Research Notes
The Social Capital of Vietnamese People in Germany

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Introduction
When referring to foreign workers in Germany, it is the Gastarbeiter (guest worker) that first comes to mind. The Gastarbeiter was a category in West Germany during the period when the country was divided into East and West Germany. However, there were also many foreign workers in the former East Germany (the German Democratic Republic, or the DDR). They were contract workers coming mainly from socialist countries as a result of intergovernmental agreements between the DDR and other countries from the 1970s onwards. The first contract workers came from Hungary to the DDR in 1967. Later, they came from Poland (from 1971), Algeria (1974-1984), Cuba (from 1978), Mozambique (from 1979), and as of 1985, from Angola (Uladh, p. 51). Vietnamese contract workers continued to enter the DDR from the time the agreement was made in 1980, to 1989 when the Berlin wall came down. They numbered about 59,000 people. They form the largest group among contract workers, but few people are aware of this fact.

With the sudden collapse of the German Democratic Republic, where they resided, the Vietnamese lost their jobs and resigned themselves to a situation where their residence status was left hanging in midair. The ones who didn’t return to their home country at that time secured their survival through the ethnic networks, and have obtained their livelihood through these networks until today. At the same time, associations that also include German members are assisting them with integration into German society. This paper will look at this unique example as an aid to understanding one form of social capital.

In recent years, attempts have been made to review the presence of the Vietnamese in the DDR. The Brandenburg State Office for Political Education, the Brandenburg Commissioner for Integration, and the Song Hong Association organized the exhibition Welcome to Work – Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany in Potsdam from March 24 to July 9, 2009. The exhibition toured several cities in eastern Germany including Erfurt and Chemnitz until 2011.

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As suggested by the subtitle of the pioneering book introduced here (*Erfolg in der Nische? - Die Vietnamesen in der DDR und in Ostdeutschland* [Niche Success? Vietnamese in the DDR and East Germany] edited by Karin Weiss and Mike Dennis, Lit Verlag, Münster, 2005), the book discusses the actual situation for Vietnamese people in the DDR and East Germany (the states in the eastern part of Germany) after the unification. The “Nische” (niche)” of the title can be interpreted in different ways. A niche in the history of the DDR and Vietnam, a niche at the turning point for the system in DDR, or a niche in modern German society – this is where the Vietnamese in Germany have lived and where they live now. The table of contents below lists the nine writers and eleven essays in the book.

- Mike Dennis, Eva Kolinsky und Karin Weiss: *Erfolg in der Nische? - Die vietnamesischen Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR und in Ostdeutschland* [Niche Success? Vietnamese in the DDR and East Germany]
- Damian Mac Con Uladh: *Die Alltagserfahrungen ausländischer Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR: Vietnamesen, Kubaner, Mozambikaner, Ungarn und andere* [Daily Life for Foreign Contract Workers in the DDR: Vietnamese, Cubans, Mozambicans, Hungarians and others]
- Almuth Berger: *Nach der Wende: Die Bleiberechtsregelung und der Übergang in das vereinte Deutschland* [After the Wende: The Right to Stay and the Transition to a United Germany]
- Karin Weiss: *Nach der Wende: Vietnamesische Vertragsarbeiter und Vertragsarbeiterinnen in Ostdeutschland heute* [After the Wende: Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany Today]
- Dao Minh Quang: *Wirtschaftliche Strukturen in der Gruppe der ehemaligen Vertragsarbeiter/innen in Deutschland* [Economic Structures in Groups of Former Contract Workers in Germany]
- Phuong Kollath: *Der Verein Dien Hong - Selbsthilfe und Integrationsarbeit in Rostock* [The Dien Hong Association: Self-Help and Integration in Rostock]
- Karin Weiss: *Strukturen der Selbsthilfe im ethnischen Netzwerk* [Self-Help Structures in Ethnic Networks]
Eva Kolinsky: Das Ende der Unberatenheit - Ausländerbeauftragte in Ostdeutschland
[The End of Being Without Advice – the Commissioner for Integration in East Germany]

Hai Bluhm: Der Frauenverein Song Hong in Potsdam [The Song Hong Women’s Association in Potsdam]

This book is the product of a joint research project by the University of Wolverhampton in Britain and the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam. The editors are Mike Dennis at the University of Wolverhampton (Modern German History), and Karin Weiss, affiliated with the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam (Social Work) at the time of publication. According to Mike Dennis, “the project focuses on the experience of contract workers from 1980 to the present time. It is based on written materials, autobiographical interviews and analyses of expert questions, and aims to clarify how the Vietnamese contract workers entered the DDR and how they built their life in the DDR” (p. 9).

Eva Kolinsky, whose name is listed together with Dennis and Weiss in the foreword, is also affiliated with the University of Wolverhampton (Modern German History). Three of the eight authors contributed articles from the British perspective, and five from the German perspective. Three of the German writers are originally from Vietnam and two are native Germans. Two of the three authors from Vietnam have worked as interpreters for former contract workers, while the third writer currently represents a Vietnamese organization, the Dien Hong Association in Rostock. Almuth Berger, one of the two German writers, served as Brandenburg Commissioner for Integration since 1991, and she was still in that post in 2005 when the book was published. Dr. Karin Weiss succeeded Berger in the post as the Brandenburg Commissioner for Integration in 2007. Since 2012, Dr. Weiss has been head of the Office of Integration and Immigration (of Foreigners) in Rheinland-Pfalz where she still remains.

The second essay by Dr. Weiss, which deals with ethnic networks, and the articles by Almuth Berger, Eva Kolinsky and Phuong Kollath, which deal with the associations formed by Vietnamese and Germans, are particularly important from the perspective of social capital. However, all the essays are vital for understanding the background and social context of the formation and the role of the networks and associations. Therefore, each essay will be summarized below. Section headings are provided by the author for convenience.

Vietnamese Contract Workers in the DDR
To start with, the three principal researchers involved in this project, Mike Dennis, Eva Kolinsky and Karin Weiss, named in the foreword to Erfolg in der Nische? - Die Vietnamesen in der DDR und in Ostdeutschland, point out that the Vietnamese were the largest group among the foreign workers who came to the former DDR as contract workers.

“As of the mid-1970s when labor shortages in the DDR caused major production bottlenecks, contract workers from countries outside Europe were accepted within the framework of intergovernmental agreements between the DDR and other countries, for example, Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria, Angola and Mozambique. By the time of the Wende (meaning significant political or social change in Germany, generally the dissolution of East Germany) a
relatively large group of contract workers from Vietnam had come to the DDR. In December 1989, there were 90,000 contract workers in the DDR and approximately 60,000 of them were Vietnamese. Due to inaccurate statistical categories, there is still only sketchy information about the numbers of people actually resident (or once again resident) in the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD). According to expert assessments, there are at the moment between 15,000 and 20,000 former Vietnamese contract workers and their families living in the new federal states (author note: the former East Germany). The majority of them are in the Berlin Brandenburg region. Other main areas are Magdeburg, Rostock and Leipzig” (p. 8).

These facts are not well known. Therefore, the authors state that the purpose of the book is “to discuss the history of the former Vietnamese contract workers in the DDR, their life in socialist Germany, the history of their survival after the Wende, and their integration into the newly united Germany. The book deals with the changes in the lives of the non-German minority in the east of Germany through three periods: the DDR, the Wende, and now unified Germany. It also looks at the integration processes and concepts of the inclusive civil society as defined in the east of Germany today” (p. 7).

The project is carried out through documents and interviews. Firstly, where documentation is concerned, “Dennis has focused on archival data and documents from the period of the DDR. In particular, he has consulted the archives of Merseburg in the state of Sachsen-Anhalt and the files of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives (the central archive, external archives) (author’s note: Stasi refers to the former East German Ministry for State Security). Based on these files, it is possible to obtain an overview of the lives of the contract workers in every area of the DDR, in particular, regional distribution, work deployment, occupational qualifications, housing conditions, social activities, and the reactions of the Germans. Thanks to the countless documents in these archives, it is possible to analyze and reconstruct the politics of the SED (author’s note: the Socialist Unity Party), and the views of the most important state agency in the DDR on the deployment of foreign manpower” (p. 9).

Secondly, “from the summer of 2002 to early 2004, Eva Kolinsky and Karin Weiss interviewed a total of 50 former contract workers, and carried out professional face-to-face surveys of foreign agents and organizations, representatives of self-help associations, and other experts in Berlin, Brandenburg, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In addition, there are autobiographical interviews in Vietnamese carried out by Lan Do for this research. These interviews make it possible to reconstruct the history of individual migrants. That is, to depict developments at the time of the Wende, and after the Wende in the midst of confusion, responsibilities, problems and opportunities, as well as the attitudes of public organizations and agencies through the different periods” (p. 9). The foreword provides abstracts of the essays in the book, but I have omitted them here.

