989 almost three-quarters of the Vietnamese in West Germany between 15 and 65 years of age were employees subject to social insurance contributions (Horr 1991, 53, 63); others were self-employed or had illicit work. Yet, the first generation fared worse than the second in mastering the language and securing employment with German companies.

Vietnamese quota refugees often arrived as families with young children. This had a conflicting impact on their integration. On one hand, it provided an opportunity for young children to acquire an education, master the German language, and integrate into the labour market. On the other hand, this hindered the integration of women, many of whom lived as housewives with limited contact with Germans because of the lack of daytime childcare in West Germany. While the arrival of boat people received much public attention, they largely became invisible in many respects after the 1980s.

Isolated: contract workers in East Germany

The migration of Vietnamese to communist East Germany contrasted sharply with that of refugees to West Germany.[13] From the 1950s on, the East German government had close relations with the communist government in North Vietnam. The GDR provided training for North Vietnamese in its factories, communist party schools and organisations, and universities. For example, the GDR invited a group of 150 children to the small town of Moritzburg to receive schooling and language instruction, in order to bring that knowledge back to rebuild their country (Hüwelmeier 2017, 130). Many of these 'Moritzburger' later returned to the GDR for vocational training or university studies. Between 42,000 and 50,000 North Vietnamese studied in the GDR during the 40 years of its existence (Elsner and Elsner 1992, 16ff; Weiss 2005, 25). Some of these international students would later return to East Germany as part of labour contingents.

In 1980, the SRV and GDR signed a bilateral labour agreement that would result in 70,000 Vietnamese workers coming to East Germany; the SRV had similar agreements with the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia (Schwenkel 2014, 239). In contrast to the refugees in the West, contract workers in the East were seen as those loyal to the communist government, who were being rewarded with coveted labour contracts that usually lasted four or five years. At least one-third were female. Contract workers were expressly forbidden from arriving with their families. In the early 1980s, contract workers tended to be more highly skilled and received on-the-job training (Schwenkel 2014, 243). The majority of contract workers would arrive in the second half of the 1980s, as lower skilled workers and former soldiers came to work in the light- and heavy-industry factories of the GDR (Dennis 2005, 2017).

While the Vietnamese in the West participated in obligatory language and integration programmes, similar support for contract workers in the East remained poor, because both the East German and Vietnamese governments expected that contract workers would eventually repatriate. Contract workers only received language training at and for their jobs, as the stated goal of the labour programme was to provide practical

experience.[14] Contract workers also did not receive support from civil society because private voluntary organisations, media, and donations were not allowed. Vietnamese had at least the same access to medical care as native East Germans and similar workers' rights. Yet, they had one big advantage in comparison with co-ethnics in West Germany: everyone had work and earned money. This was compulsory and dawdling in the factory was a reason to be sent home. Yet, having work enabled Vietnamese at least some contact with other workers and a measure of independent consumption. As Vietnamese seldom went out at night, they saved most of their income for the organised transfer of East German goods to their families in Vietnam (Schmiz 2011; Weiss 2005).

The East German government supervised the entry of contract workers closely, with the goal of preventing integration. They therefore restricted Vietnamese contact with native East Germans. Because both East Germany and Vietnam stood to benefit from an ongoing contract labour exchange, the former made provisions to facilitate workers' transition abroad, for example by transporting new arrivals to East Berlin from Schönefeld Airport directly to their ethnic- and gender-segregated shared flats and confiscating their passports (Klessmann 2011, 192). Vietnamese concentrated in some quarters of East Berlin and bigger cities like Leipzig, Rostock, and Dresden. Liaisons or marriages with East Germans were prohibited, and labour contracts stated that pregnancy would lead to contract workers' immediate return to Vietnam (Raendchen 2000). Thus, on the eve of German reunification, only 346 marriages had taken place (0.5%). Later, when marriages were allowed and could prevent deportation, 1,300 married. The contracts included many other restrictions, such as on political participation. People who violated these restrictions faced immediate removal from the programme. Yet, contemporary witnesses remember at least some contact between Vietnamese and East Germans at work and in everyday life (Dennis 2017, 79). However, the lack of a shared language with East Germans was a bigger problem than in West Germany: East Germans rarely spoke English or French, because Russian was the first foreign language taught in school. Compared with refugees in West Germany, contract workers in East Germany had fewer opportunities to start new lives abroad.

