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REFUGEES WELCOME?

The West German Reception of Vietnamese ›Boat People‹

Very few non-European refugees reached West Germany in the first three decades after the end of the Second World War. This changed after 1978/79. Images of packed refugee boats in Southeast Asia, resembling today's pictures from the Mediterranean region, now stimulated engagement on many levels in politics, media and society. Within just a few years, West Germany took in some 30,000 refugees from Southeast Asia, with more following as families were reunited. The latter were allowed to enter the country as ›quota refugees‹ as part of a fixed-quota agreement by the federal states without applying for asylum and were mostly flown in at the state's expense. Until then, migrants had generally been seen as temporary ›guest workers‹. Now the state was financing extensive integration programmes, as it no longer expected them to return to their countries of origin. Many Germans supported the refugees from Southeast Asia with donations and active assistance. At the same time, however, there was a growing fear of foreigners and ›economic asylum seekers‹ among large sections of the population from 1980 onwards. The question at issue during this phase was the extent to which West Germany should open itself to non-European refugees.

This article analyses how so much refugee support – an unexpectedly high level both at the time and from today's perspective – for the mostly Vietnamese ›boat people‹ came about and gained such strong momentum. It examines the role of civil society groups, state bureaucracy, political parties and the media, and how they interacted when it came to actually receiving refugees. We shall see, firstly, that it was chiefly public pressure that persuaded the social-liberal government to accept refugees from Indochina, although civil society and the state administration then cooperated, complementing one another. The second argument is that the public pressure was created

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in large part by media campaigns and Christian Democrat initiatives, which took a decisive stand in favour of accepting the refugees. A critical factor here, and this is the third proposition, was that the ›boat people‹ were associated discursively with post-war German history, and specifically with the expulsion of Germans at the end of the Second World War. Fourthly, the article shows how refugee admission methods and new forms of humanitarian aid developed, both of which can be seen as changes in civil society and bureaucracy.

In public perception and in research, ›Vietnam solidarity‹ has generally been associated with the student movement of '68.[1] There are only a few isolated studies on the USA, Australia and East Asia about the support for Vietnamese people after the end of the war there (1975); the West German reception of the ›boat people‹ has scarcely been explored at all.[2] More extensive studies on German foreign policy or migration history have also largely omitted the reception of refugees from Indochina.[3] Some initial thoughts were presented by two recent articles that address Cap Anamur's humanitarian mission and its competition with the German Red Cross (*Deutsches Rotes Kreuz*, DRK), but less so the reception of refugees.[4] My text is based in the first place on the archives of the ministries, parties, organisations and authorities involved (including those of the embassies in Indochina, the Foreign Office, the Chancellery, the Ministry of the Interior, the German Bundestag and the party executives), and, secondly, on records from aid organisations (especially Cap Anamur), media sources, and interviews with eyewitnesses, including the founder of Cap Anamur, Rupert Neudeck, who died in May 2016.[5]

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1 Cf. Claudia Olejniczak, *Die Dritte-Welt-Bewegung in Deutschland. Konzeptionelle und organisatorische Strukturmerkmale einer neuen sozialen Bewegung*, Wiesbaden 1999; Dorothee Weitbrecht, *Aufbruch in die Dritte Welt. Der Internationalismus der Studentenbewegung von 1968 in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 156-161.

2 The best overview to date is provided by the following short article: Julia Kleinschmidt, Die Aufnahme der ersten »boat people« in die Bundesrepublik, in: Deutschland Archiv Online, 26 November 2013, URL: <http://www.bpb.de/170611>. In brief: Olaf Beuchling, Vietnamese Refugees in Western, Central, and Northern Europe since the 1970s: The Examples of France, Great Britain, and Germany, in: Klaus J. Bade et al. (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Migration and Minorities in Europe. From the 17th Century to the Present*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 730-734; in greater detail: Court Robinson, *Terms of Refuge. The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, New York 1998; Nghia M. Vo, *The Vietnamese Boat People, 1954 and 1975–1992*, Jefferson 2006; on Hong Kong: Yuk Wah Chan (ed.), *The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora: Revisiting the Boat People*, New York 2011.

3 Cf. for example Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland. Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge*, Munich 2001; Jenny Pleinen, *Die Migrationsregime Belgiens und der Bundesrepublik seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen 2012.

4 Cf. Michael Vössing, Competition over Aid? The German Red Cross, the Committee Cap Anamur and the Rescue of Boat People in South East Asia, in: Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 2016, pp. 345-370; Patrick Merziger, The ›Radical Humanism‹ of ›Cap Anamur‹/›German Emergency Doctors‹ in the 1980s: a Turning Point for the Idea, Practice and Policy of Humanitarian Aid, in: *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 23 (2016), pp. 171-192.

5 Cf. his self-assessment: Rupert Neudeck, *In uns allen steckt ein Flüchtling. Ein Vermächtnis*, Munich 2016.

1. The Social-Liberal Government under Pressure: The Christian Democratic Opposition as Driving Force

During the first three decades of its existence the Federal Republic of Germany took in almost no non-European refugees. In practice, the liberal West German asylum law was interpreted restrictively, and the number of applications and admissions generally remained low. Just 230,000 asylum applications were submitted in total until 1979 – less per year than in the early 1990s. Only 57,000 of these were approved, and less than 15,000 individuals admitted for asylum were naturalised.[6] Instead, millions of *German* refugees came to West Germany: first those displaced from the former German territories in the east, then people from the GDR, and a growing number of ›resettlers‹ (*Aussiedler*) from East Central Europe who were likewise leaving their communist homelands. West Germany was also generous in admitting refugees to the country following the uprisings of 1956 and 1968 in Hungary and Prague.[7] In addition, it approved smaller quotas in the 1970s for Chileans and Argentinians fleeing from the dictatorships in their respective countries. The human rights discourse encouraged this, as did Germany's desire to enhance its international profile as a democratic state.[8]

A first wave of refugees fled from Vietnam after the USA's withdrawal and the occupation of the country by troops from the communist north in 1975. The federal government responded with assistance which, however, was less an expression of solidarity with the fleeing Vietnamese than of solidarity with the USA. The USA, which was now taking in numerous Vietnamese refugees, urged the Federal Republic of Germany to support it in this endeavour – ›as a matter of solidarity‹, as an internal memo put it.[9] It was typical for West Germany that it immediately offered generous financial assistance, but took almost no non-European refugees. The minister of the interior agreed to take in 3,000 South Vietnamese refugees, but only 1,000 places were distributed among the states and far fewer people were actually admitted.[10] When in November 1978 pictures of drowning ›boat people‹ mobilised politicians and citizens around the world, the USA had already taken 164,000 refugees from Indochina; France, 43,000; the Federal Republic of Germany, despite its pronouncement, just 1,300.[11]

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6 Federal government figures, in: German Bundestag, Drucksache 8/4278, 20 June 1980, p. 1; Plenarprotokoll 8/217, 14 May 1980, p. 17474.

7 Cf. Patrice G. Poutrus, Zuflucht im Nachkriegsdeutschland. Politik und Praxis der Flüchtlingsaufnahme in Bundesrepublik und DDR von den späten 1940er bis zu den 1970er Jahren, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2009), pp. 135-175.

8 Looking also at Chile: Jan Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten. Menschenrechte in der internationalen Politik seit den 1940ern*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 592-644.

9 Démarche, US ambassador, 11 September 1975, in: Bundesarchiv/Koblenz (Coblenz Federal Archives, BA/K) B 136 16709; note Ref. 513, 26 September 1975.

10 Itemisation 7 May 1981, in: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (Federal Foreign Office Political Archive, PA AA) ZA vol. 127380.

11 Figures 1 December 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16709.

The USA and France doubtless felt a particular responsibility to help because of their military engagement in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the restrictive position adopted by the West German government was remarkable. An internal memo from the ministerial bureaucracy in 1978, for example, stated in no uncertain terms that West Germany was ›not able to accommodate large numbers of refugees‹, and that the approved quota was the ›absolute limit‹.[12] The social-liberal government representatives also shared this position. Even in the international negotiations with the states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the UN at the end of the 1970s, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher kept returning to the fact that West Germany was already too heavily burdened by the many displaced persons and resettlers from the former German eastern territories, by asylum seekers and other foreigners to take in Vietnamese refugees.[13] They pointed out that in 1978 alone, 58,000 resettlers and 33,000 asylum seekers had come to the Federal Republic of Germany. In the cabinet and in public speeches, too, the government highlighted these kinds of figures to stonewall the admission of further refugees.[14] It was also concerned that despite the ban on recruiting new migrant workers (1973), the number of foreigners living in West Germany in the late 1970s was on the rise.