Die vietnamesischen Vertragsarbeiter und Vertragsarbeiterinnen in der DDR, 1980-1989, the first essay by Mike Dennis, presents a general overview of the contract workers from the conclusion of the intergovernmental agreement between the DDR and Vietnam in April 1980, through the 1987 renewal of the agreement, to 1989, and has an introductory position in
According to Dennis, “the number of Vietnamese contract workers in the DDR increased from 1534 persons in 1980 to 59,000 in 1989. The rise in numbers was not orderly. In the early stages, from 1980 to 1986, approximately 12,000 workers arrived, but most of them came between 1980 and 1982. Compared to the preceding seven years, five times the manpower was sent to the DDR during the second stage from 1987 to 1989. The ratio of female workers was 37%, and 60% of them were married. Almost all the Vietnamese (85%) were factory workers, half of them worked in light manufacturing and the other half in various machine industries” (p. 15). Dennis cites the figures for Vietnamese contract workers arriving in Germany between 1980 and 1990 based on materials held at the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung. Looking at this, approximately 10,000 persons arrived in the three years from 1980 to 1982. Then, for several years, the numbers did not exceed 1000 per year until the renewal of the agreement in 1987 when the numbers rose dramatically with 60,000 entering the country by 1989 for a total of 71,965 persons over the whole ten-year period. Just before the collapse of the DDR, the Vietnamese contract workers, who had arrived as a result of the agreement between the two countries, were the largest group of foreign workers.

Next, Dennis considers the interests of both Vietnam, the country that dispatched the contract workers, and the DDR, the country that accepted them. First, he looks at the situation in Vietnam. In 1975, the Vietnam War had ended with victory for Vietnam. However, Vietnam then underwent a series of hardships. Firstly, Dennis enumerates the upheavals that continued without a break after unification including surging postwar unemployment in the South Vietnamese cities in the late 1970s (3 million), the ‘boat people’ fleeing the country in 1978-1979 when south Vietnam was absorbed into the socialist system of the North, and the wars with Cambodia and China. Secondly, Dennis mentions a series of natural disasters (typhoons) and failed harvests in the early 1980s, the hyper inflation immediately after the Doi Moi reforms in 1986, the shortage of daily necessities due to such circumstances, and the crisis in the Vietnamese economy due to ballooning foreign debt. With the end of the Vietnam War, there were also the issues of rising unemployment and war widows in North Vietnam. In actual fact, ex-soldiers and war widows were given priority when referring contract workers.

Conversely, what was the situation in the DDR? The context of the official phrase of “support for the Socialist fraternal nation of Vietnam” masked a clear labor shortage. Regardless of the stagnation in productivity and rationalization due to the inefficiencies in the centrally controlled economy, exports to capitalist countries increased from the late 1970s to the 1980s. However, Dennis does not include any data to substantiate the actual circumstances.

In any event, as of 1980, the contract workers were dispatched due to the mutual interests of the DDR and Vietnam, but what about the contents of the “contracts”? According to Dennis, “the agreement was valid for five years and until the revisions in 1987, the labor contracts were usually limited to four years. The revisions are described in annual status reports. The age limitations were based on the assumption that young workers would be more productive. The preferred age range was 18 to 35 for technical workers, and up to 40 for workers with university
or vocational qualifications. The Vietnamese authorities selected the people for the stay in the DDR based on trustworthiness. Families were not permitted to travel together to work in the DDR. The agreement permitted couples to travel for work, but only in exceptional circumstances. However, couples did not have the right to live together. The Vietnamese contract workers were given a performance-based separation allowance (leistungsbezogenes Trennungsgeld) of four East German marks per day, and the same employment insurance and social insurance as the German workers. The companies in the DDR paid the cost of return travel. Except for cases of death or illness in the family, the Vietnamese were only able to take one paid vacation in Vietnam during their stay in the DDR. In that case, the contract workers had to pay half of the cost. For travel to other socialist countries, permission by the Vietnamese embassy in the DDR and a visa for the country in question were required” (p. 20).

It was also important for the contract workers to send remittances and goods back to their families in Vietnam. “The wages paid to the Vietnamese were based on the regular employment laws in East Germany. “The grade of the wages depended on qualifications, the occasional shift work system, and whether or not quotas were reached. For example, similar to the Cubans, the Vietnamese were allowed to send remittances of up to 60% of their net income in excess of 350 East German marks per month to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. However, since the conversion from the East German mark to the Vietnamese currency incurred losses, the Vietnamese preferred to send household products, clothing, and electric appliances to their home country. Twelve times a year, any contract worker was allowed to send a small parcel worth up to 100 marks to Vietnam; six times a year, duty-free postal items with no limits on the value; and at the end of their stay, they were allowed to take a crate with a maximum dimension of two meters (total length, width and height), and weighing maximum 1000 kg. In addition, workers who returned home for holidays were allowed to take a crate with a maximum dimension of one meter and weighing no more than 500 kg. In 1989, the limit for sending duty-free goods to Vietnam was two mopeds, five bicycles, two sewing machines, 150 meters of cloth, and 100 kg sugar. The contract workers were housed in their own shared lodgings where each person was given five square meters, and the monthly rent was at most 30 East German marks” (p. 21).

Importantly for the Vietnamese government, the system of sending out Vietnamese contract workers meant that funds flowed directly back to the government. Namely, “the DDR paid the Vietnam a lump sum of 180 East German marks per worker per year in the form of annuity insurance, accident deposit, and child allowance. In addition, every month, the workers paid 12% of their net income as a contribution to the construction and defense of their native country. This tax was remitted from the DDR directly to Vietnam” (p. 21).

The contract workers were assigned to hostels and placed with enterprises in the DDR, but they were subject to a detailed network of surveillance and control in the workplace and the hostel. The system of surveillance included the Foreign Workers Bureau under the State Secretariat for Labor and Wages, which was the main central agency for matters relating to employment. At the regional level, there were district committees and Bureaus for Labor and
Wages, and below them, the enterprises that were directly involved with the contract workers, their German minders, and a Vietnamese group leader with German language skills assigned to groups of fifty. Separately from this system, the Stasi (the Ministry for State Security) and the Volkspolizei (the East German national police) were also important organizations for surveillance and control. Dennis bases most of the data on Stasi documentation.

However, it seems that the dragnet of surveillance and systems of control in the DDR had in reality become rather lax by the 1980s. At the hostels (mostly high-rise apartment blocks) allocated to the Vietnamese contract workers, which were physically separated from the Germans, the Vietnamese acted completely in line with their motivations for coming to the DDR. The motivation was to support their families in their own country. Since it was better to send goods rather than East German marks, which had no liquidity as a foreign currency, the hostels turned into ‘warehouses’ for these goods. “In February 1989, a fire officer who carried out fire prevention controls at the hostel of a Sankt-Hausen state-run manufacturer of children’s clothing came across a veritable “treasure trove.” He found 36 mopeds, 112 bicycles, 230 bicycle tires, and 150 moped tires in a basement room. In addition, the Vietnamese residents had converted a part of the hostel into a warehouse for a range of goods, in particular, detergent, soap, candles and cigarettes. The goods were obtained in a variety of ways and sent to Vietnam. The strategy was ingenious, but the people of the DDR were offended and it caused a battle with the DDR tax authorities” (p. 25). As a result, “concerns about the exports of consumer goods that were in short supply in the DDR increased, and the DDR post office would not process the increased shipments of goods to Vietnam. For these reasons, new rules were introduced in 1989. The maximum limit for goods that a single worker was permitted to send to Vietnam was set at five bicycles, two mopeds, two sewing machines, and 150 m2 of fabric” (p. 29).

The hostels also doubled as workshops for their secondary jobs. When they finished in the workplace and returned to the hostels, they worked diligently sewing jeans, shirts and other clothing to sell to the Germans. According to Stasi documents in Halle, half of the Vietnamese contract workers in the area were involved with secondary work in 1988.

Some of the contract workers also tried their hand at smuggling. In Stasi documents for Frankfurt an der Oder on the Polish border and East Berlin, Dennis has found instances of transactions involving goods and foreign currency from Vietnam and several Western countries.

