

Changing Demographics: Migration Flows From or To Germany

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Stepping outside of Kottbusser Tor, the metro station in the Berlin borough of Kreuzberg, gives one an entirely different perception of what it means to be a “Berliner.” Ordering Döners and Spetzi from two Turks speaking broken German with thick accents makes one realize that Berlin is a city of many cultures. The Turks who made us Döners serve as an example of the changing demographics of Germany. With the onset of the “Economic Miracle” in the 1950s, West Germany did not have enough German citizens to fill all the jobs available. The West German government created a policy that allowed “Gastarbeiter” (guest workers) to come to West Germany to work. East Germany had much stricter immigration policies and opened its doors to very few foreign laborers during its existence. Today, the presence of Turks – and other immigrants such as Greeks, Serbs, Italians, and Russians – has strengthened as families have laid their roots in Germany.

Postwar migration has created a much more heterogeneous Germany. The ethnic diversity in Germany today has strengthened Germany, but also poses new questions about German and European identity. At present, some foreign families have been living in Germany for two or three generations. Although the first generations of Turkish immigrants may not have received citizenship, their children and grandchildren have. This struggle for German citizenship has prompted many Turkish youths to become more politically active. Extending their cause beyond gaining full German citizenship or rights, many have begun to promote a “global identity.” Conversely, a small number of neo-Nazi and extreme right-wing party members seek to resist the changing demographics of the new Germany. Young German males, especially from poorly-performing economic areas in the former East, are often attracted to these groups. These

groups promote stricter immigration laws, arguing in favor of a Germany “for Germans.” The changing demographics of Germany have split the younger German generation into these groups, which could prove detrimental for Germany as well as European unity in the future.

The “Economic Miracle” of the 1950s created an atmosphere of economic prosperity in West Germany. “West Germany’s rapid economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s created a demand for labor that was met in part by a 1961 bilateral agreement between the two governments under whose terms 650,000 Turks migrated to the Federal Republic.”¹ Many Turks moved to Germany to work; their families followed shortly thereafter. By the 1970s and 1980s, the second generation of Turkish immigrants had arrived. Although many were born on German soil, the West German government did not grant citizenship to foreigners. Turkish workers could, however, pay into the tax system and receive benefits. A German-Turkish identity began to form in West German urban areas, which would have an important impact on East Germans after reunification as they competed with German-Turks for jobs.

East Germany did not witness the “economic miracle” that West Germany had. Throughout its lifespan (1949-1990), East Germany experienced a less dynamic economy. This, coupled with East Germany’s location behind the Iron Curtain, meant that guest workers were virtually non-existent in the East German state. East Germany would not have accepted workers from a democratic (non-communist) nation such as Turkey. In the eyes of the East German government (led by Walter Ulbricht in the 1960s), workers from a capitalist nation would be dangerous. East Germany was also a “nation of workers.” Accepting foreign workers would be considered an embarrassment for the socialist nation. Foreign workers from other Communist

¹ Ted Robert Gurr. *Peoples Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. (Washington DC: Institute of Peace Press, 2000), 22.

nations, like North Vietnam, were allowed to immigrate to East Germany, but they did not impact East German culture like the Gastarbeiter did in the West.

By the time of reunification in 1990, two very different cultures had emerged. West Germany was the home to generations of guest workers. East Germany did not have a separate Turkish subculture like West Germany. As a result, the integration of Turks into German culture was a new phenomenon for East Germans. Conversely, the reunification of Germany created culture shock for Turks. In her article “Turks in the New Germany,” Jenny B. White reflects on the jokes told about East Germans:

“A Turk is standing in line at Aldi behind two Ossies. One Ossie complains to the other, ‘Look at this line. We’ve been waiting here for hours. I don’t know why we came here. It’s no different from where we were.’

The Turk turns to them and says, ‘We didn’t ask you to come.’”²

Turks found themselves more at home in Germany than former East Germans, a significant effect of reunification. Although legally viewed as non-citizens, Turks sometimes garnered more positive stereotypes than East Germans. This pro-Turk, anti-East German attitude would play a large role in the economic problems and thus the emergence of extreme right-wing political parties later in the decade.