Pictures from Southeast Asia in the international media from November 1978 onwards, however, upset this defensive stance. The photos resembled those of refugees in the Mediterranean that began circulating in 2013: old, hopelessly overloaded boats sinking, or families in crowded camps. The numbers of refugees increased drastically from late 1978 onwards, particularly in the camps in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia; estimates put the figure at a total of more than 1.5 million people.[15] Initially, many were fleeing from the Communist collectivisation in Vietnam, from the re-education camps, or from poverty, later also because of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 and the fear of renewed fighting. Many refugees from Vietnam were of Chinese extraction and left the country because they experienced even greater racial and economic discrimination following China's intervention. At the same time, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979 caused further groups of people to flee from here as well – Khmer Rouge fearing revenge following the overthrow of the murderous regime, or people trying to escape famine and war. The public perception, however, was that the refugees were mainly Vietnamese.

From the end of 1978 onwards, the media images condensed this extremely complex situation into simple messages. In particular, the November 1978 photos of the ship *Hai Hong*, which were distributed by international news agencies, boosted state,

12 Nestroy/AA to Federal Ministry of Finance, 11 March 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107397.

13 Cf. for example EC/ASEAN talks in Brussels, 21 November 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107398; Helmut Schmidt to UN Secretary-General Waldheim, 24 May 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110380.

14 Cabinet meeting minutes, 6 December 1978, point B, URL: <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/cocoon/barch/0000/k/k1978k/kap1_1/kap2_50/para3_8.html>.

15 On their reception in the neighbouring countries and worldwide, cf. Supang Chantanavich/E. Bruce Reynolds (eds), *Indochinese Refugees. Asylum and Resettlement*, Bangkok 1988.

media and civil society relief efforts worldwide. They showed a ship in a desperate condition with 2,500 people on board, which had been at sea for weeks without supplies and had been refused permission to land in Malaysia. A number of states responded straight away. Canada immediately declared itself willing to bring several hundred people from the *Hai Hong* ashore and to take in tens of thousands more; the figure was ultimately 200,000.[16] The USA now likewise stepped up its already generous reception of the refugees.[17] Intellectuals in France, including gulag and Holocaust survivors, called for the *Hai Hong* refugees to be taken in and all the ›boat people‹ to be rescued, as did the centre-right government under Giscard d'Estaing.[18] In 1979, Great Britain, which until then had taken only a few hundred refugees, increased its quotas to 10,000 and created reception centres.[19] The German federal government, on the other hand, initially only offered the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) a large financial contribution to provide for those in urgent need on the *Hai Hong*.[20] As usual, the federal government wanted to help with money, not by taking in people. Before long, however, thousands of refugees were being flown in on Lufthansa and Bundeswehr planes. There were a number of reasons for this.

The CDU/CSU played a pivotal role, something which requires some explanation given its subsequent asylum policy. Following publication of the pictures of the *Hai Hong*, its deputies in the Bundestag urged foreign minister Genscher to increase financial aid for the refugees and to give them preferential access to asylum.[21] And on 24 November 1978, the Minister-President of Lower Saxony Ernst Albrecht (CDU) took what was, by German standards, a spectacular initiative: When he saw the images of the *Hai Hong* while watching television with his family, Albrecht explained, he immediately resolved to have 1,000 ›boat people‹ from Vietnam flown in to Lower Saxony.[22] In addition to refugees from the *Hai Hong*, these included – on Genscher's request – 450 people who had been rescued from the sea at the same time by a German freighter. Albrecht's conservative minister of the interior Wilfried Hasselmann even flew to Asia himself to accompany the refugees being transferred from the camps and generate

16 Dara Marcus, Saving Lives. Canada and the Hai Hong, in: *bout de papier* 28 (2014), pp. 24-27.

17 Dennis Gallagher, United States and the Indochinese Refugees, in: Chantanavich/Reynolds, *Indochinese Refugees* (fn. 15), pp. 230-248, here p. 231.

18 Eleanor Davey, *Idealism beyond Borders. The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954–1988*, Cambridge 2015, p. 169; Dan Nguyen Thrieu, *Indochinese Refugees in France. A Study and Some Comparison with France*, Victoria 1982, p. 294.

19 Robinson, *Terms of Refuge* (fn. 2), pp. 146-150.

20 Genscher promised half a million deutschmarks for *Hai Hong* refugees on 16 November 1978: Genscher to Schmidt, 30 November 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107397.

21 Werner Marx (CDU/CSU deputy) to Genscher, 24 November 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107397; CDU/CSU parliamentary group, press service, 24 November 1978, and Möllemann, fdk-Tagesdienst (FDP house publication *freie demokratische korrespondenz*), 23 November 1978, in: BA/K B 136 16709.

22 On the (international) reception: notes Ref. 513 AA, 17 November and 30 November 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107397. Albrecht's public explanation in: Vietnam-Flüchtlinge. Erlösende Tat, in: *Spiegel*, 4 December 1978, pp. 60-62.

Vietnamese refugees on the deck of the freighter *Hai Hong*, 22 November 1978. In the database of the photo agency picture alliance, this photo carries the title ›Vietnamese Syrians‹.
(picture alliance/AP Photo/Jeff Robbins)

media interest, together with 19 journalists.[23] On arrival in Germany the refugees were greeted formally and with extensive media coverage by Minister-President Albrecht, who also went on to visit them in their camps and communities.

Orchestrated events like this sent a signal of solidarity that went beyond the selfies of Angela Merkel with refugees in 2015 that are currently so widely discussed. Albrecht's independent initiative showed the federal government, the media and the population what was possible. Albrecht himself had not previously had any personal connection with Southeast Asia; he said that his dedication to the cause was motivated by Christian charity.[24] Over the following years, too, Albrecht remained the political leader most committed to taking in a large number of refugees from Vietnam. Other CDU politicians were initially equally robust in their support. In the Bundestag and the press they called for a rapid intake of more refugees from Indochina, and increased the quotas in their respective federal states. CDU delegates likewise urged the foreign minister to provide diplomatic and financial support for the German rescue ship *Cap Anamur*; others demanded aid for a French rescue operation.[25] In 1979, president of the Bundestag Richard Stücklen (CSU) even called for Germany to receive refugees from foreign rescue ships such as the French *Île de Lumière*.[26] At the European level, Conservatives, Liberals and Christian Democrats in the European People's Party (EPP) called for transport vessels to be sent to rescue refugees.[27]

And these were not empty words. CDU-governed states initially really did take in more ›boat people‹. The Christian Democrat-governed state of Lower Saxony in particular was consistently more generous than the national average in offering refuge to Vietnamese. Baden-Württemberg, which was governed by Lothar Späth (CDU), doubled the allocated admission quota in 1979, provided extra funds for a German Red Cross aid ship, and set up an office to coordinate private and public initiatives.[28] The CDU/CSU-led states of Schleswig-Holstein, Rhineland-Palatinate and Bavaria were likewise quick to make places available over and above the agreed quotas, and individual CDU-led cities, such as Frankfurt am Main under mayor Walter Wallmann, decided at the beginning of 1979 on their own quota of 250 ›boat people‹.[29] The Social Democrats were more restrained in this regard. Hesse was the only SPD-led state to initially take refugees in excess of the quotas; later it was primarily North Rhine-Westphalia under Johannes Rau. SPD members of the Bundestag complained that the Vietnamese

23 Report Member of the Bundestag Köster, 5 December 1978, and Jakarta embassy to Ministry of Defence, 29 December 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107398.

24 See fn. 22 and Ernst Albrecht, *Erinnerungen, Erkenntnisse, Entscheidungen. Politik für Europa, Deutschland und Niedersachsen*, Göttingen 1999, pp. 55-58.

25 Wissmann to Schmidt, 4 July 1981, in: BA/K B 136 16710; Rupert Neudeck (ed.), *Wie helfen wir Asien? oder »Ein Schiff für Vietnam«*, Hamburg 1980, p. 84.

26 AA to Stücklen, 26 July 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110383.

27 AA, 20 July 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16710.

28 Lothar Späth (MP BaWü) to van Well (StS AA), 31 July 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110380.

29 German Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 8/133, 26 January 1979, p. 10565.

Christian Democrat engagement: Minister-President Ernst Albrecht (right) and Minister of the Interior Wilfried Hasselmann (left) greeting Vietnamese refugees in Lower Saxony, 3 December 1978 (picture alliance/AP Photo/Helmuth Lohmann)

refugees were coming so fast while the 500 quota refugees from the military dictatorship in Argentina were still waiting.[30] The question of which refugees were to be preferred clearly had ideological connotations.