Despite the strict regulation of their movements and activities, many contract workers in East Germany considered their lives in the GDR a 'paradise' up until the fall of the Berlin Wall (Kolinsky 2004, 85). Even though this paradise had few mechanisms of mobility in place, contract workers still had a higher earning capacity abroad than in Vietnam and could remit goods back home. But after the fall of the Berlin Wall, many companies laid off workers regardless of the length of time left on their contracts. The state offered 3,000 German Marks as an incentive for workers to repatriate, while also deporting failed asylum seekers and those with a criminal record (Bui 2003). Many had to return to Vietnam, while others remained in Germany with unclear statuses (Schmiz 2011, 91–94). While contract workers had come voluntarily to the GDR, the prospect of return to Vietnam became a sort of forced migration for some, who applied for asylum to remain.

While German reunification did not significantly disrupt the lives of Vietnamese in the West, it impacted contract workers with real force. The increasing unemployment rate and cost of living in former East Germany accompanied a new wave of nationalism. This led to an increase in widely-publicised xenophobic and racist violence in the early 1990s. Vietnamese, the biggest migrant group in East Germany, were attacked in 1992. Racist mobs

burned several flats, such as those in Rostock and Hoyerswerder. Such hostile attacks happened in big cities as well as in rural areas. Vietnamese victims reported that friendly neighbours and colleagues turned a blind eye to their plight (Long 2017, 138). Moreover, there remained an open question as to whether the reunification of Germany would go hand in hand with a reunification of Vietnamese in Germany.

Divided in unity: Vietnamese in present-day Berlin

After 1990, Berlin became the centre of the Vietnamese communities in reunified Germany (Röttger-Rössler 2016).[15] Estimates differ greatly, but official statistics mention 26,000 people with Vietnamese passports or at least one Vietnamese parent.[16] Sixteen thousand retain a Vietnamese passport.[17] In comparison with the refugees in the West, the legal and cultural integration of contract workers in East Berlin took more time. By the early 2000s, fewer than 150 Vietnamese had received a German passport each year. Since 2012, this number has tripled to 300–350 each year (Statistische Bundesamt 2017).

Although ethnic Vietnamese comprise just 1% of Berlin's population, they are the biggest non-European migrant group in the capital.[18] There are no precise statistics about their income. However, we know more about their residential patterns in Berlin. More than half of Vietnamese, regardless of citizenship, live in average-income residential areas and the rest in more basic ones.[19] Those in higher-income residential areas almost all live in the western part of Berlin (especially in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf), which underlines that former refugees or Vietnamese coming to the West had more economic success than those in East Berlin. Vietnamese in western Berlin have managed to remain in quarters experiencing high levels of gentrification in recent decades.[20] In east Berlin, almost all Vietnamese lived in collective accommodations and had to look for cheap flats after 1990. Almost half of Vietnamese continue to live in the cheaper eastern districts of Marzahn-Hellersdorf and Lichtenberg. This suggests that, on average, the families of former Vietnamese contract workers have been less able to integrate across neighbourhoods (Figure 1).

The major centres of the Vietnamese community remain those quarters where contract workers originally settled in the GDR. By contrast, refugees are more dispersed in the western part of the city, and have had better integration outcomes than contract workers who lived with uncertain legal status from 1990 to 1997. Only after 1997 could they apply for permanent residency (Weiss 2017, 114). Specifically, we discuss measures relating to residential, occupational, and social integration (Table 1).

The level of residential segregation of Vietnamese is highest among migrant groups – and even higher than among Turkish, who are very concentrated in quarters like Kreuzberg and Wedding. While the index of Vietnamese segregation declined between 1992–95 due to the reduction of the number of Vietnamese in eastern Berlin, it increased in the late 1990s due to economic problems and unemployment among former contract workers from East Germany (Gyapay 2012, 46–55). Even when Vietnamese former contract workers are upwardly mobile, they tend to remain in their ethnic neighbourhoods, near major markets like Dong Xuan Center in eastern Berlin. In high schools in Berlin-Lichtenberg, like the Barnim-Gymnasium, up to one-quarter of pupils have a Vietnamese background.[21] The majority of Vietnamese in these eastern quarters marry co-ethnics,