Negative stereotypes affected employment rates in East Germany. With the privatization of former East German companies by West German companies, unemployment rose quickly. “From full employment under the socialist system, by 1991 only half the workforce of 10 million people was fully employed, a rate of unemployment higher than during the depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s.”³ Discrimination against East Germans in the workplace resulted in much

² Jenny B. White. “Turks in the New Germany,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series 99, no. 4 (1997): 761.

³ White, 762.

of this unemployment. Immigrants took many of the lower-paying, less-skilled jobs available to East Germans, although John Clark asserts that it is the “perception that they are taking jobs from German citizens” that is important.⁴ Upper-level jobs would also be given to second-generation immigrants over East Germans because of education. A West German education, whether received by a German or by a Turk, was valued more than a socialist East German education.

The integration of East Germans into West German culture and the massive unemployment that took place after reunification created a foundation for extremist right-wing political parties to emerge in the former East. Right after reunification, foreigners faced discrimination through personal attacks and vandalism. Ten years later, the anti-immigrant sentiments that spurred these attacks found a foothold in organized political organizations. The three most prominent extreme right-wing parties are the German People’s Union, the National Democratic Party, and the Republican Party.⁵ These parties generally promote stricter immigration laws. Moreover, their vision of a “new, powerful, ethnically homogeneous Germany is imagined against a multicultural national imaginary felt to be enforced by the United States and Europe.”⁶ Although extreme right-wing parties do not gain a significant amount of votes from the general population, they do attract a significant amount of young males who are easily impressionable because of the high rate of unemployment and negative stereotypes of former East Germans. Ulrich Rippert observes that in 1998, one out of every five young males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four voted for an extreme right party.⁷ Although these votes may

⁴ John A. Clark and Jerome S. Legge Jr. “Economics, Racism, and Attitudes toward Immigration in the New Germany,” *Political Research Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1997): 904.

⁵ Kai Arzheimer. “Extreme Right Parties in Germany: An Overview.” http://www.politik.uni-mainz.de/ereps/download/germany_overview.pdf (accessed March 26, 2008).

⁶ White, 764.

⁷ Ulrich Rippert. “The Development of the Radical Right-Wing Parties in Germany.” *The World Socialist Web Site*, October 17, 1998, <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/oct1998/germ-o17.shtml> (accessed March 26, 2008).

not impact present elections, many mainstream conservative parties are adopting their principles.⁸

While young German males seek to preserve a distinctly German identity, Turkish and foreign youth have become politically active in order to promote a European identity. “This community could include not only other Turks but also Iranians, Italians, or anyone who shared, by virtue of their personal history, the characteristics of self...of what they call ‘European or German’ attributes, like professionalism or being on time, and “‘oriental or Turkish’ attributes, like engaging in generalized reciprocity...”⁹ Unlike their pro-German counterparts, many Turkish youth are seeking to establish a multicultural identity, but without much representation. One of the few Turkish-German politicians in Berlin was attacked by neo-Nazis, a reminder to Turkish youth about the consequences of foreign political activism.¹⁰

The divergence of political paths of German and Turkish youth may prove detrimental to European unity in the future. The European Union (EU) seeks to integrate European identities. Turkish youth in Germany are placed in an interesting dilemma: Germany plays a large role in the EU, yet the EU is dragging its feet in offering Turkey membership. German citizens of foreign descent who are allowed, by German law, to enter the political realm may be fearful of the consequences: the Turkish politician serves as an example. In the future, extreme right-wing youth voters may be able to exert more influence in Germany because many mainstream political parties are adopting extreme right-wing beliefs about immigration. Germany has often battled with the concept of the “German Question.” The divergence of youth voters’ viewpoints in

⁸ Clark, 904.

⁹ White, 765.

¹⁰ Judy Dempsey, “Racial Attack on Politicians Angers Germans,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 22, 2006, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/05/21/news/german.php> (accessed March 26, 2008).

Germany indicate that this concept has not been defined in the context of present-day Germany and its role in the European Union.

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