The Christian Democrat support for the ›boat people‹ was accompanied by solidarity actions in their milieu that were more reminiscent of those of left-wing groups. The Circle of Christian Democratic Students (*Ring Christlich-Demokratischer Studenten*, RCDS) organised the fundraising campaign ›Help the Vietnamese‹ in 1979, and the CDU/CSU youth organisation *Junge Union* campaigned for housing, work and host families for Vietnamese refugees and sold rice to raise money. In addition, the *Junge Union* under leader Matthias Wissmann called for the number of refugees admitted to

30 Ref. 213, 17 January 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16709; German Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 8/127, 17 January 1979, pp. 9933-9934.

be increased fivefold to 50,000 and for an ›airlift‹ with donations.[31] Political work and active citizenship came together especially in the ›Vietnam-Büro e.V.‹ agency founded by CDU delegates Elmar Pieroth and Matthias Wissmann in April 1979. The association was financed by donations and raised aid money, provided medical assistance, and found job opportunities – evidently with a fair degree of success – for the Vietnamese who were flown in.[32] There was no such commitment in Social Democrat circles. And an inspection of the minutes of Green party meetings and their press statements likewise found no indication that they were discussing the reception of the ›boat people‹ and the integration of refugees.[33]

There were several reasons why the Christian Democrats, who had previously shown little interest in admitting non-European refugees, were now so emphatic in their support for forced migrants. To begin with, the fact that the Vietnamese were fleeing a communist regime was key. The Christian Democrat complaints about ›orders to shoot refugees adrift at sea or going ashore‹[34] carried connotations of attempts to flee the GDR. And the images of crowded boats, camps with children, and raped women reminded many Christian Democrats of the expulsion from the former German eastern territories after 1945. As early as 1975, then, several Christian Democrats had called for assistance for the Vietnamese: ›As Germans we know best what it means to be a refugee‹ – which was why, according to their parliamentary leader Karl Carstens, ›the call for help for those suffering in Vietnam is so loud in Germany‹.[35] In 1979 CDU chairman Helmut Kohl also advocated higher admission quotas, citing the German experience of displacement and flight.[36]

In the 1979 debate it was notably often CDU/CSU spokespeople for displaced persons like Herbert Hupka and Herbert Czaja who denounced the situation in Vietnam and called on the federal government to ›condemn this expulsion just as it does the expulsion of millions of Germans from their homeland in 1945/46‹ (Hupka).[37] The CDU/CSU was also able to position itself morally as a defender of human rights with the ›boat people‹, after solidarity with (North) Vietnam had become a key issue of the

31 Leaflets (e.g. JU correspondence to JU functionaries, 11 August 1979) in: Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 04-007-471-4 and 07-001-532.

32 On the work of the Vietnam agency: Member of the Bundestag Pinger (CDU) to AA, 16 August 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110380; Vietnam-Büro press statement, 5 July 1979, in: ACDP 04-007-471-4; Elmar Brok, Deutschland-Union-Dienst (DUD) No. 149, 7 August 1979, p. 4; Wolfgang Hoffmann, Im Netz der Bürokratie, in: *ZEIT*, 23 November 1979.

33 Green party minutes 1979–1981, in: Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis B I.1. 543-545. Thanks to archive staff member Robert Camp for additional verification.

34 In the words of Walter Althammer, deputy chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group; German Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 8/161, 21 June 1979, p. 12854.

35 Cf. Scherl, CDU/CSU press release, 26 March 1975; open letter Member of the Bundestag Pfeffermann to Chancellor, CDU/CSU release, 1 April 1975; Karl Carstens, 8 April 1975 at the party meeting, 9 April 1975 in the Bundestag.

36 Kohl, CDU party minutes, 19 June 1979, p. 3, in: ACDP VIII-001-1057/1; similarly in CDU/CSU parliamentary group, press service, 22 June 1979.

37 German Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 8/161, 21 June 1979, p. 12850 (Hupka) and p. 12861 (Czaja).

left in the wake of the student movement and the Social Democrats had then discovered the human rights discourse regarding South Africa and Latin American dictatorships. The Christian Democrats now accused the SPD and the left of biased solidarity.[38] Generally the Christian Democrat commitment corresponded to the reform of the CDU in the 1970s, which now adopted forms of left-wing activism in many respects. This included internal programme debates, the development of an active membership base and the mobilisation of the middle class. In general, the party sought to gain the high ground in the public moral agenda wherever it saw a dominance of the left.[39] Finally, it helped that the Vietnamese and East Asians were considered hard-working and relatively educated. No such solidarity emerged for refugees from Africa or Afghanistan, nor even a willingness to take them in, even when they were likewise fleeing communism and some media showed pictures of the victims.

The federal government was prompted into receiving refugees not only by the opposition and individual federal states, but also by its international allies. In late 1978, for instance, the US foreign minister once again urged the federal government to allow more Vietnamese into the country,[40] and the UN in particular called for West Germany to be more willing to take in refugees. As early as 11 December 1978, at a meeting in Geneva held at the invitation of the UNHCR, there were attempts to achieve an increase in refugee quotas. The comparatively small number admitted by West Germany came to international attention in the talks with government delegations from 34 countries, including Vietnam.[41]

The UN conference on Indochinese refugees held in Geneva on 20/21 July 1979, which sought to set higher intake numbers, was particularly galvanising. Before it began, UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim called on the Federal Republic of Germany to increase its quota to at least 10,000 refugees. The German Federal ministerial bureaucracy sought to prevent this. In its preparatory documentation it gave 4,000 additional places as the maximum, citing the large number of resettlers and asylum seekers.[42] Nevertheless, over the course of the conference the UN succeeded in increasing the number of places for refugees internationally from 125,000 (May 1979) to 260,000. In this context the federal government also agreed to take a total of 10,000 refugees and promised to increase its humanitarian aid to 32 million deutschmarks;[43] in comparison, the US was now taking 14,000 refugees from Indochina each month. Shortly beforehand, Vietnam had in fact promised the UNHCR

38 Cf. ibid., p. 12852-12853; Strauß, Bavarian Parliament, 24 July 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16710.

39 Cf. Martina Steber, *Die Hüter der Begriffe. Politische Sprachen des Konservativen in Großbritannien und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1945–1980*, Berlin 2017.

40 Foreign minister Vance/USA to Genscher, 16 November 1978, and Genscher to Schmidt, 30 November 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107397.

41 Report to AA, 12 December 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107398.

42 Waldheim to Schmidt, 2 July 1979, and submission AA, 3 July 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16710, and 16 July 1979, in: BA/K B 106 69007.

43 Note for cabinet meeting, 24 July 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16710.

that anyone could leave the country as long as they were not liable for military service, liable to prosecution, or ›bearers of official secrets or working in important functions and currently unable to be replaced‹.[44] But this was not honoured, and illegal migration continued to increase. Over the following two years only around 400 Vietnamese came to West Germany legally, to be reunited with their families.[45] International agreements were therefore unable to prevent the majority from risking their lives crossing the water.

2. Journalists Playing an Active Role in Rescue Efforts

Politicians and first relief efforts were regularly accompanied by journalists who then also travelled to the camps independently. Their reports and pictures were in the tradition of the political journalism of the Vietnam and Biafra wars and sought to mobilise politicians and the population to help.[46] The agency photographers responsible for the influential early pictures of the *Hai Hong* were professionals like Eddie Adams, who had taken iconic pictures in the Vietnam war, and Alain Dejean, who was photographing Khomeini's revolution in Iran at almost the same time. The impressions of the shipwreck victims lent themselves to a visual language that transcended party lines. The distress at sea represented archetypal fears. The refugees on the ocean seemed to be stateless and borderless and thus detached from the ideological background of the wars in Vietnam and Cambodia. Many of the refugees were children, visually underscoring the need for action across party lines. The rescue situation also made it possible for photojournalists to take pictures that could be understood around the world. The term ›boat people‹ also underscored this decontextualisation, because it left unclear whether they were Sino-Vietnamese traders persecuted by the communists, or Khmer Rouge from Cambodia. The designation ›boat people‹ was an alternative to terms with increasingly negative connotations like ›asylum seeker‹, ›refugee‹ or ›foreigner‹, and left the reasons for migration open.[47]

What was interesting was the high level of active citizenship demonstrated by the journalists themselves. This was particularly true of those working for *Die Zeit*. Like many other media, the Hamburg weekly had initially reported in a spirit of solidarity on the misery on the boats and in the camps. Its editor Josef Joffe travelled to the camp

44 AA, 13 February 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110832.

45 Embassy in Hanoi, 20 October 1981, in: BA/K B 136 29942.

46 Lasse Heerten, A wie Auschwitz, B wie Biafra. Der Bürgerkrieg in Nigeria (1967–1970) und die Universalisierung des Holocaust, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 8 (2011), pp. 394-413; Florian Hannig, Mitleid mit Biafranern in Westdeutschland. Eine Historisierung von Empathie, in: *WerkstattGeschichte* 68 (2015), pp. 65-78.

47 B. Martin Tsamenyi, The ›Boat People‹: Are they Refugees?, in: *Human Rights Quarterly* 5 (1983), pp. 348-373, here p. 348.