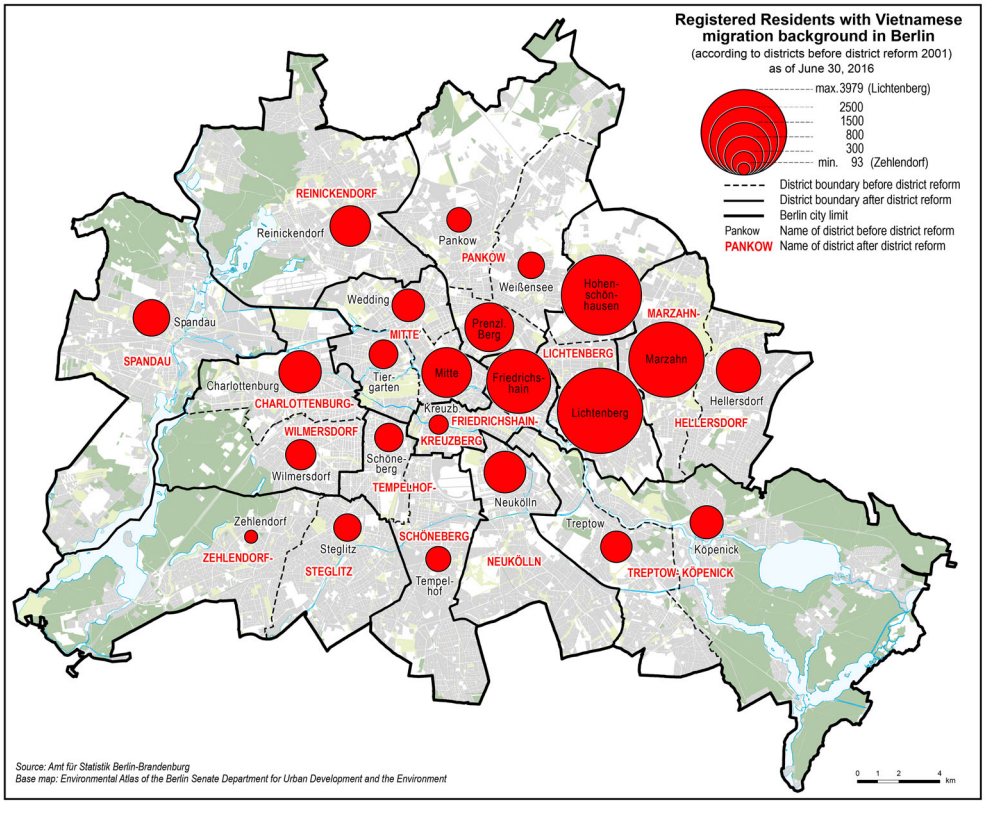

Figure 1. Number of Vietnamese in Berlin districts, 2009. Note: As of 30 June 2016. This map shows the strong, persisting segregation of Vietnamese in former socialist eastern Berlin compared with the dispersed population of former boat refugees in the west. Source: Schmiz and Kitzmann (2017, 5). Reproduced with permission from the authors.

maintain close contact with family networks, and prefer Vietnamese television (Schmiz 2011, 102–105). A strict Vietnamese upbringing remains typical, and the majority speak Vietnamese within their families, as they see the language as a key connection to Vietnamese culture (Müller 2017, 40–45).

Conditions after German reunification changed the public perception of Vietnamese. After 1990, western German Vietnamese could still rely on their image as a diligent and ambitious ethnic group. Because many contract workers lost their jobs and had no legal status, however, criminality increased (Bui 2003). The image of Vietnamese illegal cigarette sellers became dominant in eastern Berlin. In Berlin, and in the eastern states of the former GDR more broadly, Vietnamese were disproportionately convicted of criminal activity compared to those in the west. Often, Vietnamese themselves were victims of brutal violence: in the first five years after reunification, 39 Vietnamese were murdered in Berlin in gang fights (Beuchling 2008, 85). Their uncertain legal status only exacerbated their social stigmatisation.

This association with criminality changed the image of Vietnamese in the west, too. Former boat people, who had a positive reputation, increasingly became associated with gangs in the east. The growing number of migrants coming to Germany in the early

Table 1. Residential areas of Vietnamese in Berlin by district, 2016.