Nonetheless, the majority of Vietnamese worked as diligently as they had done in their own country. On the one hand, Dennis cites examples of Vietnamese who were unable to meet their quotas in the actual workplace due to an excessive zeal for their secondary jobs, or prioritized their sideline and submitted medical certificates to get sick leave, but on the other hand, he also introduces examples of commitment to acquiring occupational qualifications. Under workplace regulations, the contract workers were equal to the German workers, and were able to obtain expert worker qualifications and supervisor qualifications through training in the workplace. “Even though it was difficult to combine job training, working multiple shifts, quotas, and limited free time, many of the contract workers succeeded in obtaining occupational
qualifications. The following is an assessment made by the Elsners (author’s note: researchers specialized in foreign workers in the DDR). Namely, about 75% of all foreign workers had qualified as expert workers by 1987, and 15% had partially qualified as expert workers. However, when the number of Vietnamese contract workers started to rise rapidly from 1987, it became difficult for the enterprises to provide the means for obtaining appropriate qualifications, and work was prioritized over training” (p. 33).

In this life of work (and secondary jobs), the contract workers had extremely limited contact with the people of East Germany, and integration into (East) German society was never an issue. Of course, on the surface, there were events appealing to the solidarity between fellow socialist countries, but “the Vietnamese embassy endeavored to isolate its citizens from East German society” (p. 36), and “personal contact outside the workplace was rare. This was also because most of the Vietnamese did not speak fluent German” (p. 37). In the context of the restrictions on contact between the citizens of the two countries, the restrictions on marriages between Germans and Vietnamese were especially symbolic. The Vietnamese contract workers were prohibited from marrying other contract workers, and pregnancy was not allowed. In addition, there were effectively impossible restrictions on marriage to East Germans. “If someone was found to have intimate personal relations with an East German citizen, the Vietnamese authorities in the DDR would send the worker back home. If both parties wanted to marry, the marriage was premised on the consent of the DDR government and the Vietnamese embassy. This was a time-consuming and difficult procedure. The German citizen had to submit one copy of the application form, but the Vietnamese partner was required to submit reams of documents, including a letter of consent from the embassy. If the Vietnamese applicant wanted to stay in the DDR, he or she had to reimburse the Vietnamese state for the cost of the stay. While marriage to an East German was seen as a promise of permission to stay in the DDR for the contract worker, the obligation to leave the DDR at the end of the employment contract was not automatically cancelled because of marriage. To be released from this obligation, the Vietnamese worker had to pay at least 8000 East German marks. If a child was expected, or had already been born, the payment was even higher” (pp. 37-38).

However, in March 1989, “based on an intergovernmental agreement, the DDR published regulations about the obligations of the enterprises and the national agencies in the relevant districts concerning pregnant women working temporarily in the DDR. Supported by these regulations, pregnant women were no longer forced to return to their own country against their will, and they were also given permission to work in the DDR. The enterprises and the national agencies had to supplement the cost of day care, and the mother had to be given access to social services such as pregnancy allowances, weekend and child allowances. The DDR authorities had understood that this would have an impact on the (rising) number of Vietnamese workers and their acceptance” (p. 40). However, ironically, the “improvement” was almost meaningless because it came only a few months before the fall of the Berlin wall.

Due to the scarcity of opportunities for contact, the citizens of the DDR did not understand the foreign workers and this expressed itself in various forms of dissatisfaction with them. In a
life where housing and consumer products were scarce, people were unhappy that foreigners were allocated hostels, and that the foreigners (Vietnamese) used their hostels as if they were warehouses for hoarding goods. This is where the seeds of the widespread hostility towards foreigners directly after the unification gradually germinated.

According to Dennis, the reason was the extreme restrictions on information by the DDR government. “If, for argument’s sake, the SED had explained to its citizens why it was necessary to recruit such large numbers of foreign workers, it would probably have helped to prevent the prejudices. However, from the perspective of the SED, a public discussion about these topics would have exposed the fundamental weaknesses in the DDR planned economy, and further weakened the legitimacy of the regime” (p. 41).

The above is a comprehensive outline of Mike Dennis’ essay on the Vietnamese contract workers in the 1980s. According to Dennis, the Vietnamese in the DDR closed the labor shortage gaps (Lücke) by coming to the DDR, and they closed the gap on the shortage economy through the secondary jobs that they pursued in their daily lives. But were they really “a niche success”? (Erfolg in der Nische?).

**Daily Life for Contract Workers**

In *Die Alltagserfahrungen ausländischer Vertragsarbeiter in der DDR: Vietnamesen, Kubaner, Mozambikaner, Ungarn und andere*, Damian Mac Con Uladh discusses the day-to-day experiences of the foreign contract workers in the DDR, and the resistance to the rules imposed by the authorities, in a format that supplements the general overview by Mike Dennis. Here, the Vietnamese are not the only object of study, but other foreign contract workers are also included. “Despite the hostel rules, the hostel wardens, company controls, and surveillance by the German National Police (DVP), the Ministry for State Security (MfS) and the State Secretariat for Labor and Wages (SAL), the contract workers were able to assert themselves and find space in many ways and in an extremely diverse range of daily settings” (p. 51). The essay depicts daily life from the aspect of the workplace, housing, leisure time and exchanges (above all, marriage) with citizens of the DDR.

When accepting foreign contract workers, the initial criterion for housing was to assign up to six people to a space where each person was allocated 4.5 square meters, but it quickly became clear that these conditions were inferior, and in 1974, each person was allocated five square meters in a space reserved for a maximum of four foreign workers. According to new rules introduced in 1982, apartment blocks, not temporary housing or low-rise housing, became a requirement.

The rules about remittances to home countries varied depending on the group. “Polish and Hungarian contract workers were able to send money and goods home with relative ease. Poles were permitted to carry out 80% of their wages in the form of goods. Algerians, on the other hand, were only permitted to take 40% of their net wages. Contract workers from Cuba, Mozambique and Vietnam were even more disadvantaged. They were only able to remit 60% of their monthly net income in excess of 350 or 360 East German marks” (p. 54).
Concerning life in the workplace, the author finds the German assessment of the Cubans very interesting. Damian quotes a report dated September 24, 1979 by the National Police in Halle about the behavior of Cubans in the workplace, and from other relevant literature, a report written in 1989 by the German minder of Cuban workers at a certain company in Berlin. The report by the National Police says that “the Cuban workers are not accustomed to the life of a factory worker. As a result, there are many problems with work discipline, study habits, and behavior during leisure time. Above all, they are not punctual, they leave their post during working hours, they disregard the non-smoking rules at the company, and they are distracted when studying. People in the DDR work collectives, in particular, expect exemplary Cuban workers with military training. Even though these expectations have not been met, no one should take a negative view of the Cuban workers” (pp. 55-56).

According to the report by the company minder, “the Cubans have a tendency to be loud, and are perceived as noisy by their coworkers. They are also more careless. They sing and tap rhythms during the breaks. They have a really good sense of rhythm. If they are near a die cutter making a rapping sound, they beat time with it, but the Germans don’t think this is a good idea. They are always arguing and if you ask them to stop, they only interrupt themselves for a short time” (p. 56). What comes to mind here is that whether Socialists or pencil-pushers, the overly serious Germans were perplexed by the behavior of the cheerful Cubans.

There were also strikes in the workplace because of dissatisfaction with wages. “From 1974 to 1984, there were at least fifteen strikes by Algerians at companies in the DDR. More than 800 contract workers participated in the strikes. In the fall of 1975 alone, there were six strikes with 17% of workers from Algeria participating in the strikes. The main reasons were the low wages paid to the strikers and the wage policy of labor intensification. In the case of the largest strike at the Schwarze Pumpe gasification complex, the participants obtained wage increases, better options for training, and the right to move out of the company-specific prefab homes (DDR workers also lived here) to normal residential areas in the suburbs. The wave of strikes became quite substantial after May 1976. At that time, the Algerian contract workers secured the unaccompanied transfer allowance of 120 marks per month, which until then had only applied to Polish and Hungarian contract workers” (p. 56). Damian also refers to cases of strikes by Cubans and Mozambicans in addition to the Algerians. As well as improving some conditions, these strikes also resulted in the deportation of some workers.

How did they spend their free time away from the workplace? Contrary to the official expectations in the DDR of “meaningful use of free time” (sinnvolle Freizeitgestaltung), the contract workers had regular drinking spots in the areas where they were posted. The Vietnamese were not the only ones working hard to sell prohibited goods. For example, “the Hungarian contract workers imported ‘Beat’ products such as sweaters, shirts, records or books from Hungary, and sold them to young East Germans. In the 1970s, in particular, Polish contract workers and travelers were important suppliers of goods for the black market in East Germany. A report by the German national police from the late 1970s contains general information about the Polish products that the Poles sold in the DDR including makeup, woolen, leather and jean
clothing, candy, photos of ‘Beat’ groups in the non-socialist world, American army insignia, boring machines, heaters, radio and television receivers etc. However, with the collapse of the Polish economy in the early 1980s, fewer products entered from Poland. In this sense, the timing of the arrival of the Vietnamese contract workers in the DDR was certainly fortuitous” (p. 62).