Journalists accompanied the rescue operations and campaigned with dramatic pictures and reports for the *Cap Anamur* missions.
(from: stern, 16 October 1980, pp. 20-29, here pp. 22-23; photo: Klaus Meyer-Andersen)

on the Malaysian island Pulau Bidong, which was overcrowded with 40,000 people, and sent his detailed accounts to Chancellor Schmidt to persuade him to take action; he said he ›left as a reporter and returned as a party man‹.[48]

After this, *Die Zeit* developed an initiative of its own to have an extra 250 refugees transferred to Germany outside the German quota allocation. The city of Hamburg immediately promised to take in the additional refugees if the newspaper's fund-raising campaign raised enough for support services and language courses. Publisher Marion Gräfin Dönhoff promoted the initiative with great success under the headline ›Help the Refugees‹, again citing the German expulsion.[49] *Die Zeit* raised almost 2.2 million deutschmarks in donations in the first two months alone, which it used for airfares, medicine and an emergency hospital in Vietnam, for helpers, the basic

48 Joffe to Schmidt, 13 July 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16710; Josef Joffe, Stehplatz in der Hölle, in: *ZEIT*, 6 July 1979; Barbarei in Vietnam, in: *ZEIT*, 22 June 1979.

49 Cf. Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, Völkerwanderung des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, in: *ZEIT*, 27 July 1979, and the weekly reports on the campaign that followed.

equipment in Hamburg and increasing the benefit payments.[50] Accompanied by their journalists and German Red Cross staff, *Die Zeit* brought 274 people to Hamburg on a Bundeswehr plane and a scheduled aircraft and paid for social workers for further refugees.[51] *Die Zeit* thus created the events on which it itself exclusively reported.

With the donations it collected, then, the media company was organising and financing political tasks that were actually the responsibility of the government. It also spurred politicians to get involved as well. This was only possible due to the cooperation between the media, civil society groups, local bureaucracies and the Foreign Office, which organised entries and departures. Active citizenship and community involvement increased as a result of the media campaign. Following the campaign, companies and mayors provided jobs for Vietnamese refugees, workers and musicians donated their day's takings, and numerous families offered to adopt children. Besides donations of clothing there were also a number of charity activities, with *Die Zeit* reporting that German expellees were now inviting Vietnamese refugees to dinner.[52] In other cities, media reports prompted similar responses. After the Cologne daily *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* had reported on the arrival of 34 refugees from Indochina, for example, it received not only donations of money, food and clothes but also 44 applications for adoption, 26 offers to host refugees, 35 job offers, and 25 housing referrals.[53]

Some sections of society thus displayed a welcoming, immigrant-friendly culture that was less in evidence from the government. In addition to the analogy to the German expulsion and the Communist threat, the American series *Holocaust* no doubt also played a role. Broadcast in Germany in January 1979, it showed emotive pictures of the victims and addressed the lack of help forthcoming at the time. Around the world, the Holocaust now became a historical and political argument for helping the refugees from Indochina. People spoke of the ›Jews of the East‹, ›Asia's Jews‹, the ›final solution‹.[54] A 15-year-old lower secondary school pupil wrote a letter to the government that was cited by a parliamentary state secretary and which argued in the justificatory pathos of the time: ›The plight of the refugees from Vietnam is just like the Holocaust. [...] During Hitler's time no one spoke out, and anyone who did was gassed. No one could help. But now we must help.‹[55] Figures cited by the CDU delegates in the Vietnam-Büro were undoubtedly exaggerated: ›Inaction makes us complicit in a new Holocaust, because an estimated 2,000 people are now drowning every day.‹[56] Working to help the ›boat people‹ felt like compensation for the murders of European Jews during the

50 Cf. Flüchtlingshilfe, in: *ZEIT*, 28 September 1979.
51 Cf. Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, In eine neue Heimat, in: *ZEIT*, 17 August 1979.
52 Cf. Hilfe für Flüchtlinge aus Vietnam, in: *ZEIT*, 3 August 1979; Gabriele Venzky, Und nun die Halskestraße, in: *ZEIT*, 31 August 1979.
53 *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, 13 September 1979. Other news articles in: BA/K B 106 69008.
54 ›Die Juden des Ostens – ohne ein Israel‹, in: *Spiegel*, 25 June 1979, pp. 116-124 (the headline quotation was ascribed to a ›European diplomat in the Far East‹); Dönhoff, Völkerwanderung (fn. 49); Kein Ruhmesblatt, in: *ZEIT*, 30 July 1982.
55 Speech by von Schoeler, parliamentary state secretary, Ministry of the Interior, 23–27 September 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110381.
56 Vietnam-Büro press statement, 5 July 1979, in: ACDP 04-007-471-4.

Nazi regime that were being discussed at the same time. Particularly in France, however, there were also a large number of Holocaust survivors now doing a great deal for the refugees. The leading activist Bernard Kouchner, for example, came from a German-Jewish family, and Joëlle Eisenberg, a Jew who had fled from the Nazis, was helping as a doctor in Vietnam.[57]

3. *Cap Anamur* and Civic Solidarity with Vietnam

The assistance given to ›boat people‹ was in a sense a reversal of the left-wing Vietnam solidarity of the 1960s. The protest against the Vietnam war was crucial in politicising the student movement and gave rise to a solidarity with the victims of American warfare that went far beyond the movement of '68. But the left's interest in Vietnam diminished with the victory of the Communist North. The dream of the revolution dissolved in the face of the reality of a socialist administrative state rife with corruption, labour camps and poverty. Instead, the wave of refugees forced the left to come to terms with the real Vietnam. The prominent leaders of the American anti-war movement interpreted this in various ways. Many of Joan Baez' political fellow travellers did not want to sign an open letter written by the folk singer condemning the human rights violations in Vietnam on account of the refugees; Jane Fonda even went so far as to accuse her of being duped by CIA sources.[58] In France, on the other hand, there was broad commitment, with many intellectuals like Michel Foucault and Jean-Paul Sartre as well as leftists like Daniel Cohn-Bendit and André Glucksmann supporting relief efforts after seeing the images of the *Hai Hong*.[59] They joined individual centre-right politicians in supporting the *Un bateau pour le Vietnam* committee that was created to rescue people there and provide them with volunteer doctors. Only the Communist Party abstained from getting involved.

The most important West German initiative was the association ›Ein Schiff für Vietnam‹ (A Boat for Vietnam) founded by radio journalist Rupert Neudeck. A direct adaptation of the French initiative, it was originally conceived as a European project. With countless small donations and broad public support, Neudeck likewise succeeded in renting a large cargo ship and modifying it for the rescue of refugees – the famous *Cap Anamur*. By 1982 the *Cap Anamur* had rescued 9,507 ›boat people‹ from the sea, most of whom then came to West Germany. 888 more people were brought to safety in another mission in 1986 (on the successor ship, *Cap Anamur II*).[60] Some 35,000

57 Rupert Neudeck, *Exodus aus Vietnam. Die Geschichte der »Cap Anamur« II*, Bergisch Gladbach 1986, p. 65.
58 Cf. Larry Clinton Thompson, *Refugee Workers in the Indochina Exodus, 1975–1982*, North Carolina 2010, p. 146.
59 For more on the background, cf. David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War France*, New York 2016, p. 153.
60 Figures from: status note, AA, 21 October 1982, in: PA AA ZA vol. 127363, and information from Cap Anamur itself.

people received medical care from the volunteer doctors and nurses on board. As I argue in the following, this initiative represented a shift in active citizenship, which was characterised less by ideological ›solidarity‹ than by ad hoc activities.

Interestingly, Neudeck (1939–2016) did not come from the movement of '68. He had studied, with some interruptions, from the end of the 1950s, and obtained a doctorate in philosophy with a study on ›Political ethics in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus‹ in 1972. But he was not active in the anti-Vietnam War movement or any political groups. He was a journalist with Catholic leanings, stirred into action by the media images of drowning refugees. The fact that he had been forced to flee from Danzig (Gdańsk) with his family at the age of six in 1945 and came very close to finding passage on the doomed *Wilhelm Gustloff* influenced his decision to become active in refugee matters.[61] And this no doubt also contributed to the broad acceptance of his work.