	German citizens with immigration background				Foreign nationals			
	Vietnam				Vietnam			
Residential area	Good residential areas	Average residential areas	Basic residential areas	Areas not affected	Good residential areas	Average residential areas	Basic residential areas	Areas not affected
District								
Berlin	795	4613	3829	37	1028	9059	6185	91
01 Mitte	85	469	563	-	108	734	589	18
02 Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg	6	496	347	3	-	1023	621	3
03 Pankow	34	444	262	-	70	759	542	6
04 Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf	392	259	42	-	502	304	34	-
05 Spandau	-	69	314	3	-	78	309	3
06 Steglitz-Zehlendorf	79	164	30	-	103	128	25	-
07 Tempelhof-Schöneberg	164	164	102	-	183	117	94	-
08 Neukölln	-	70	452	3	-	31	357	3
09 Treptow-Köpenick	3	218	134	3	17	462	281	13
10 Marzahn-Hellersdorf	-	623	604	10	6	1437	1463	30
11 Lichtenberg	17	1515	552	15	24	3892	1637	15
12 Reinickendorf	15	122	427	-	15	94	233	-

Note: As of 31 December 2016.
Source: Berlin Statistical Office "Population Registry Statistics: Location of Vietnamese in Berlin." Data provided to the authors on 11 October 2017.

1990s met with xenophobic reactions in western Berlin and western Germany. In particular, migration from eastern Europe and Africa created new fears among the public and eventually led to stricter asylum laws in 1993 (Hailbronner 1994). It consequently became harder for Vietnamese to apply for asylum in Germany. Polls suggest that Vietnamese felt much more strongly discriminated against than did migrants from Europe and Turkey: in 2000, roughly 66% of those surveyed felt discriminated against in their neighbourhoods, and 80% in their encounters with administration and clubs (Steinbach 2004, 147). The number of Vietnamese who have left Germany since 1990 correlates with this unstable situation: in 1991, 10,000 Vietnamese left the country, and at least 4,000 each year up to 2008. Since then, the number of those leaving has lessened.[22]

The image of the Vietnamese as 'cigarette mafia' has declined since 2000, as former contract worker families in east Berlin have since had more success in securing jobs and attaining higher levels of education.[23] But data on the children of Vietnamese in Berlin reveal slight differences from other regions. Namely, they attend the highest form of education, the *Gymnasium*, less often than Vietnamese in all other parts of Germany. This points to persisting integration difficulties for the children of former contract workers. Still, the Vietnamese second generation in Berlin achieve educationally on par with those without a migration background.

Integration outcomes: a portrait of Vietnamese in Germany

In the remainder of the findings, we consider how the integration outcomes of Vietnamese in Berlin compare with those in other regions of Germany. Drawing on data from the Federal Bureau of Statistics, we analyse general population estimates, residential patterns, and labour market outcomes. We then discuss how the educational outcomes of the second generation inform theory-building about contexts of reception.

The total number of Vietnamese and people with Vietnamese parents in Germany increased after 1990, despite the repatriation of many contract workers (Figure 2).

In many respects, the existing structure was shattered after the end of the Cold War: in the first half of the 1990s, about 45,000 Vietnamese (contract workers from other Eastern

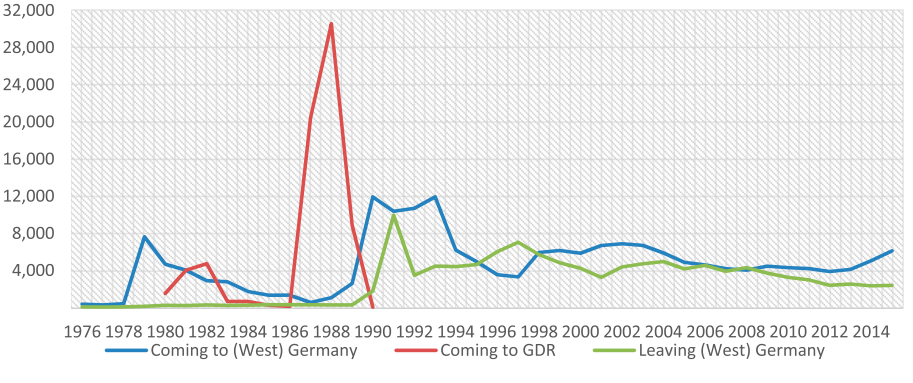

Figure 2. Vietnamese coming to East Germany, coming and leaving West Germany (through 1989) and reunified Germany (since 1990) each year. Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics (West and East Germany); East Germany data based on (Dennis 2005, 16; Priemel 2011, 157).