The Uladh essay also touches on the restrictions on marriages between contract workers and East German citizens. It seems that Polish and Hungarian contract workers, who were the first to come, were not subject to such severe restrictions on marriages in the DDR. “In 1983, when the agreement between Hungary and the DDR expired, roughly 4300 out of 40,000 Hungarian contract workers (nearly 11%) were married to East German partners. Most of them were men (4000, or 80% of all marriages) and they decided to stay in East Germany” (p. 64). However, when contract workers from outside Europe started to enter the country in the early 1980s, marriages between East Germans and contract workers were evidently restricted. In 1987, a young Mozambican who wanted to marry a German woman, but had been unable to obtain the marriage license, committed suicide when his contract expired and the return to Mozambique was imminent. Uladh quotes from the moving confession of the pregnant German woman.

(Former) Contract Workers at the Time of the Wende
All foreign contract workers in the DDR suddenly fell on hard times in the period from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the unification of Germany in 1990, to the final decision on the issue of the right to reside in Germany in 1997. The situation was particularly serious for the largest group, the Vietnamese, whose numbers had increased rapidly from 1987.

The Berlin Wall crumbled in November 1989. The following year, the system of SED rule ended as a result of the last general elections in the DDR, and the country moved toward unification in October when the DDR ceased to exist.

Almuth Berger was Brandenburg Commissioner for Integration in 2005 when she wrote Nach der Wende: Die Bleiberechtsregelung und der Übergang in das vereinte Deutschland. Berger held this post for 15 years until 2007 when Karin Weiss, co-editor of Erfolg in der Nische?, succeeded her in the post. Tracing Berger’s career from the essay, we find that as a pastor in the Evangelical church, she worked for the welfare of foreigners already in the time of the DDR. As a result of a roundtable conference after the March 1990 elections, she became the first Commissioner for Integration in the DDR Council of Ministers. In May the same year, she negotiated revisions to the contracts that had already been concluded with Vietnam, Mozambique and Angola through intergovernmental agreements concerning contract workers. Later, as Commissioner for Integration, she was consistently involved with the issues around the contract workers.

The essay is divided in two parts. One part deals with the eastern part of Germany and the atmosphere of hostility toward foreigners that surfaced with the collapse of the DDR system. The other part of the essay discusses the issues around the contract workers’ right to stay, which were left up in the air with the collapse of the DDR system.

Just as Mike Dennis, Berger says that the reason for the emergence of the hostility toward
foreigners in East Germany was that the DDR government communicated next to nothing about the true state of affairs to citizens. “Neither the assessment that the foreign contract workers were a stable element in the social labor force (Arbeitsvermögen), nor the precise calculations by the Ministry of Finance (for example, 13,000 Mozambican contract workers contribute 240 million East German marks in annual national income) were communicated to the nation or to the foreign workers. Hardly anyone knew that the labor of individual Vietnamese and Mozambican workers reduced the national debt that their countries owed to the DDR because a part of the wage remittances and the required social security and pension payments (die Ansprüche auf Sozialversicherungs- und Rentenleistungen) were deducted from the debt of those countries” (p. 70). Berger points out that “the hostile attitudes to foreigners that had been a taboo subject in the DDR were laid bare by racism coupled with worries and insecurities triggered by the collapse of the economy, the phenomenon of unemployment which was completely unfamiliar to the citizens of the DDR, and ignorance of the conditions for the foreign contract workers recruited by intergovernmental agreements” (p. 69).

The other issue, which is the principal point of this essay, concerns the right to stay of the contract workers. As already stated, in May 1990, Berger was involved in the negotiations to revise the contracts under the intergovernmental agreements concerning contract workers. As a result of these negotiations, the last DDR cabinet under de Maizière in 1990 issued a cabinet order concerning changes in labor relations with foreign residents eligible for a work permit on the basis of intergovernmental agreements with the DDR. The essential points are outlined below.

- The agreements will not be extended.
- It is lawful and acceptable for companies to dismiss workers “for unavoidable reasons” (for example, necessary reductions in personnel for reasons involving business conditions due to changes in production patterns, or ceasing operations for reasons of environmental protection)
- Dismissed employees can be repatriated earlier than planned, or stay in Germany until the end of the planned contract period.
- Those who return home will be paid a lump sum of 3000 marks and 70% of their net wages for a period of three months. They may stay in their housing until they return home, and they have the right to obtain return travel allowance and financial arrangements from the company.
- For the workers staying in Germany, the labor contract, the workplace and the approved relationship with the employer will be cancelled. They will have the right to receive a work or business permit, the right to request suitable housing, equal wages at the workplace and unemployment benefits, as well as support when converting loans, and the right to request a new workplace from an intermediary” (pp. 72-73).

At this point, monetary union between both Germanys had already been decided (implemented July 1990), so the lump-sum payment of 3000 marks paid out to repatriating workers was no longer paid in DDR marks. The cash that contract workers had saved up to that point was subject to the same swap as the citizens of the DDR.
Regarding the right to stay, the revised Aliens Act that took effect on January 1, 1991 did not apply to the contract workers. The Act was intended for the guest workers in the western part of the country. According to the Act, foreigners who had been resident in the country for eight years were granted the right to stay, but the years of residence in the DDR were not recognized. The contract workers were only granted residence permits up to the time appointed in the original contracts from the DDR. The treatment was based on the premise that they would go home, and workers who tried to stay in Germany were left in midair. In June 1993, the conditions of the entitlement to residence for the contract workers were clarified. They are listed below.

- Permission for legal and normal residence in the federal territory
- Discontinuation of the payments for voluntary repatriation
- Withdraw asylum claims by December 17, 1993
- Maintain a livelihood through independent or non-independent employment
- Not convicted of a criminal offence” (p. 75)

On this basis, the contract workers were able to reside in Germany for two years to start with. Moreover, workers who had married, but left their families in the home country, were permitted to send for them. However, “the residence status was always uncertain. The entitlement was only granted for a period of two years, and as a condition for extension, the applicant must not be in receipt of social assistance. Workers who had their applications for extension approved every two years after unification would at long last be eligible to apply for an indefinite residence permit after eight years. In this case, it would be possible to receive child allowances and education benefits. The majority of contract workers stayed for eight years or longer. However, the period of stay in the DDR was not recognized” (p. 75).

Almuth Berger, the author of this essay, and others mounted campaigns focused on recognizing the whole period of stay in the DDR, and the issue was finally resolved in 1997. The contract workers were given indefinite leave to stay under the following conditions. As a result, they were also able to claim social benefits (child allowance, education benefits etc.).

“- Workers who had been legally resident in the DDR before unification
- Workers with certain qualifications
- Workers who are able to secure their livelihood independently
- Workers with no grounds to leave the country
- Workers able to prove that they have been resident in the country for at least eight years” (p. 76).

However, the ability to secure a livelihood independently was applicable whether the permission to stay was limited to a specific term, or indefinite. At the Wende, contract workers were dismissed in large numbers when the state corporations in the DDR went bankrupt, or had to be dismantled and sold. There was no change in the hardship of having to find another way to survive.

Nach der Wende: Vietnamesische Vertragsarbeiter und Vertragsarbeiterinnen in Ostdeutschland heute, the first essay by Karin Weiss, who is also a co-editor of this book,
discusses the Vietnamese during this difficult period.

She starts by outlining the number of former Vietnamese contract workers after 1989, but there are no clear statistics because the times were chaotic. Weiss makes this clear before introducing a range of figures in an attempt to pin down a summary. The text below quotes from this part of the essay.