The solidarity practised at ›Ein Schiff für Vietnam‹ differed markedly from that of the left-wing alternative ›Third World‹ groups of the time. For one thing, it had a cross-party basis. High-profile supporters included not only left-wing intellectuals like Heinrich Böll, Alfred Biolek, Dieter Hildebrandt and Rudi Dutschke, but also Christian Democrat politicians and journalists such as Norbert Blüm, Richard Stücklen, Franz Alt and Klaus von Bismarck. This meant that there was no clear separation from the political establishment either. Instead, what was striking was a greater disregard for political contexts in order to make way for a ›radical humanism‹ (Neudeck) that sought proactively to save human lives.[62]

Secondly, ›Ein Schiff für Vietnam‹ was a lean, person-centred organisation. Based neither on grassroots groups in individual university towns nor on a professional apparatus like that of Greenpeace, it had its headquarters in Mr and Mrs Neudeck's living room in a townhouse in Troisdorf near Cologne. Neudeck generally made decisions very quickly on his own, which soon led to quarrels with some of the association's board members. His frequently voiced dislike for bureaucracies went so far that he would independently plan his campaigns, argue with politicians, or select doctors in an honorary capacity after hours, dispensing with the organisational apparatus.[63]

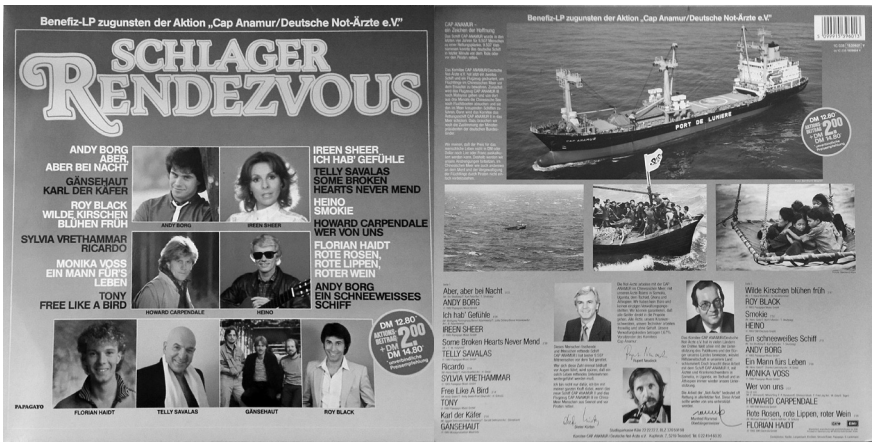
Thirdly, this small aid organisation was broadly anchored in society. It used the media of popular culture for its own purposes, promoting active citizenship. Footballs signed especially by players from all of the German Bundesliga clubs were auctioned for Cap Anamur.[64] Musicians like Udo Jürgens gave TV concerts for Cap Anamur, Circus Roncalli had Vietnamese refugee children sing, and the music label EMI released a record with German *Schlager* stars like Heino, Roy Black and Howard Carpendale, with two deutschmarks from every sale going to Cap Anamur. The campaigns

61 This self-description was confirmed in a conversation between the author and Rupert Neudeck (10 March 2016).

62 This is underscored in: Merziger, The ›Radical Humanism‹ (fn. 4).

63 Conversation with Rupert Neudeck (10 March 2016).

64 Documents in the Cap Anamur Cologne archive (press folder).



Refugee relief and popular culture: The benefit LP *Schlager Rendezvous*

were therefore embedded more in consumer society at large than in the smoky back rooms of the ›Third World‹ groups. In this they represented a trend that was also emerging within the Western anti-apartheid movement.[65]

Fourthly, the close cooperation with the established mass media was crucial to the success of ›Cap Anamur. Deutsche Not-Ärzte e.V.‹ (German emergency doctors association), as the association ›Ein Schiff für Vietnam‹ soon renamed itself. As a journalist, Neudeck knew how to use the logic of the media. He held his very first press conference together with Heinrich Böll in order to generate interest. Journalists were present on almost all of the *Cap Anamur* rescue missions, and the doctors helping there on a voluntary basis often gave reports afterwards in their home newspapers. Rescued refugees wore ›Cap Anamur‹ T-shirts, a kind of record for the donors, as it were.[66]

The breakthrough in terms of donations came with a show by public television broadcaster ARD, the magazine programme *Report* presented by Franz Alt, on 24 July 1979. Following an extensive report on the still relatively little known ›Ein Schiff für Vietnam‹ campaign, and without having obtained the prior consent of the broadcaster's chairman, he gave the details of a donations account. Around 2.2 million deutschmarks were very quickly donated, making it possible for the ship to be deployed.[67] Franz Alt remained an important public supporter over the following years,

65 Cf. the special issue ›Apartheid und Anti-Apartheid – Südafrika und Westeuropa‹, ed. by Knud Andresen and Detlef Siegfried, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 13 (2016) issue 2.

66 Newspaper clipping with refugees in Düsseldorf, in: Cap Anamur archive press kit.

67 Script Franz Alt/Report, 7 August 1979, in: Archiv Cap Anamur. Cf. also Franz Alt, Vietnam-Flüchtlinge und die Schere im Kopf, in: Neudeck, *Wie helfen wir Asien?* (fn. 25), p. 148.

among other things writing articles and making calls for donations in the newspaper *BILD*. Press publishers like Gruner + Jahr and Springer (in the TV listings magazine *Hörzu*) also agreed to make free advertising space available over an extended period. The lurid caption next to the picture of a Vietnamese child read: ›A refugee from Vietnam dies every minute. [...] Hundreds of thousands of children, women and men have already drowned or starved to death.‹[68] By the beginning of November 1979, donations reached the unexpectedly large sum of 6.8 million deutschmarks.[69] This windfall again propelled Cap Anamur's relief efforts with long-term effect. From 1980 onwards, the association also helped in other parts of Asia and Africa, and is still active today in crisis areas dominated by persecution, forced migration and famine.

These rescue operations were controversial in left-wing alternative circles. Certain left-wing intellectuals who had once protested against the American involvement in Vietnam rejected them. The writer Peter Weiss complained particularly vociferously about the ›defamation of the Vietnamese government‹ and justified the camps there, saying: ›To protect the lives of 50 million people, it is necessary to detain a few ten thousand who are a threat to the nation.‹[70] The theologian Helmut Gollwitzer, who had been active in opposing the Vietnam war, played down the flight of refugees, speaking of it involving ›the upper classes and Chinese traders‹.[71] While the alternative newspaper *taz* tended to support the Cap Anamur campaigns, the left-wing magazine *konkret* fulminated: ›Many of the boat people are traffickers, pimps and US collaborators paying cash to buy tickets for the journey to new shores.‹[72] Here *konkret* used almost exactly the same tone as the German Socialist Unity Party of the GDR in its party organ, the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*.[73] The writer Heinrich Böll, who was working to help the refugees, replied in the spirit of the new humanitarian engagement across party lines: ›I would rescue a drowning pimp, too. [...] I would even have pulled the mass murderer Eichmann out of the water.‹[74]

At the same time, these rescue operations also clearly distanced themselves from those of established aid organisations like the German Red Cross. This led to some fierce confrontations. On the one side, the German Red Cross opposed small, spontaneously established associations like ›Ein Schiff für Vietnam‹; its president spoke of their ›unqualified operations‹, ›unreliable reporting‹ and ›lack of willingness to coordinate‹ and even accused them of being partly responsible for the influx of refugees.[75]

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68 Cap Anamur archive.

69 Cf. financial statement, 20 February 1980, in: Cap Anamur archive.

70 Peter Weiss, Noch einmal Vietnam, in: *konkret* 9/1979, pp. 6-8; cf. also: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 16 August 1979.

71 Helmut Gollwitzer, Teilbare Humanität?, in: Neudeck, *Wie helfen wir Asien?* (fn. 25), p. 170.

72 Ein Schiff gegen Vietnam, in: *konkret* 9/1981, pp. 20-22. Cf. also: *tageszeitung*, 14 December 1981.

73 Cf. Klaus-Dieter Pflaum, Hetze mit Krokodilstränen gegen das Volk von Vietnam, in: *Neues Deutschland*, 5 July 1979, p. 6.

74 Heinrich Böll in an interview, ›Auch einen Zuhälter retten‹, in: *Spiegel*, 19 October 1981, pp. 87-92, here p. 90.

75 Cf. summary record, humanitarian aid subcommittee, 13 February 1980, German Bundestag, in: Cap Anamur archive; cf. on this conflict: Vössing, Competition over Aid? (fn. 4), pp. 355-356.

On the other hand, Neudeck accused the German Red Cross of being a ›voracious and bureaucratic institution‹ that didn't conduct any real relief efforts despite receiving enormous state aid.[76] According to Neudeck, the German Red Cross ship *Flora*, financed by public funds and likewise operating in the South China Sea, limited its activity to supply trips and sporadic medical assistance, whereas the *Cap Anamur* systematically rescued refugees from the oceans, sometimes even with the help of helicopter searches.