Bloc states, relatives of contract workers, and asylum seekers) came to Germany, while about 25,000 (mostly contract workers from the GDR) returned to Vietnam. By 2016, an estimated 176,000 people of Vietnamese origin resided in Germany; two-thirds were first-generation migrants.[24] Their average age is 32, making them much younger on average than European migrants and native Germans. About 86,000 retain a Vietnamese passport. These tend to be former contract workers and asylum seekers, who struggled to legalise, and also kept closer connections to their home country.

Economic and social trends

In the following, we provide a portrait of socioeconomic outcomes among Vietnamese in Germany. These statistics are complicated by several data issues: first, sources such as the Federal Statistical Office do not often distinguish the foreign-born who have naturalised into German citizenship from native Germans, nor do they differentiate between former refugees and contract workers. Second, the data do not accurately capture the number of undocumented Vietnamese citizens in Germany. Third, survey analysts must rely on region of residence in Germany as a proxy for migratory origins (refugees in the west, contract workers in the east), even though some contract workers moved westward after the fall of the Berlin Wall. And fourth, local and federal statistics bureaus do not have income or employment data on Vietnamese, whom they consider too small to track. For these reasons, while we discuss secondary data, we note that they neither fully account for the experiences of Vietnamese in Germany nor perfectly distinguish between contract workers and refugees.

Vietnamese migrants tend to live in Berlin (20%) and big cities in the west, such as Hamburg, Hanover, Frankfurt am Main, and Munich. After Berlin, the southern state of Bavaria has the largest Vietnamese concentration of all German federal states (15%), although it did not take a big proportion of the boat people after 1979. These data suggest that many Vietnamese followed the labour market, because Bavaria has offered the best job opportunities in Germany since the 1990s. This also becomes evident in an east-west perspective. Many former contract workers left eastern Germany, where the unemployment rate was and remains high, and went to the west; only 12% remain in eastern Germany (excluding Berlin), most of them in the industrial area of Saxony in the southeast. Experiences of racism, which are much more prevalent in eastern Germany, may also have driven Vietnamese to move to cities in western Germany rather than migrating the other way around. For example, between 1989 and 1993, the number of Vietnamese in Munich doubled to 3,000, and it continues to increase.[25] Although Bavaria is a conservative state, specific prejudices against Vietnamese are less common there than in the east.

On socioeconomic measures such as income, educational attainment, and poverty, Vietnamese refugees are generally well integrated (Wolf 2007). Among interview respondents, refugees tended to work for German entities. Their ranks included doctors, engineers, government workers, and corporate employees. Of course, there were also refugees who were unemployed or underemployed. But even so, they were largely protected by their refugee or naturalised German status, and received a monthly living allowance. Thus, while we are theorising the factors that lead to successful integration outcomes, even those considered unsuccessful are shielded socioeconomically by their legal status.

By contrast, former contract worker interviewees ranged from the long-term unemployed (nearly two decades) to those who became wealthy entrepreneurs after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Un(der)employed former contract workers who had legal permanent residency enjoyed similar rights and protections as refugees. Yet, the German welfare state remained relatively closed to many others with liminal or undocumented status.

A majority of Vietnamese are employed: one-quarter are self-employed, another quarter are 'blue-collar' workers, and half work as 'white-collar' employees (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017, 412). Nearly two-thirds work in the trade and food business (63%), a quarter in other services, and the rest in the producing industry. Some concentrations include small corner shops, laundromats, nail studios, and restaurants. The second generation, most of whom have German passports, work to a significantly higher degree as white-collar employees. These trends are favourable in comparison with other migrant and refugee groups.

To assess the cultural lives of Vietnamese, we consider their participation in civic associations. Since the 1980s, boat people in West Germany have founded several Vietnamese organisations to support recent refugees. Today, roughly 130 official Vietnamese organisations and many other informal networks operate.[26] Many support the integration of Vietnamese, especially regarding the education of the second generation. Buddhist centres also play a major role for boat people in the west, as compared with the relative suppression of religion in the GDR (Bösch and Kleinschmidt 2017, 11). Political activism plays a minor role in the lives of Vietnamese when compared with other refugee groups. No shared Vietnamese organisation exists in Germany even today: the federal umbrella organisation, the Bundesverband der Vietnamesen in Deutschland e.V. (BVD), is seen as too close to the Socialist Vietnam Republic and is therefore not recognised by Vietnamese refugees.[27] This suggests that despite sharing a sense of ethnicity, Vietnamese from different migration streams do not necessarily exhibit social cohesion or 'groupness' in their social interactions (Gisselquist 2020; Su 2017).