“According to information at the Federal Commissioner of Foreigner Affairs, there were a total of 90,600 resident contract workers in the DDR as of December 31, 1989. Most of them had already been repatriated by December 31, 1990. Table 1 shows the numbers for the foreign labor force in 1989 and 1990 respectively. These figures mostly concern the people who came to the DDR as contract workers. However, according to Nguyen Van Huong, these statistics do not include the former Vietnamese exchange students in the DDR who stayed on as contract workers once they had completed their studies. As a result, Huong estimates that in 1990, for example, the number of Vietnamese contract workers alone totaled 75,000 persons. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs claims that in 1993, the number of former contract workers in the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or the BRD) was 19,036 persons. The number includes 16,635 Vietnamese, 2018 Mozambicans, and 383 Angolans. Officially, at least, all other contract workers had already returned home by this time” (p. 79).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>59,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>15,100</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>8,300</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers in the DDR</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>1,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers going between DDR and Poland</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>90,600</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1993, after the regulations around the residence rights for the contract workers were established, the Federal Government still encouraged the ones who had remained in Germany to return home. Weiss states that “a bilateral repatriation agreement was concluded on June 21, 1995. According to information from the Federal Ministry of the Interior dated July 9, 2002, a total of 38,077 applications for repatriation were submitted in the first half of 2002 and 21,573
applications were approved” (p. 80). On the other hand, many of the former contract workers, who had been placed in precarious positions, tried to stay in Germany by lodging asylum claims. In Table 2, Weiss outlines the number of asylum applications from Vietnamese contract workers based on the statistics of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. Please note the instant drop in the number of applications after the rules for residence rights were clarified in June 1993.

The further from the Wende and the closer to the present-day, the more difficult it is to specify the number of former contract workers based on current official statistics. As Weiss points out “there are no accurate figures for the current number of former contract workers living in Germany. The reason is that there are three groups that have not been factored into the official information. Namely, (a) when the border was opened, a group of contract workers moved to the ‘old’ federal states in search of work. However, most of them returned relatively quickly to the ‘new’ federal states, but they have not been captured by the official statistics. (b) Others lodged asylum claims, which meant they were excluded from the statistics on contract workers. (c) Yet others were first repatriated, but unable to secure firm footholds in their home countries, they returned to the BRD regardless of the legality. These people are not recorded as contract workers in the official statistics, nor are they included in the regulations for residence rights. For these reasons, it is not possible to definitely point to accurate figures. The current official statistics only show the total number of Vietnamese today. The group of 84,138 persons in the whole of Germany in December 2000 includes the quota of refugees that came to the (former) BRD, the former contract workers in the DDR, the family members they brought to the country, children born in Germany, and asylum seekers. From 1981 to 2001, a total of 36,461 Vietnamese were given citizenship, among them, 32,840 became citizens after 1991. However, citizenship was almost exclusively granted to the Vietnamese in western Germany” (pp. 81-82).

Therefore, Weiss introduces two sets of statistics from the Commissioner for Integration in the new federal states (the former East German states). These figures also include family members brought to the country, but not the people who moved to West Germany, so they are not entirely accurate.

“The Brandenburg Commissioner for Integration estimates that in 2002, there were approximately 22,000 former contract workers in Germany with approximately 10,000 residing in the greater Berlin-Brandenburg area alone. Six thousand were living in Sachsen, and 2000 each in the states of Thüringen, Sachsen-Anhalt, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In the view of the Commissioner for Integration, there were hardly any former contract workers living in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>9,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8,133</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>12,258</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>10,960</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3,427</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2,619</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,130</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1,494</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2,991</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2,425</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>3,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2002</td>
<td>788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62,854</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the old federal states. The estimates of the office of the Commission of Foreigners’ Affairs in Berlin are similar. According to the office, there were approximately 18,000 former Vietnamese contract workers in Germany in 2002 (not including family members brought over at a later stage) with approximately 4500 living in Berlin. According to Huong, in 2002, there were approximately 18,000 former contract workers from Vietnam. Fifteen thousand were entitled to stay under the framework for regulations for residence rights, while the other 3000 were eligible for other categories of residence permits” (p. 82).

Although we understand from Weiss’ description that a large number of the approximately 59,000 Vietnamese contract workers in the DDR before the Wende, returned home after the Wende, more than 20,000 stayed behind in the new federal republic where they still remain. Compared to contract workers from other countries, this number is exceedingly high. The numbers are extremely small compared to the Turkish people in Germany, and readers may be under the impression that the Vietnamese in Germany have not posed much of a problem, but have lived quietly in the country. This is not the case. From my own personal experience of relatively long stays in Berlin and Halle (Sachsen-Anhalt in former East Germany) in 1993-94, 2006 and 2008, I observed Vietnamese as roadside sellers of illegal cigarettes in Berlin in 1993-94, and as sellers at fruit and vegetable stands or Asian snack bars in the 2000s. Their presence symbolizes the period of the Wende in Germany.

Weiss also discusses the reality of day-to-day life for the Vietnamese (former) contract workers after the Wende, including occupations, income, homes (housing), the second generation, language, contact with German people, experiences and awareness of hostile attitudes to foreigners.

Immediately after the Wende, “a series of illegal acts were committed. The numbers were slight, but people committed crimes in order to survive. The media used this to stigmatize the contract workers on a large scale, setting them up as criminals. For a long time, this image was fixed in the minds of the public. Some of the contract workers also worked for Vietnamese mafia groups in the illegal cigarette trade. However, all experts say that these were the exceptions” (p. 85).

Throughout the transition period, they have found specific occupations. “Most of the former contract workers are currently operating their own businesses, or working at food stalls, market stalls, flower stalls, or small restaurants. Frequently, whole (extended) families are working together. Most of the ones who are not operating their own businesses work at cleaning businesses or other service businesses. The reason is that these jobs do not require a great deal of knowledge of the language” (pp. 83-84).

Some of the Vietnamese expanded to become import traders. “The first Vietnamese wholesale center was set up in Berlin as early as 1995. Most of the Vietnamese trade was oriented toward their own group. Many producers focused on the needs of their own ethnic group, and provided services to answer those needs” (p. 84). This kind of trade is also supported by the ethnic community. Here, Weiss borrows from Lars Liepe, a researcher in this field, when she states that the Vietnamese (former) contract workers had created a niche in commerce and
services. Presumably, this is also the source of the title of this book (Erfolg in der Nische?). But the question mark added at the end of the title suggests that there were many problems.

The problems were, first of all, the low income levels. After the Wende, they had to work to maintain the minimum standard of living because their residence permits were conditional on not being in receipt of social assistance. This is still the situation today. Therefore, they have not paid into the pension fund toward their future pensions. On paper, they had paid into the pension fund during the period in the DDR. However, since the payments were deducted from their wages regardless of their wishes, and paid to Vietnam, the government of united Germany did not recognize that period as contributing toward a pension. The period in the DDR was recognized in 2003, but many former contract workers are still not paying into the pension fund. Now, more than twenty years after unification, they are already joining the generations receiving old age pensions.

In addition to these kinds of problems, the low levels of income also forced them to work long hours. Ironically, this was possible because they were self-employed and because they are industrious by nature. Weiss points out that working in excess of 60 hours a week was the rule rather than the exception. As a result, they sacrificed family life and, as will be described later, tended to neglect communication with their children.

Next, there was the language problem. Weiss says that “still today, the majority of the former contract workers have inadequate German language skills. The expert assessment is that more than 10 to 15% of the former contract workers in the Berlin-Brandenburg area do not have sufficient knowledge of the German language to be able to communicate independently with the German people around them. The figure is said to be around 30% in Rostock. There are clear regional differences here” (p. 85). On the other hand, the second generation is marked by a faltering knowledge of the Vietnamese language. “Even though most children and young people know the language, they have not mastered written Vietnamese. This situation is unparalleled among the migrant groups living in Germany. Although the second generation is occasionally more proficient in the German language, in the case of the Vietnamese contract workers, the language skills gap between the first and second generation is greater than for other groups of migrants. According to experts, this is essentially a condition imposed by the long working hours. In short, children attend German institutions from an early age (where they only speak German), but their parents often work on the weekends. Therefore, they lose out on time spent together and communicating in Vietnamese on the weekends” (p. 87).

Of course, these language problems constrain contact between the former contract workers who are long-term residents, and the German people in German society. To start with, their patterns of residence mean that they are concentrated in certain districts: “Most of the former contract workers are still concentrated in limited residential areas in the new federal states. Above all, in the greater Berlin-Brandenburg area. The contract workers are concentrated in the eastern parts of Berlin, i.e. Marzahn, Lichtenberg, and Hohenschönhause. Berlin is a striking case because there are certain residential areas isolated from the former contract workers, and asylum seekers have been assigned to the former West Berlin. The asylum seekers remain in
the western part of Berlin, and the others in the east. In short, the residential configuration still reflects the former political structures” (p. 87).