The *Cap Anamur* operated without state aid and considered its activities legitimised by the mandate of its donors. Nevertheless, it relied on state support for the admission and entry of the refugees. Its relationship to the government bureaucracy was initially cooperative, then increasingly confrontational. The *Cap Anamur* sailed under the Federal German flag, so the Federal Republic of Germany was formally obliged to receive the shipwrecked refugees. *Cap Anamur* was therefore constantly sending messages to the Foreign Office on the number of people on board to be flown out to West Germany. Neudeck launched his relief effort without any prior knowledge and pragmatically circumvented bureaucratic rules. Even as the ship set out from Japan he breached legal regulations and was accordingly detained.[77] The embassies also increasingly received complaints from the neighbouring countries. Singapore and Malaysia finally refused the *Cap Anamur* permission to land and blamed the rescue ship for the fact that more and more people were fleeing Vietnam. This and, in particular, a consignment of rice – financed by donations – delivered by the *Cap Anamur* to Vietnam also lead to diplomatic tensions, with the neighbouring ASEAN countries viewing the operations as official West German support for Vietnam.[78]

The Foreign Office held a number of difficult conversations with Neudeck.[79] Nevertheless, without the support of the Foreign Office it would not have been possible to receive the refugees. Genscher in particular let the *Cap Anamur* carry on for quite a while – presumably partly for fear of negative press. The Foreign Office handled the formalities and having the ›boat people‹ flown out, and succeeded in gradually increasing the number of quota places for almost three years with enquiries to the federal states. Despite the tensions, then, it may be said that bureaucratic aid and active citizenship in civil society complemented one another.

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76 Summary record, humanitarian aid subcommittee, 27 February 1980; Rupert Neudeck, Ein Boot für Vietnam, in: Neudeck, *Wie helfen wir Asien?* (fn. 25), pp. 70-145, here p. 139.

77 Consul Loer/Cope to Neudeck, 13 October 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110383.

78 Dept. 3, January 1981 to AA, in: PA AA ZA vol. 127380.

79 Submission for Genscher for the assessment of the *Cap Anamur* from Gorenflos, head of department in the Foreign Office, 26 November 1980, in: *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1980*, published on behalf of the Foreign Office by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, ed. by Tim Geiger, Amit Das Gupta and Tim Szatkowski, Munich 2011, p. 1778.

4. From Camps to Admission: Flight Routes and Legal Procedures

The social-liberal government was thus pressed from many quarters – by the media and civil society groups, by the political opposition and international allies – to gradually increase the quotas for refugees from Indochina. Whether a refugee from Vietnam reached West Germany depended on bureaucratic rules and regulations, on the decisions of individual stakeholders, and on chance. In Vietnam, almost all of the refugees paid around US$3,000 to people smugglers and corrupt officials to be brought to the transit camps in the neighbouring countries.[80] Getting there was extremely risky. It is unclear how many people drowned crossing the seas; some studies give six-digit figures, numbers in the high five-digits at least are realistic.[81] The boats were increasingly attacked by pirates, and women were raped; resistance often resulted in murder. If the refugees reached the camps, they could only control their onward journey to a particular country if they could prove they had close relatives there or had worked for the country in question in Vietnam. This applied in many cases to the US and France, but initially rarely for Germany. Otherwise they had to wait to be allocated quota places. Here, too, refugees had only limited influence on the choice of their new home.

The West German admission procedures were particularly complex because party interests and those of the federal states had to be coordinated. When a German ship like the *Cap Anamur* rescued refugees and wanted to transport them to West Germany, it communicated this via the relevant embassies to the Foreign Office, which then informed the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), which in turn had to seek the approval of all of the state governments for a corresponding increase to the quotas. Their answers were then communicated via the BMI and Foreign Office.[82] Later on, the consent of several federal ministries involved in the financing also had to be obtained. All of this could take some time. One solution would have been to increase the quotas for refugees from Indochina overall in order to avoid these kinds of individual enquiries. The federal government and the majority of the federal states, however, had reservations about options along these lines.

The federal government began by formulating three primary criteria for admission: reunification with close family members; existing connections to West Germany, such as having worked for the embassy or for German companies; and rescue by boats with the German flag.[83] It was therefore necessary to have a connection to West Germany in order to be admitted. In all three cases the number of refugees was difficult

80 Cf. embassy in Hanoi to AA, 8 December 1978, in: PA AA ZA vol. 107398.

81 50,000 is the estimate given in: Thompson, *Refugee Workers* (fn. 58), p. 169.

82 Cf. in addition to the relevant Foreign Office and BMI correspondence: flow chart 1979, in: BA/K B 136 16710.

83 AA report, 28 June 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110380; itemisation BMI, 9 September 1981, in: BA/K B 136 29942.

to calculate. Many federal states and the federal government therefore left the quota places they had actually confirmed unassigned for a long time so that they could fill them in the event of family reunification. As a result, in September 1979 approximately one third of the places (4,500) had not been assigned; two years later, more than 2,000 of the 28,129 quota places were not filled.[84] The number of quota places was driven up by the *Cap Anamur* rescues and by the media reports on crowded camps.

The admittance of shipwrecked persons was similarly difficult to calculate. The international law of the sea proved to be a floodgate for admitting the ›boat people‹ to West Germany, because in the event of a life-threatening situation at sea, a captain is obliged to take in the persons rescued, to assist them and to take them to the next safe port. While this does not imply any right to be admitted to the rescue boat's country of origin, it hardly seemed ethical to return people rescued by a German ship to Vietnam where they were threatened with punishment. As the neighbouring countries were increasingly refusing to receive them and long refugee transports were extremely expensive for the cargo ships, the federal government conceded in the late summer of 1978 that refugees from boats flying the Federal German flag would be accepted if no other country would take them. This was again confirmed at the Geneva Convention on Refugees in July 1979, and other Western industrialised nations also endorsed this approach.[85] In the case of German ships sailing under flags from countries like Panama (to save on wages and taxes), however, acceptance had to be negotiated on an individual basis.

The distribution of the refugees rescued by German ships was also complicated. They often wanted to go to the USA or France instead, where their relatives lived, there were fewer language barriers, and a Vietnamese community already existed. On board and in the camps, then, translators had to mediate to establish who wanted or was permitted to emigrate to which country. A further complicating factor was that the Asian neighbours were increasingly demanding definite confirmation that West Germany or another country really would take in the refugees before they allowed them to disembark and enter their transit camps. Complex issues like these could only be resolved with the assistance of the West German embassies on the ground.

It was difficult to ascertain in each instance whether it was actually a case of distress at sea, and it was left to the discretion of the captain to decide. The boats were often still seaworthy and distress was foreseeable rather than acute. Here, too, refugees could actively influence their reception: they hoisted SOS flags, and some German ships reported that refugees had sunk their boat next to them so that they would be forced to take them in. Others said they had towed a boat away twice, but that it had kept returning to a German drilling rig off the coast of Vietnam to then be ›rescued‹.[86] There were also conflicts with the Vietnamese security forces while rescuing refugees:

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84 Dept. 3 AA, 19 September 1981, in: PA AA ZA vol. 127380.

85 Cf. AA to BMI, 22 January 1981 in: PA AA ZA vol. 127380.

86 DDG (*Deutsche Dampfschiffahrts-Gesellschaft*, German Steamship Company) Hansa/Bremen to AA, 21 June 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110383; further reports there.

In July 1979, as the German ships *Nordertor* and *Alexanderturm* were towing a refugee boat in the direction of Singapore, they were forced by a Vietnamese naval vessel firing shots across the bow to hand over the towed boat, even though it was outside Vietnamese waters.[87] All of this meant that many captains found rescuing refugees burdensome, and there were accusations that they were routinely ignoring boats with fleeing refugees.

The refugees for whom the onward journey to a third country had been assured following their rescue were brought to transit camps under the jurisdiction of the respective country and the UNHCR. If they had received permission to leave the transit country, they were permitted to remain here for up to three months, sometimes six, before the third country transferred the refugees. With the time spent in the interim camps getting longer and longer, conflicts arose between the transit countries and the West German embassies.[88] While the USA and France were systematically transferring people out of the camps, West Germany more frequently admitted people rescued at sea, which legitimised their entry into the country. In absolute numbers, the Federal Republic of Germany accepted more refugees from Indochina than other European countries; based on their populations, however, small neighbouring countries like Belgium and the Netherlands took more people in.

The selection of refugees from the camps was also only gradually being worked out in 1979. Individual federal states initially wanted to select ›their refugees‹ themselves and specified what they wanted in terms of their education and age.[89] In the end they accepted the fact that the West German embassy representatives and aid organisations generally considered both less qualified refugees who had been in the camps for longer and those with good professional training.[90] It generally became accepted in 1979 that the selected refugees were to represent a ›cross-section‹ of the camp – in terms of age, education and how long they had been waiting, to improve the chances of integration. To provide for the people in the reception centres, West Germany significantly increased its funds for humanitarian aid abroad in 1979 from a total of 23 to 64 million deutschmarks. Most of this was funding for refugee relief allocated to international organisations like the Red Cross and *Welthungerhilfe* (World Hunger Aid), the UNHCR, as well as the Protestant social welfare association *Diakonisches Werk* and the Catholic *Caritas* association.[91] Policymakers thus looked to major organisations, while smaller civil society initiatives like Cap Anamur received no support.

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87 Embassy in Hanoi and Singapore to AA, 2 July, 4 July and 6 July 1979, note AA, 16 July 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110383.