Educational outcomes of the second generation

We have thus far have painted a mixed picture of the integration outcomes of first-generation immigrants and refugees; we turn now to educational attainment trends among their children to gesture toward the intergenerational effects of contexts of reception. In the German school system, students are traditionally tracked early on into different paths of decreasing academic prestige. The *Gymnasium* (12–13 years), which prepares for university track, is the most prestigious. Academically, Vietnamese are the most successful national group:[28] more than half of the children of Vietnamese citizens attend *Gymnasium*, and this proportion increased from roughly 50 to 60% between 2005 and 2015. By comparison, only 13% of children from Turkish migrant families attend *Gymnasium* (El-Mafaalani and Kemper 2017, 217). Proportional to their group size, the children of Vietnamese citizens are more likely than those of German citizens (42.7%) or other immigrant groups (22.6%) to attend *Gymnasium* versus a lower-ranked secondary school system (El-Mafaalani and Kemper 2017, 217, 220). In interviews, former contract worker respondents discussed drawing on ethnic organisations and networks to navigate the German schooling system and to encourage their children to aim for *Gymnasium*, mirroring Zhou and Bankston's study of Vietnamese in New Orleans. These trends have led

commenters to marvel at the 'Vietnamese wonder',[29] and at the second generation – especially in the former east – who have seemingly succeeded 'against all odds' (Nauck and Schnoor 2015).[30]

Though Vietnamese from separate migration streams encountered different contexts of reception, this did not appear to significantly hinder the educational outcomes of their children (El-Mafaalani and Kemper 2017, 225). For example, while refugees and their children had pathways to German citizenship, some former contract workers remain in liminal legal statuses today. Yet, legislation passed throughout the 1990s provided a secure legal status to some former contract workers and their children. As of 2000, children born on German soil to at least one parent with German permanent residency receive automatic (conditional) citizenship. Today, the children of refugees and contract workers have similar access to the German welfare state.

As they are a relatively young population, 31% of Vietnamese migrants and children with Vietnamese parents are still in schools, universities, or other forms of education. The Microcensus, an evaluation of 1% of the German population, shows a bifurcation in the education of ethnic Vietnamese: about one-seventh of adult Vietnamese have no school degree at all, while nearly half have completed an apprenticeship (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017, 182, 207–209). This suggests a gap between generations that is much stronger than among other migrant groups. This generational gap is true of Vietnamese in the United States as well (Zhou and Bankston 1998). But while the Vietnamese in New Orleans converged on positive contexts of reception, Vietnamese refugees and contract workers in Germany split along the three dimensions of government, labour market, and ethnic community. Former refugees and, by extension, their children benefitted from immense government support and a healthy economy, while former contract workers tempered their negative government and labour market reception with ethnic businesses and the availability of in-language resources (ethnic social capital) that benefitted their second generation.

Discussion and conclusion

Our study offers a dynamic comparison of Vietnamese refugees and contract workers who began arriving in divided Germany at the same time, and who were reunified in the country of Germany and, for many, in the city of Berlin after 1989–90. Today, roughly 176,000 Vietnamese and Germans of Vietnamese background live in Germany (BAMF 2016, 162). They comprise the second-largest Vietnamese community in Europe and the sixth-largest in the world, behind the USA, Cambodia, France, Australia, and Taiwan, and tied with Canada. The fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany provided an opportunity for contract workers to try to change their legal status from temporary worker to immigrant. Many would eventually stay in reunified Germany, whether through new legislation or as liminally legal (Menjívar 2006) migrants, called *Duldung*.