This is also a reason why “the contract workers have hardly any contact with Germans. However, this lack of contact with Germans was also “normal” in the DDR. Neither the Germans nor the Vietnamese wanted contact. At the end of the day, there has been no change to the situation of extremely limited social contact with the German people around them” (p. 88). Weiss points out that the German hostility toward foreigners at the time of the Wende also reinforced their tendency to stick to their own group, which has turned into another problem. Namely, “some social reference groups (soziale Bezugsgruppe) are highly significant in traditional terms. This provides even less motivation for forming contact with Germans. These groups are not only socially significant, but they are also important for material security and to cope with distressing situations. To put it plainly, the traditional social security system is the social reference group. These groups guarantee confidence and assistance at times of unemployment or illness, and they assist by caring for family members who are newly arrived in Germany, or family members remaining in Vietnam. It is not possible to break out of the dependency that the groups create. The Vietnamese groups have their own patterns of values and standards, which are not necessarily always in agreement with German values and standards” (p. 88). Weiss touches on the problem of lack of agreement (with the German values and standards) in her second essay.

Although the paucity of day-to-day contact between Vietnamese and Germans was enforced already during the DDR period, another factor is the experience of the German violence and hostility toward foreigners after the Wende. “The initial period after the Wende has without doubt been marked by the experiences of hostility toward foreigners, which invited them to stay together in close-knit ethnic groups. The unjust acts built solidarity between the ethnic groups, and provided the incentive for self-help (p. 90). As far as the author recalls, this upheaval continued until 1992. The hostility toward foreigners and acts of violence decreased after 1992, and most Vietnamese experts estimate the physical violence at 10% of 1992/93. However, no firm figures exist. The existing research on the scale of hostility toward foreigners in the new federal states, in particular, has not reported any decrease in the violence up to this point. On the contrary, the reports say that the risk of violence (Gewaltbereitschaft) is increasing” (p. 90).

So, what are the lives of the (former) contract workers like at this time? Weiss sums up their circumstances compared to the period of the DDR as follows.

“With the Wende came large-scale changes to the living conditions for the contract workers. In the DDR, the Vietnamese had been extremely constrained, but at the same time, the conditions afforded them some protection. These conditions met all requirements for survival. With the Wende, all guarantees disappeared overnight. If the contract workers wanted to stay in Germany, they were forced to make their own way. Today, the conditions for a framework to guarantee basic survival have been established, but even so, the pressure of competition is high and the future is uncertain. The former contract workers have very mixed feelings about these three extremely different situations (DDR, the Wende, and now the BRD). However, when they
look back, most of them view the DDR as the best period in Germany” (p. 93).

The essays below discuss the problems of the (former) contract workers today, and the current state of affairs from the perspective of the reunification of Germany.

The Vietnamese (Former) Contract Workers Today

Eva Kolinsky, who is listed as co-author together with Dennis and Weiss in the foreword to this book, depicts the daily life of the former contract workers after the Wende in her first essay, *Paradies Deutschland – Migrationserwartungen und Migrationserfahrungen ehemaliger Vertragsarbeiter und Vertragsarbeiterinnen aus Vietnam*. The essay is a summary of a research project that ran from the summer of 2002 to early 2004, interviewing a total of fifty (former) contract workers. It is divided into three parts: 1) Memories of the DDR (the Paradise!); 2) Life after the Wende with examples of success or failure; 3) Estrangement from German society and from the second generation. In this sense, the essay complements the essay by Karin Weiss with concrete examples.

1) In a way, the memories of the DDR share traits with the “Ostalgie” (Ost [East] + Nostalgie) of the citizens of the former DDR in the 1990s with things that are unique to the Vietnamese (former) contract workers added into the mix. This is a quote from part of an interview that Kolinsky has included in the essay: “It was better in the GDR. There is no doubt about that. The GDR was better. It was much better than it is today. There were many regulations, but everybody knew the rules and adhered to them. One knew what was required and what to expect. I personally did not miss any freedoms. I was equal to Germans, I had the same status and was treated equally. I felt secure in the GDR. I felt integrated and accepted, in the same way as I had been when I was still in Vietnam. Since the Wende and unification, all this has, unfortunately, changed.” (pp. 100-101)

2) The examples of success after the Wende project an image of the Vietnamese carving out a life for themselves by their own efforts in a restricted environment. A woman who arrived at a sewing factory in Leipzig in 1987, one of several examples in the essay, tells her own story. “I applied on my own for the next level of German language courses. I completed the course at night school. I obtained a diploma with a good grade. After I received the German language diploma, I started to look for opportunities for other work. I did it because at the time I found it very hard and painful to work in front of a machine (author’s note: the woman worked in a sewing factory in Leipzig) all day long… I was able to get another job. I worked in the fashion department of this company until 1990.” (p. 101)

In another example, a Vietnamese woman was disappointed for a time when she found herself assigned to a kitchen assistant job at a low salary despite arriving in Rostock in 1981 with hopes of pursuing vocational education and training in the DDR. Even so, she studied German and requested a place to study at the Free German Trade Union Federation. Her request was rejected, but she was able to get assistance to train to become a cook and she completed the course in 1985. As a result, her wages were raised to the level of a professional worker, and she transferred to another company where she had people working under her. Later, she obtained
an extension of her residence permit, married a German man from her workplace (ignoring stiff opposition from the parents), and in 1989, she had a child. After the Wende, she got a job as a cook at a daycare center, but she lost the job when the center closed in 1994. At the same, she also got divorced. Kolinsky speaks highly of this woman, saying that “she built her own life in the private domain as well as the professional domain, and made her own decisions about how to live her life” (p. 104).

Another success story is the case of a man who came to Rostock to work as a stevedore in 1982. He did not take any German language courses, but used all his contacts in the workplace and everyday life to use and improve the little German (das bisschen Deutsch) he had learned at the (company) introductory course. Before long, he applied to the next level of job training at his company, and qualified as a cargo transshipment technician in 1984. Instead of carrying cargo himself, he was now able to use cranes and machinery, and he received a better salary corresponding to his status as an expert worker. Alongside this, he also earned additional income from sewing trousers (copies of brand products sold well in the DDR) as so many Vietnamese contract workers did. On the weekends and on weekdays when he did not work at the port, he went to the surrounding villages to sell his own wares.

At the Wende in 1990, he first went to Berlin as did many other Vietnamese people. There, he talked to Vietnamese people who had started their own businesses. After learning from them, he thought that if he were going to start an independent business, rather than moving to Berlin, it would be better to return to Rostock and to open a market where there was no competition. So, he went back to Rostock and obtained a seller’s license from the business bureau. It was precisely the time when the DDR mark was converted into the BRD mark. He converted the maximum limit of 4000 East German marks at a rate of 1:1, and the remaining 6000 of his savings at a rate of 1:2 (i.e., 3000 BRD marks), and obtained a total of 7000 West German marks.

With this as his starting capital, he went to Hamburg where he bought a second-hand van and packed it full with Asian products (noodles, rice, cuttlefish etc.). He drove back to Rostock, where he set up in the areas where the Vietnamese lived, and sold out in less than two hours. Later, half the population of Vietnamese in Rostock were repatriated, leaving around a thousand people, so he changed the business and opened a mobile snack van in the areas where the Germans lived. This also did well. He then opened a Vietnamese restaurant and operated a hotel, becoming a full-fledged businessman.

Kolinsky mentions four examples of success and one example of failure. Normally, though, there were probably many failures and hardships and a few examples of success. To return to the essay, the following is an example of taking the rocky road.

After the Wende, a man who had come to the DDR in early 1989 had to choose between taking the 3000 marks and returning home, or remaining in Germany. “Why did I stay? Perhaps I was a fool. In any case, I was in my room with some friends who said they were staying. So, I thought in that case I would stay, too. We stayed behind as a group.” (p. 108)

He and his friends started selling cigarettes and he saved up small amounts of money. Like other Vietnamese, he then decided to start his own business (selling vegetables and fruit),
so he used the money to “buy a truck and signed a long-term lease on a place for a shop. When he went to the authorities to convert his Vietnamese driver’s license into a German one, he thought that his new start in life seemed secure. However, the official noticed that his Vietnamese license was forged. It was one of many forged licenses that had come into circulation via the Vietnamese embassy and Vietnamese forgers” (p. 111). He was hugely disappointed, but he was assisted by other Vietnamese who gave him work.

In 2001, he married in Germany and after the couple had a son, he again tried to start a business. He and his wife opened a snack bar. “However, there were few customers. The snack bar was in an area where most residents were Germans with little money, and there was no demand for Vietnamese food” (p. 111). Kolinsky sums up his story of continuous hardship and failure: “I did not, however, consider going back to Vietnam. Partly, because he had not been successful and could not show off the proud achievements of a migrant, and partly because no matter how disappointed he was, he had more freedom and possibilities in Germany” (p. 112).