88 AA report, 26 June 1981, in: PA AA ZA vol. 127380; embassy in Manila to AA, 19 March and 21 September 1982, in: PA AA ZA vol. 127381.

89 AA Dr. Heide-Bloech (Ref. 513) to Bavarian State Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2 January and 9 January 1979; embassy in Bangkok, 20 January 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110832.

90 Note Heide-Bloech, 18 January 1979; Hamburger/AA, 15 January 1979; embassy in Manila to AA, 16 January 1979, in: PA AA ZA vol. 110832.

91 Cf. Federal government report on German humanitarian aid abroad from 1978 to 1981. German Bundestag, Drucksache 9/2364, 23 December 1982, pp. 10-11.

The transfer of refugees to Germany was financed and organised by the federal government. The Foreign Office took care of the immigration procedures and flights. In the beginning politicians flew together with groups of refugees or met them at the airport on various occasions to present themselves in a favourable light. On arrival the refugees were taken to central transit camps such as Friedland in Lower Saxony or Bergkamen in North Rhine-Westphalia, where they were mainly taken care of by charities. Family relations in Germany were then considered when it came to sending them on to their future place of residence.[92] In terms of reception in the communities, the social welfare offices bore the lion's share of the burden of finding and furnishing apartments and made mostly very successful appeals for donations to help with this.

Here again, the combination of bureaucracy and active citizenship was crucial. One example: the town of Westerstede in northwestern Lower Saxony wanted to take in 20 to 30 Vietnamese. But because the federal state only paid for the urgently needed translator if there were 50 or more people, the municipality raised the number accordingly. The director of the social welfare office then organised the assistance together with the local population, who donated numerous items and helped the refugees settle into everyday life. ›Housewives help the women with those things that are unknown to the people in the Far East but all-important in these parts – hanging curtains‹, one journalist observed.[93] Every Vietnamese family in Lower Saxony received a one-off sum of 1,000 deutschmarks and a monthly sum from the municipality of 1,200 deutschmarks, from which the rent was deducted. After half a year the refugees were allowed to work. All of the federal states were also committed to extensive, obligatory language courses that would begin immediately. West Germany thus did more to support the integration of the refugees from Indochina than other countries.

The costs of this social and linguistic integration were considerable. 176 to 200 million deutschmarks were budgeted just to expand the language support for the 13,000 refugees from Indochina in 1979, followed by almost 30 million deutschmarks per year after that.[94] The cost of integration was thus around 15,000 deutschmarks per refugee in the first year and 2,300 deutschmarks in the following years. This meant that when quotas were increased, various federal ministries had to release large amounts of money. At the beginning of 1981, for example, they estimated the cost of taking in another 5,000 refugees at DM 100 million, with DM 5 million for transportation, DM 68 million for language support, DM 25 million for integration assistance and DM 1 million for BAföG (government study grants).[95] This again highlights the federal government's strong active commitment, despite many concerns, to the

92 As well as the general correspondence of the BMI, cf.: flow chart 1979 (fn. 82).
93 Ruth Herrmann, Zuflucht, keine Heimat, in: *ZEIT*, 6 July 1979, p. 7.
94 Documentation on the federal government programme for foreign refugees, in: BA/K B 126 77251.
95 Cf. cabinet meeting minutes, 28 May 1980, Ref II C4, 28 April 1980, and II C4 to BMI, 23 January 1981, in: BA/K B 126 77251.

integration of the Vietnamese. Unlike the supposedly only temporary admission of migrants as had been the focus with the ›guest workers‹, it was assumed from the beginning that the refugees from Indochina would stay indefinitely.

In order to receive full social benefits, the first refugees from Indochina always submitted asylum applications, even though this was not actually necessary within the framework of the quota intake. For the authorities, however, the designation ›quota refugee‹ was not a clear legal status. To resolve this, the federal cabinet approved the ›federal government programme for foreign refugees‹ on 29 August 1979 so as to place them on an equal footing with recognised asylum seekers. The ›boat people‹ now received a temporary work permit for five years that could be extended and was to be permanent after eight years. They also received BAföG, assistance with integration into working life, and social support and counselling.[96] The Federal Ministry of the Interior argued that ›the question of who counts as a quota refugee is rather a political decision by the federal government and the federal states to take in people from crisis areas as part of a quota under certain conditions‹.[97] This underscored the fact that the refugees from Indochina were given preference for admission over other asylum seekers.

5. Limits to the Willingness to Accept Refugees

From the end of 1980, after somewhat more than two years, the initially very broad-based solidarity with the Vietnamese refugees began to ebb. This is explained not only by the usual signs of fatigue that mostly take their toll on relief efforts at a much earlier stage. While some continued to rescue people from full boats, others now took up the ›boat is full‹ rhetoric. This was due in the first instance to the numbers of people applying for asylum, which increased in 1980 and invigorated the *Überfremdung* (›over-foreignisation‹) debate. In addition, growing unemployment in the wake of the 1980 economic crisis led to an increasingly xenophobic mood. The CSU in particular now began circulating the term ›economic asylum seekers‹. And West Germany realised that despite the 1973 ban on recruiting new migrant workers, family reunifications meant that the number of migrants was still growing, and they were staying on permanently. Surveys show that within just a few years, more and more people thought that the ›foreigners‹ should go back home.[98] Many CDU politicians increasingly invoked the welfare magnet theory, according to which active aid such as that provided by Cap Anamur caused an increase in the number of refugees. Media reports

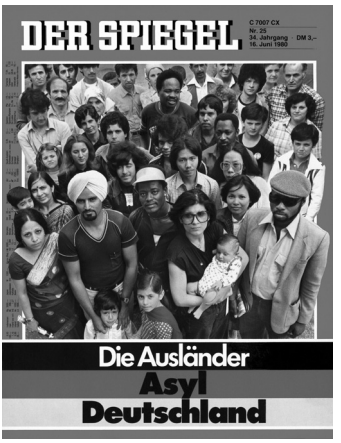
96 Federal government programme for foreign refugees (approved in the cabinet on 29 August 1979), in: BA/K B 136 16710 and B 126 77251.

97 Minutes of the BMI/refugee administrations of the federal states, 25 September 1979, in: BA/K B 126 77251.

98 Cf. Herbert, *Ausländerpolitik* (fn. 3), pp. 241-247, 262-272.

now mentioned more frequently that many Vietnamese were allegedly fleeing for economic reasons, and this also reduced solidarity.[99] In 1981, almost all federal states refused to take in any more Cap Anamur refugees, claiming that their transit camps were full to capacity with asylum seekers.

The Vietnamese were just a small group in comparison with the Turkish ›guest workers‹, but their reception attracted a lot of media publicity. This meant that they too were on the receiving end of the hate of the ›New Right‹, which was forming in paramilitary groups called *Wehrsportgruppen* and political networks.[100] In 1980, two Vietnamese men who had come to West Germany with the *Cap Anamur* and the support of *Die Zeit* were killed in an arson attack by right-wing extremists. The two perpetrators came from the neo-Nazi ›Deutsche Aktionsgruppe‹ (German Action Group) that had also carried out attacks on an Auschwitz exhibition in Esslingen, a residence for Ethiopians in Lörrach and a transit camp in Zirndorf.[101]



Cover of SPIEGEL magazine, 25/1980. In the issue it read (p. 32): ›Will West Germany be inundated by a wave of foreigners, will we have to have mass camps for the asylum seekers or even border judges to get rid of them? Abuse of the asylum regulations is fuelling the debate about *Überfremdung* [»over-foreignisation«] and threatening a constitutional guarantee that is one of the best features of the Federal German legal system.‹

The social-liberal federal government implemented a dual strategy in terms of migration policy, promoting the long-term integration of the foreigners while also adopting repatriation assistance measures and tighter restrictions on new immigration. The minutes of the cabinet meeting on 11 November 1981 contain the following passage: ›The Federal Chancellor [Schmidt] stresses in the discussion that the Federal Republic of Germany is not a country of immigration and nor does it want to become one. He went on to say that the proportion of foreigners in some neighbourhoods in big cities was already 20 % to 30 %. This was, however, no longer sustainable, not least in the interests of integration.‹[102] Both the Asian first host countries and the subsequent host countries like West Germany now drafted more restrictive regulations. The result was a decrease in refugee numbers in 1981/82,

99 Cf. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29 August 1981; Späth ist empört, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 November 1981.

100 On this change: Gideon Botsch, *Die extreme Rechte in der Bundesrepublik 1949 bis heute*, Darmstadt 2012, pp. 86-91.

101 Cf. G.V., Sie haben wieder Angst, in: *ZEIT*, 29 August 1980; Michael Schwelien, Das zweite Todesopfer, in: *ZEIT*, 5 September 1980; Frank Keil, Verbrannt und vergessen, in: *tageszeitung (Nord/Hamburg)*, 22 August 2014.