Our analysis has shown a generally positive picture of Vietnamese integration, with some persisting areas of concern regarding inequality. Arriving in the late 1970s, Vietnamese refugees have largely mastered the German language well enough to work for German corporations; moved into neighbourhoods where ethnic Germans reside; and did not rely on ethnic communities for their livelihoods, though they still participate in

ethnic cultural activities. By contrast, former contract workers' outcomes are much more bifurcated. Many lost their factory jobs in 1990 and only some have managed to set up ethnic businesses (like gastronomy, corner shops). Some of these former contract workers-turned-entrepreneurs have achieved enviable success. Yet, many remain unemployed or underemployed, lacking in knowledge of the German language, and reliant on co-ethnics for support in navigating their lives in Germany. While contract workers experienced stigmatisation and discrimination in eastern Germany, their children have gone on to graduate from high school at rates comparable to those of the children of Vietnamese refugees, and higher on average than those of non-immigrant Germans.

Despite some initial ambivalence from the West German government, refugees encountered an overwhelmingly positive context of reception. The government sought to facilitate their integration, and the public provided even stronger support than in countries such as the USA, where polls reported increasing 'compassion fatigue' in relation to refugees throughout the 1980s. Unlike the Vietnamese in the USA, however, refugees in West Germany did not cluster into ethnic communities or economies. Rather, they integrated into German neighbourhoods and occupations with native colleagues. Contract workers were also initially received positively, as industrious workers in socialist solidarity with East Germany. The companies that hired contract workers, together with their Vietnamese group leaders, arranged their travel and everyday needs, even while depriving them of the means to self-navigate in East German society. But as the former East German economy broke down, contract workers became seen as pariahs infringing on an already weak economy. Their reception in reunified Germany turned hostile, involving instances of racist assaults and efforts by the reunified government to forcibly repatriate them to Vietnam (Bui 2003). To stay in Germany, former contract workers relied on ethnic networks to help them navigate paperwork, find employment, or start up their own businesses.

Based on our comparison of refugees and contract workers from a shared country of origin, we offer two observations about factors shaping refugee and immigrant integration. First, affirming past scholarship, we find that the context that receives immigrants and refugees powerfully shapes their resettlement opportunities and outcomes, beyond any cultural traits or human capital they bring with them. Specifically, how governance structures treat newcomers, the strength of the labour market into which they enter, and the presence of an ethnic community all impact their life chances. Though sharing similar backgrounds, the Vietnamese refugees and contract workers we studied had divergent integration outcomes. On average, both migration streams left Vietnam with low levels of education and wealth. West Germany provided refugees with language classes, job training or an education, and the tools to start new lives. East Germany and the Eastern Bloc, by comparison, took steps to prevent the integration of foreign contract workers, including restricting their contact with the native population. As Vietnamese in East Germany had no prospect for a permanent stay in the first decade of the labour programme, their own effort to integrate was minimal. Nearly 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, former refugees fare on average better than former contract workers in terms of linguistic fluency, occupation, and residential integration.

An important caveat to the first point, however, is our second: that the support of ethnic networks may in time offset the initial impact of a negative context of reception. By providing in-language information and services, ethnic networks offer important resources

for migrant arrivals. While Vietnamese refugees and contract workers differed widely in their integration outcomes, the second-generation children of both migration streams have achieved similar academic success. They have outperformed even native Germans. Here we refer back to Zhou and Bankston's (1998) study, which theorised the importance of ethnic social capital. But often, a positive context of reception and ethnic social capital coincide. This is where our comparison of refugees and non-refugee contract workers proves particularly fruitful: while refugees benefitted from a positive context of reception, contract worker relied on ethnic social capital to navigate their lives in Germany. In the face of legal uncertainty, contract workers drew on their ethnic networks to organise for residency rights and build their new lives in reunified Germany. We thus find that the resources of an ethnic community, coupled with the presence of a strong welfare state in Germany, may in time offset the initial disadvantages of a hostile context of reception.