3) As far as the estrangement from German society and from their own children is concerned, Kolinsky says that even though there is a sense of estrangement from the Germans, both sides are now making efforts to make some contact. But she introduces the concerns of the parents about the estrangement from their children and, above all, the estrangement of the children from Vietnamese culture and traditions. One Vietnamese individual says that children and parents, or one of the parents, see each other for maybe an hour. “They live separate lives… The meaning of family has changed. Even though we come from a country in Asia where the family is traditionally held in very high esteem, we have not been able to maintain this tradition of the family. The traditions will not survive if the children think they no longer have any meaning. Parents and children have less and less to do together in everyday life. This is also because the parents have hardly any time for the children. This has probably had a big impact. We come from Vietnam and now we live here, but our traditions are likely to become impoverished.” (pp. 116-117)

Next, Dao Minh Quang uses his own experience to describe the occupations of the Vietnamese (former) contract workers today, and how they make a living, as suggested by the title of the discussion paper, *Wirtschaftliche Strukturen in der Gruppe der ehemaligen Vertragsarbeiter/innen in Deutschland*. First, he describes his own background. “I studied in the DDR from 1980 to 1986, and after a short stay in Vietnam, I returned to the DDR in 1989 to work as an interpreter for the contract workers. So, I am also a member of a group of contract workers, and I have been directly and indirectly involved with this group for 16 years. From 1991 to 1993, I worked at the office of the Brandenburg Commission for Foreigners where I had opportunities to take part in general, legal and social situations involving these groups in East Germany. Since 1994, I have mainly worked as a Vietnamese interpreter and adviser to Vietnamese people who are trying to start up businesses (*Existenzgründer*), or to operate businesses” (p. 119).

First, he defines three categories of contract workers: 1) The people who came because
of the government agreement between Vietnam and the DDR, and stayed in Germany after the Wende (approx. 18,000 people). 2) (Former) contract workers who went back to Vietnam, but then returned to Germany (approx. 6000 people). 3) People who were brought to Germany as dependants of a contract worker (approx. 5000 people). Twenty-nine thousand persons in total, these groups make up about 30% of the total number of around 100,000 Vietnamese people living in Germany. When the second generation is added to the group of contract workers, the figure of 29,000 swells to 40,000 people.

“In the months and years after the Wende, 55% of the contract workers in Germany started their own businesses, and they are still working independently today. Fifteen percent are unemployed, and 30% are employed (but no accurate information has been listed so far) (p. 120). Further, when drawing comparisons between this group and the Vietnamese “boat people” (most of whom arrived in West Germany between 1975 and 1980, and were permanent residents of the old federal republic), the abovementioned figures are almost reversed. In short, approximately 15% of the (former boat people) group are self-employed, 55% are employees, and 30% are unemployed” (p. 120).

After qualifying that this is a rough estimate based on his own experience, Quang suggests that the occupations of the (former) contract workers are distributed as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant business (snack bars, restaurants)</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small and large-scale businesses (clothing, flowers, foods, newspapers, Lotto)</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import/export businesses</td>
<td>5-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service businesses (payroll, interpreting/translating, travel agency, insurance)</td>
<td>5-10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quang describes some recent trends. Firstly, even though the businesses have in the past focused on the old DDR, some major business chains have emerged, and have also started to expand in the West. Secondly, there is an emerging trend towards investing in Vietnam. Thirdly, the abovementioned service businesses aimed at the Vietnamese have created new types of occupations.

However, some characteristics and problems have continued since the Wende. Firstly, “many companies and businesses are still operating as family businesses, or small-scale businesses. This is not only because it is the only way to secure an income for the family, but also because family-run businesses do not have to observe working hour regulations. This leads to extended working hours and, in part, to self-exploitative working hours. This is certainly a way to secure a livelihood, but it does not allow for a normal family life” (p. 123). Secondly, “regardless of the major (labor) investment, the total earnings of most of the companies or businesses are relatively small, and do only guarantee a basic living. According to estimates, the average earnings of a self-employed worker are about 2000 Euros, but this is also the income for the whole household. Overall, the total income is low and even though it guarantees a basic living, it does not permit the normal social security and consumption of most German families”
The continuing barriers between the Vietnamese people and German society since the Wende, as well as the related lack of German language skills among the first generation, and the lack of basic knowledge about business operations are the cause of these characteristics and problems. The situation also narrows down the prospects for the dependants of the (former) contract workers in Germany.

Lastly, Quang makes some proposals to counter these types of problems. Firstly, political and social support; secondly, organizing professional sessions on operating your own business; and thirdly, providing facilities and educational venues for the next generation, as well as cultural exchange.

Social Integration of the Vietnamese (Former) Contract Workers

The essay by Phuong Kollath, *Der Verein Dien Hong - Selbsthilfe und Integrationsarbeit in Rostock*, discusses the social integration of the Vietnamese (former) contract workers and their families through the Dien Hong Association. Kollath came to the DDR as a contract worker in 1981, and she has been active as a key member of the Dien Hong Association and as a social advisor to Vietnamese people since the collapse of the DDR.

In August 1992, the Lichtenhagen district of Rostock saw two days of xenophobic attacks of stone-throwing and arson at an apartment building (Sonnenblumenhaus, named after an image of a sunflower on the exterior wall) where asylum seekers were temporarily housed, and where Vietnamese people had been living for a long time. This incident was symbolic of the hostility toward foreigners in East Germany after the collapse of the DDR. Still today, a government-led commemorative ceremony is held on the site at important anniversaries. The incident provided the motivation to set up the Dien Hong Association in Rostock. The Association has become a model for the integration of Vietnamese people, and the essay discusses the process of setting it up, as well as its activities. As far as the Rostock-Lichtenhagen incident is concerned, the second essay by Kolinsky, which comes after this one, have even more vivid descriptions than the ones in this essay. Kolinsky tells the story by publishing the testimony of Wolfgang Ritter, the Commissioner for Foreigners who was present at the time.

Established after the incident at Lichtenhagen, the Dien Hong Association has also received administrative support and won awards from the German Federal Government and the EU for its social integration activities. The essay introduces the main activities. These include establishing a venue where Germans and Vietnamese can meet, youth activities, the XENOS project (social integration activities for foreigners), general and political education, integration services for migrants, a network for occupational qualifications, and assistance to migrant women.

There were approximately 2000 Vietnamese contract workers in Rostock in the 1980s. After the collapse of the DDR, many of them returned home, or left Rostock. As of the end of 2003, 845 Vietnamese remained in Rostock. “From the start, it was important for the Dien Hong Association to work tirelessly for the residence rights of the Vietnamese people. Overcoming
the problems of the language, jobs and social life, and navigating the complex bureaucracy are ongoing issues. Support for dependants brought to Germany has always been an important function of the Dien Hong Association (p. 134). Above all, the venue has definitely contributed to resolving the problems of integration. It has also provided opportunities for further self-realization and self-confirmation” (p. 134).

In addition to the Dien Hong Association and other organizations that have aimed to live harmoniously with the Germans and other migrants, there are also numerous independent organizations and networks for Vietnamese. The second essay by Karin Weiss, *Strukturen der Selbsthilfe im ethnischen Netzwerk*, considers the organizations that were formed at the time of the Wende in Germany.

In the essay, Weiss discusses “how the ethnic networks and self-help structures were formed among the Vietnamese contract workers, what functions they had, and how they adapted to the radically different living conditions and frameworks in the DDR, at the Wende, in the period before the rules about the rights of residence were finalized, and in the current Federal Republic” (p. 137). Please note that despite the essay title *Strukturen der Selbsthilfe im ethnischen Netzwerk* (Self-Help Structures in Ethnic Networks), the body of the essay discusses ‘ethnic networks and self-help structures’. Judging by the intention of Karin Weiss’ essay, the latter is more appropriate, the reason being that she distinguishes between ‘ethnic networks’ and ‘self-help structures’ in the essay. Moreover, ‘self-help structures’ is not a particularly good translation of ‘Strukturen der Selbsthilfe.’ From the context, it seems that the term *Strukturen* (structures) as used here refers to organizations, or similar groups (networks etc.).

We start with the ethnic networks. In the DDR, the Vietnamese contract workers set up “functioning ethnic networks amongst themselves despite the daily surveillance. The purposes were social and economic as well as to elude rules and controls. Eventually, the structures expanded beyond the regions… To start with, the ethnic structures served to facilitate side jobs through mutual assistance and support… For example, workers sewed jeans at their hostels and sold them on the city streets. Of course, these acts were not officially sanctioned by the authorities, but orders for clothes were nevertheless received openly, and some even in the presence of the DDR authorities. The communal living in the hostels expedited the production and commerce in the sense that the Vietnamese protected and supported each other” (pp. 139-140). At the same time, “the ethnic networks also provided protection against the negative reactions of the Germans that were real enough despite the repeated official statements of friendly relations and solidarity” (p. 140).