102 Agenda item 4, minutes of the cabinet meeting on 11 November 1981, URL: <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/cocoon/barch/0000/k/k1981k/kap1_1/kap2_48/para3_4.html>.

as the Foreign Office was pleased to report.[103] At the same time, West Germany had to tolerate more ›de facto refugees‹ who had been rejected as asylum seekers but who were not sent back to the crisis regions in their home countries on humanitarian grounds.[104]

This change of mood also had repercussions for the reception of the refugees from Indochina. On 5 June 1981, the federal government and the Ministers-President of the federal states agreed on regulations that would prevent further refugees being taken in by the *Cap Anamur*.[105] The federal cabinet then resolved by circulation that the government would, ›beginning 15 June 1981, until further notice, no longer give pledges to admit refugees whose rescue derives from the systematic search and rescue activities of ships under German flag‹.[106] At the beginning of March 1982, the heads of government of the federal states resolved definitely that such refugees in distress at sea would only be admitted if the federal states *unanimously* allocated an appropriate quota; Lower Saxony was the only state to insist on a special intake.[107] Some months before, in October 1981, the Ministers-President of the federal states had agreed in Bad Kreuznach that, with the exception of family reunifications, they would not admit any further refugees from Indochina at all.[108]

These decisions, along with the shift in public sentiment and waning donations, put a temporary halt to the *Cap Anamur* campaigns. On 11 June 1982, Neudeck told the federal government that he was ending the rescue operations at sea and sailing the ship back to Hamburg with the last 285 refugees on board. These refugees no longer received quota places, but they were at least granted immediate asylum – due again to the fear of negative media reports.[109] Once again it was the state of Lower Saxony that generously took the ›boat people‹ in. Bavaria refused to do so in accordance with the valid state distribution plan, saying that it had already taken in 6,000 more asylum seekers than the designated figure following the uprisings in Hungary in 1956 and in the ČSSR in 1968.[110] With 11,000 admissions, Bavaria's intake was in actual fact below the designated quota.

It can therefore not be said that there was any consistent, let alone ongoing, support for the ›boat people‹ by the Christian Democrats. Over the following years Neudeck tried in vain to get the new Christian-Liberal government on board for further rescue campaigns. Like the Social Democrats before them, Kohl's administration cited the heavy burden of foreigners, resettlers, and refugees from the GDR and from Eastern

103 AA status note, 21 October 1982, in: PA AA ZA vol. 127363.
104 Pleinen, *Migrationsregime* (fn. 3), pp. 139-140.
105 In a somewhat roundabout manner: Parliamentary State Secretary Fröhlich (BMI), German Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 9/44, 16 June 1981, p. 2494.
106 Ref. 32 to the head of the federal cabinet, 16 July 1981, in: BA/K B 136 16711.
107 Summary minutes of the talks between the Federal Chancellery and the heads of government of the federal states, 5 March 1982, in: PA AA ZA vol. 127363; AA status note, 21 October 1982, in: ibid.
108 Resolution of the Conference of Ministers-President 28–30 October 1981, in: BA/K B 136 29942.
109 Ref. V II2 submission minister AA, 20 July 1982, in: BA/K B 106 90292; BMI note, 9 June 1982, in: BA/K B 106 127147.
110 Ref. V II2 submission minister AA, 20 July 1982, in: BA/K B 106 90292.

On the return of the *Cap Anamur* to the port of Hamburg, 27 July 1982
(picture alliance/Sven Simon)

Europe.[111] Only Lower Saxony under Ernst Albrecht continued to demonstrate a willingness to receive more refugees, but it met with opposition from the Federal Ministry of the Interior.[112] The media, meanwhile, had long since turned their attention to other issues. When a new ship named *Cap Anamur II* put to sea in 1986 and rescued 888 refugees from the South China Sea in a collaborative effort between Germany and France (see this issue's cover photo), journalists showed little interest. Once again it was the states of Lower Saxony, Baden-Württemberg and North Rhine-Westphalia that offered a few hundred places. Saarland, which was governed by Oskar Lafontaine (SPD), offered just six places, and Bavaria not a single one.[113] Federalism both facilitated and blocked the reception of the refugees in equal measure.

111 Cf. Federal Chancellery to the federal states, 27 November 1984; Ernst Albrecht to Kohl, 8 November 1983; Kohl to Albrecht, 31 January 1984; BMI to Chancellery, 27 December 1983, all in: BA/K B 136 32967; draft letter Kohl to the Ministers-President of the federal states, June 1983, concept Teltschik, 23 June 1983, in: BA/K B 136 29942.

112 Albrecht to Kohl, 2 July 1984; AA to BMI, 9 July 1984, in: BA/K B 136 32967.

113 Neudeck, *Exodus aus Vietnam* (fn. 57), pp. 38, 58, 80-81, 116.

Rupert Neudeck and Ernst Albrecht were for a long time positively revered by the Vietnamese in West Germany, and they were hailed as heroes at gatherings of the ›boat people‹ until their deaths. The refugees themselves are mostly very positive about their reception in West Germany.[114] Compared to other migrants, the integration of the Vietnamese went very well. A study on Vietnamese in Hamburg, for example, showed that in the 1990s they were largely able to support themselves financially, and that many were already homeowners and had acquired German citizenship.[115] In 2013, 64 % of young adults with a Vietnamese migrant background attended grammar school (*Gymnasium*) (including the East German descendants of contract workers), as opposed to only 42 % of Germans without a migrant background.[116]

6. Conclusion and Outlook

The reception of the refugees from Indochina at the end of the 1970s represents a certain shift in the history of West German migration. There were active efforts to integrate non-European refugees who were expected to remain permanently. The reception of the refugees from Indochina was driven by an initially broad-based solidarity among the population and by journalists who themselves became active participants, bringing refugees in to West Germany. This support from civil society encouraged politicians and officials, who in some cases then took the initiative themselves. What was striking was the level of commitment across party lines, in particular also from conservative, right-of-centre protagonists, and the agency of individual stakeholders. The memory of the expulsion of the Germans and the contemporaneous reception of the TV series *Holocaust* were also conducive to this. Active solidarity with those suffering political persecution was therefore not limited to the moral politics of liberals and the left. It was more a case of the commitment shifting during this phase: instead of the red flag, many now pragmatically followed the flag of the Red Cross, and practical assistance became more important than reading the ›Mao Bible‹. The increasing number of relatively apolitical people opting for alternative civilian service or completing a voluntary year of social service is part of this development. Cap Anamur also proved to be an important precursor to the small internet-age NGOs run by a few individuals and financed by donations that organise opportunities for voluntary work abroad. Neudeck's association itself worked from the early 1980s onwards in numerous crisis regions that received much less public attention – and hence also less support.

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114 Cf. for example Ly My Cuong/Barbara Ming, *Zeit der Heuschrecken. Die Geschichte eines Boatpeople-Kindes*, Grevenbroich 2010.

115 Olaf Beuchling, *Vom Bootsflüchtling zum Bundesbürger. Migration, Integration und schulischer Erfolg in einer vietnamesischen Exilgemeinschaft*, Münster 2001, pp. 87, 109-110.

116 Bernhard Nauck/Birger Schnoor, Against all odds? Bildungserfolg in vietnamesischen und türkischen Familien in Deutschland, in: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 67 (2015), pp. 633-657.

The reception of the Vietnamese was also a foretaste of the massive immigration of refugees from non-European countries that first peaked in the early 1990s and was again accompanied by attacks, tighter asylum laws, and relief efforts. Finally, the reception of the ›boat people‹ most notably calls to mind the sentiment towards and treatment of refugees from Syria in recent years. This began in 2013/14, likewise with a wave of support from civil society and the media, including among many Christian Democrats. As with the refugees from Indochina, Syrians were flown to safety following publication of the dramatic images, and the quotas for their admission were increased. Again, the first 5,000 Syrian quota refugees arrived in Hanover, where they were welcomed by the then federal minister of the interior, Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU).[117] And, much as with the Vietnamese before them, the willingness to take them in was presumably initially greater than for other ethnicities because the Syrians had received credible media coverage as persecutees and were considered more educated and capable of integration than Africans. Given increasing numbers of asylum seekers from other countries as well, the first wave of solidarity was followed in both cases by right-wing populist sentiments and migration policy restrictions. International agreements again pressed for a distribution of the refugees, which then failed. Just as before, it became apparent once more in recent years just how divided the Germans are in their dealings with foreigners, but that this cannot be reduced to simple left-wing/right-wing dichotomies.

(Translated from the German by Joy Titheridge)

For additional illustrations and photos, see the internet version at <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/1-2017/id=5447>.

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117 Eva Marie Kogel/Marcel Leubecher, Erste syrische Flüchtlingsgruppe erreicht Hannover, in: *Welt*, 11 September 2013.