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Notes

1. However, some have questioned the purchase of such a presumed community, and have observed that exploitation can happen within co-ethnic relations (Morales 2004; Stein 1979). Thus, an ethnic community may simultaneously have benefits and costs.
2. But see Stepick and Stepick (2009) on how contexts of reception vary across settings and time.
3. Notice of the government 1975, Bundesarchiv B 136 16709.
4. Non-Germans had only been accepted as temporary workers: at least 14 million of them came to West Germany, and 12 million returned to their home countries. These guest workers nevertheless "always already' belong because the presence of immigrants has become integral to narrating belonging in the nation-states in which they live … ' (Korteweg 2017, 429). The point we wish to emphasize, however, is that official rhetoric rejected the idea of (West) Germany as a country of immigration.
5. See various articles in Die *ZEIT* such as those on 27 July, 17 August, and 28 September 1979.
6. In 1981–82, this admission stopped due to debate about too many refugees coming to West Germany.
7. Vietnamese and other Cold War refugees are generally described as having 'voted with their feet' against a socialist regime. However, the reasons people decided to flee by boat are complex, often involving a combination of political, economic, and social motivations (Su and Sanko 2017).
8. 'Die Juden des Ostens', *Spiegel*, June 25, 1979, 116.
9. Even Christian Democratic politicians argued thusly. See the press statement of the Vietnam-Büro, July 5, 1979, Archiv ACDP Bonn 04-007-471-<4.
10. A second potential difficulty, which our data do not address, concerns refugee trauma and its potential impact on integration (see Freeman 1989).
11. In 1989, 780 of 1,570 Vietnamese living in Munich were working. Statistisches Amt München, 'Vietnamesen in München, 1975–1996'; data provided to the authors on October 25, 2017.
12. Vermerk Innenministerium Niedersachsen, August 20, 1985, Archiv ACDP Bonn 01-473-029/8.

13. See Bui (2003) for an analysis of the differences in visibility through media and popular culture between contract workers and refugees.
14. 'Abkommen zwischen der DDR und Vietnam über die Einreise von ausländischen Vertragsarbeitern (11 April 1980)', http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/deu/Chapter4Doc9.pdf.
15. By contrast, refugees from Vietnam constituted only a fraction of the 233,000 people with foreign passports in West Berlin in 1980 (10%). Statistics do not even mention them as a separate group. As mentioned, the situation was different in East Berlin, where Vietnamese were the biggest migrant group.
16. Registered inhabitants of Vietnamese background number 35,000, according to Statistisches Bundesamt, Fachserie 1 Reihe 2.2, 2015, 131, www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/Migrationshintergrund2010220157004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, 'Melderechtlich registrierte Einwohner mit Hauptwohnsitz in Berlin', June 30, 2016. These numbers are different from those reported by Weiss (2017, 112).
17. Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 'Einwohnerinnen und Einwohner im Land Berlin am 31. December 2014', Statistischer Bericht A I 5—hj 2 / 14, 17.
18. Note that the Turkish count as Europeans in this statistic.
19. Statistisches Landesamt für Berlin, 'Einwohnerregister-Statistik: Wohnlage von Vietnamesen in Berlin'; data provided to the authors on October 11, 2017.
20. Gero Bergmann and Henrik Baumunk, 'Wohnmarktreport Berlin 2017 mit Wohnkostenatlas', Berlin Hyp, https://www.berlinhyp.de/medias/sys_master/pdf/hcd/h3d/8809133441054.pdf.
21. Suzanne Vieth-Entus and Sidney Gennies, 'Stille Community: Wie Vietnamesen in Berlin leben', *Tagesspiegel*, May 11, 2016, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/stille-community-wie-vietnamesen-in-berlin-leben/8799898.html.
22. Statistisches Bundesamt, 'Wanderung zwischen Deutschland und dem Ausland nach Staatsbürgerschaft'; data provided to the authors on October 11, 2017.
23. Martin Spiewak, 'Das Vietnamesische Wunder', *Die Zeit*, January 22, 2009. http://www.zeit.de/2009/05/B-Vietnamesen. See also Trần (2017, 229).
24. Compare the results of the *Mikrozensus* 2016 in Statistisches Bundesamt (2017, 85–86).
25. Statistisches Amt München, 'Vietnamesen in München, 1975–1996'; data provided to the authors on October 25, 2017.
26. While some studies suggest that the majority of organisations are in the west (Schaland and Schmiz 2015, 6), others report that refugees tend to be 'lone warriors', while former contract workers lead more vibrant associational lives (Wolf 2007, 5).
27. Its homepage mentions only a few clubs represented by it: http://www.bvd-vn.de/index.php/de/.
28. For the dark sides of this Asian educational success story, see Lee and Zhou (2015).
29. Martin Spiewak, 'Das Vietnamesische Wunder.'
30. This gestures to the ways that the children of Asian immigrants become stereotyped as high-achieving "model minorities" pitted against other minority groups (Lee and Zhou 2015).

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