In addition, at the Wende or after, nearly all Vietnamese contract workers suddenly lost their jobs and became trapped in situations where even their survival was uncertain. These networks were a form of self-defense and mutual assistance during the period of uncertain status until 1997 when the conditions for obtaining residence rights were clarified. “After the Wende, the Vietnamese tried to survive by legal means such as peddling wares, or small-scale food stands under tremendously troubling circumstances. For its existence, this trade relied on the
ethnic networks that had developed in the DDR” (p. 142). Self-defense was not only a matter of everyday life, but also a means of confronting the hostile views of foreigners that suddenly appeared in Germany.

Since 1997, and still now, “most of the former contract workers are still pursuing small-scale businesses and trade, or working for family businesses, within economic structures that have close links with the ethnic communities. In the larger cities, at least, these structures regulate the social lives of the Vietnamese” (p. 145).

However, Karin Weiss does not thoroughly evaluate the ethnic networks. She quietly observes that “the former contract workers turned to themselves (waren auf sich selbst verwiesen), and that the ethnic networks only provided assistance and protection” (p. 143). She made the same allusion in her first essay.

Parallel with the ethnic networks, a new type of organization emerged at the time of the Wende to look after the interests of the Vietnamese and to protect against the hostile attitudes towards foreigners. The Dien Hong Association introduced by Phuong Kollath in the preceding essay is one such organization. With Dien Hong as the model, similar organizations emerged in several cities in the old East German states. “The first official self-help organization for the Vietnamese former contract workers provided a way to defend themselves, a way to build the economically important structures for trade and small-scale business, which were the only sources of income open to them at the time, and a way to represent their interests openly. By setting up formal associations, they were also given the option of requesting public assistance” (p. 143). It was particularly important that these organizations took on the role of cultural exchange and legal counsel for the Vietnamese whose residence status was insecure. “Aligned with the ethnic networks, or formed within them, the associations had other functions than self-defense and supporting economic structures. In particular, these associations provided support and legal advice about residence permits and work permits. They also created the first cultural centers” (p. 144).

To acquire these functions, the cooperation of the Germans was absolutely necessary, a point that Weiss emphasizes strongly. “The Germans are crucially significant for setting up these associations. Firstly, there were the Commissioners for Foreigners in the new federal states, who recognized and supported the interests of the Vietnamese more than ever after the large-scale injustices. Secondly, there were other supporters, such as churches or dynamic private individuals, without whose help it would have been impossible to set up the formal self-help associations. In this case, these Germans played an extremely important role, and they remain important today. That is, they mediate with the German culture and the German authorities, and their expert knowledge of German regulations, laws and official functions are indispensable for the associations” (p. 143).

The exclusively Vietnamese ethnic networks and the associations where Germans and Vietnamese collaborate still coexist today. On the one hand, the ethnic networks of the Vietnamese have evolved. For example, the Vietnamese business center in Berlin is “profit-oriented, but fully consistent with an understanding of itself as the organization
representing the ethnic community. Today, the center is the community access point for Vietnamese people in Berlin. It is an important center in terms of culture and communication. It has an important role, not only economically, but also socially... However, the more there are of these ethnically homogenous formats for self-help, the fewer people will use the German-Vietnamese associations” (p. 147).

On the other hand, there are still German-Vietnamese associations. “These associations are meeting places and centers for communication. At the same time, this is partly due to the German advisors for creating a crossroads for introducing German culture” (p. 146). “Today, the associations are highly important as supporters of culture, as centers for advice, and as meeting points between cultures” (p. 146). However, these associations are currently mired in difficulties. “All the associations and their supporters are worried by growing financial difficulties. In the early 1990s, the large-scale injustices in the context of hostility towards foreigner caused a change in awareness in the local authorities. This was linked to comparatively generous support, for example, the Commissions for Foreigners. Therefore, the associations and the independent supporters received relatively lavish official financial support in this period. However, recently, the funds have become extremely limited” (p. 146). Nonetheless, “if we see integration assistance to the Vietnamese as the mission of the associations, it is not necessarily true that future demand will not be as high as in the past” (p. 147).

While emphasizing the role of the German-Vietnamese associations, Karin Weiss indicates the need for them to survive regardless of the current difficulties. According to Weiss, most of the Vietnamese in Germany think they will return home when they are old, but with the second generation still growing, this is still an ‘illusion’. In that case, integration with German society will be necessary and the open associations are very important for creating a new identity beyond the ethnic framework.

In another essay, Weiss speaks highly of the roles of these ethnic networks for bridging the German-Vietnamese international and business relationships. (Karin Weiss: "Vietnam: Netzwerke zwischen Sozialismus und Kapitalismus", URL: http://www.bpb.de/apuz/28970/vietnam-netzwerke-zwischen-sozialismus-und-kapitalismus)

The German Commissioners for Foreigners (Ausländerbeauftragte) supported the creation and continuing work of the German-Vietnamese associations from the German side. The second essay by Eva Kolinsky, Das Ende der Unberatenheit - Ausländerbeauftragte in Ostdeutschland, discusses the creation of the Commissioner for Foreigners and the activities.

In the DDR, the contract workers were assigned a group leader from the same country and a German minder. Basically, their role was to monitor and control the contract workers. After the Wende in 1989, the foreign contract workers were all of sudden plunged into a situation where survival and obtaining residence rights was difficult. The local municipalities appointed individuals and associations with some involvement with the contract workers in the past, to handle the problem of the foreigners. They were the Commissioners for Foreigners. “Where Commissioners for Foreigners had been active at the municipal level in the DDR, they were reinstated at the initiative of an occasional round-table meeting. In such cases, the person
assigned to the post and the local administrators filled the new positions, appointed support staff, and decided the focus on issues involving foreigners” (p. 153). The position did not have the same status in every municipality, and there were also differences in the support from the municipalities.

This essay lists actual examples of creating Commissioners for Foreigners in Leipzig, Magdeburg, Chemnitz, Weimar and Rostock. For example, in the case of Magdeburg, there were uncertainties around the post, so church associations were responsible for the activities. In Rostock, on the other hand, the Commissioner received financial assistance from the city and developed solid organizational activities. As far as Rostock is concerned, the essay discusses the activities and the Lichtenhagen incident, quoting from the testimony of Wolfgang Ritter, the Commissioner for Foreigners, who was with the Vietnamese at the time, and the sequence of events for setting up the Dien Hong Association.

“In the summer of 2004, the job title of the Commissioner for Foreigners was changed to the Commissioner for Integration and Migration. The scope of the post was expanded to include ethnic Germans (Spätaussiedler) from Russian-speaking areas alongside the foreign residents” (p. 161). In effect, “by establishing residence rights and independence, it was possible to see clear signs of normalization among the Vietnamese. Sustaining daily life in society and in the family remains an issue. Since the framework conditions for residence have now been clearly defined, the Commissioners for Foreigners have hardly any scope for activities today” (p. 164).

The role of the Commissioners for Foreigners has already diminished, but Kolinsky shares the opinion of Karin Weiss that “they expect integration to be implemented when the residence situation is stable. In this case, the Commissioners for Foreigners will consider lack of language skills, and lack of informal contact, as evidence of lack of preparation for integration” (p. 165).

The last essay, Der Frauenverein Song Hong in Potsdam by Hai Bluhm is exceedingly short. As the title indicates, it introduces the Song Hong Women’s Association, an organization for the approximately 300 Vietnamese people living in Potsdam. Established in 2004, the association is relatively young. It organizes various events with the aim of “maintaining the customs, practices and traditions of Vietnam, as well as studying and learning German” (p. 167). In particular, “in December 2004, the Song Hong Association organized a fundraiser for the victims of the Agent Orange defoliant used by the Americans during the Vietnam War with the enthusiastic participation of Vietnamese residents in Potsdam, Berlin and surrounding areas. The essay clarifies future plans by saying that through these kinds of activities, the association will meet halfway with the German people living in Potsdam and vicinity” (p. 168).

This ends the introduction to the foreword and all eleven essays in Erfolg in der Nische. The presence of the Vietnamese (the DDR contract workers) in Germany is in itself a niche, but the fact that they are there today is an embodiment of many substantial issues, from systemic problems in Germany to issues involving the integration of foreigners in society in the period from the DDR through the Wende to the present day. The book tells the story of how they secured their survival through ethnic networks and joint associations with Germans, and provides clues
for clarifying specific examples of social capital. In the future, I would like to enrich this theme through further data research and surveys.