The Lived Experience of German-Vietnamese in Germany

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Abstract

The present Bachelor thesis investigates the lived experience of German-Vietnamese living and growing up in Germany, and explored possible challenges in their experience. The conceptual framework was guided by concepts of identity and belonging with a specific focus on bicultural identities and related concepts, such as the Model Minority Myth (MMM). As the group of German-Vietnamese is widely unstudied and is inherently complex due to its heterogeneity, the study is of an explorative nature and used semi-structured interviews to investigate the topic. The ten semi-structured interviews revealed that the participants have been ascribed the label associated with the German-Vietnamese MMM, experienced challenges associated with biculturality, experienced an acculturation gap to their parents, and suffered from experiences of racism that have also resulted in internalized racism. Simultaneously, the group is, indeed, well integrated in the labor market and German social network, and despite the acculturation gap to their parents, is grateful for their parents' sacrifices. Overall, the study enlightens the field with insights into integrative outcomes and expectations in Germany and the two-edged sword of the MMM.

Keywords: German-Vietnamese, second generation, Model Minority Myth, Bicultural Identity, Belonging

The lived experience of German-Vietnamese in Germany

"[Could] there be anything wrong with the question of where someone comes from? Those who ask the question can usually answer it. They are people whose parents and grandparents have grown up in this country, [...]. People who ask this question usually aren't satisfied with a simple answer. Instead, they keep asking more questions: [...] 'Are you more Vietnamese or more German?' [...]. Those who ask these questions want to gain a better understanding of us because our names and life stories sound odd and foreign to them. We choose our answers carefully, not wanting to offend anyone. [...] We don't want to seem ungrateful or disloyal. [...]."

(Pham, 2012)

The above quote is an excerpt of "My Home, No Home" by the German author Khuê Pham. Pham was born in 1982 in Berlin, as the daughter of a Vietnamese couple. In her quote, she indicates the struggles of belonging that she experienced growing up as a German-Vietnamese. Descendants of the role model migrant, German-Vietnamese are known for being exceptionally good at school and regarded as well-integrated and adaptable (Bösch, 2017; Bösch & Su, 2020) – for individuals with a migrant background. It is unclear how many individuals of Vietnamese descent live in Germany, as those statistics that count 103,620 Vietnamese living in Germany do not include people of Vietnamese descent (Statista, 2021). The public media refers to them as the *"invisible favorites"* (Taubert, 2011) and the *"silent migrants"* (Bertz, 2021), hinting at the little media representation of German-Vietnamese who are considered as the *"Vietnamese Wonder"* (Bösch & Su, 2020; Spiewak, 2009). Some exceptions in the public space are the ex-party-leader Philipp Rösler, the scientist and reporter Mai Ti, the author Khue Pham, and the journalist Vanessa Vu who thematizes the challenges of German-Vietnamese in her podcast with Minh Tu. The few German-Vietnamese in the public sphere talk about their experiences with implicit and explicit racism, positive racist stereotypes, internalized racism, and the struggles they experienced growing up with two different cultural contexts. However, there is still a widespread lack of attention paid to these accounts and actual lived experience of German-Vietnamese; especially in academia. As a group that is considered *"the Vietnamese wonder"*, and that has succeeded in education and integration against all odds and the hurdles experienced by their parents (Bösch & Su, 2020; Nauck & Schnoor, 2015), their success and their well-being seem to be taken for granted.

Hereby, the present Bachelor thesis explores the lived experiences of German-Vietnamese, which refers to children of Vietnamese migrants in Germany, with a specific focus on their sense of belonging and identity which serves as a guiding conceptual framework throughout the research. The research question is of an

explorative nature and ask: What are the lived experiences of German-Vietnamese living and growing up in Germany like, and what challenges do they experience?

Identity and Belonging

Identities matter and are crucial for the human being (Appiah, 2005; Gilroy, 1997; Udah & Singh, 2018) as they provide a personal and social order – a sense of self. They have the power to create a sense of autonomy that allows the individual to make sense of the world (Hornsey, 2008; Hogg, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 2010). Simultaneously, identities are complex, so a simple conception despite their facilitative purpose is not possible. One way of looking at identity is by seeing them as narratives. Narratives that the individual tells themselves and others about who they are and who they are not (Yuval-Davis, 2006). These identity narratives are inherently dynamic, adapting to the context of the individual and including important social markers, such as gender and ethnicity (Hall, 1996; Udah & Singh, 2019).

While the identity narratives are adapted to the context of the individual, they do not operate in a vacuum and are influenced by multiple factors outside of the individual. One account enlightening the interaction and complexity of identity is the social identity approach that originates in the infamous Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987). Notably, there has been criticism that the social identity account is too simplified for today's context of multiculturism; nevertheless, it is an important approach that provides a framework to understand the complexity of interactions of identity and shows the importance of identities (Hornsey, 2008). The approach underlies the assumption that individuals use social categorization as a cognitive tool to separate, classify and organize their complex social environment and allows us to engage in social behavior. It provides a point of reference (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Hereby, the self is categorized into three concepts: the human identity which describes the categorization as belonging to the human species; a social identity that is comprised of the different social categories one belongs to; and a personal identity which refers to the self and how one's self interacts with the world around them. These different parts of one's identity are in constant interaction with each other, and even contradict each other at times (Turner et al., 1987).

The part of the social identity approach that proposes that a person's identity is defined, in part, by their social belonging and positionality, is in line with other conceptualizations of identity which label identities as inherently social (Antony, 2016). In fact, diverse psychological theories and conceptualizations of the self have regarded the self as a social construct that is formed through the interaction with others and is creating the social reality people live in (Morf et al., 2011). The ways in which one's personal identity interacts with one's social

environment is dependent on contextual factors, such as the cultural or sociopolitical context (Markus, 1986; Oyserman et al., 2002; Trafimow et al, 1991). While social identities include one's belonging to a group as defined by the self and others, social identities also determine the positionality in society. The positionality evolves from the inherent comparison between existing groups, the "us" and the "them" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Udah & Singh, 2019), and creates values and judgements about the meaning of being an ingroup member (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This social comparison provides the self with self-esteem based on the group they belong to. Yet, social comparison can turn out to be unfavorable if the ingroup is of lower status. In that case, as the individual always strives for a positive social identity, a member of a low-status group will negotiate the meaning of their group with the help of different strategies such as individual mobility, social creativity or social competition (Tajfel & Tuner, 1979).

However, there are times in which the social relational nature of identities (Yuval-Davis, 2006) can pose a problem for an individual. Even though the definition of one's social identity is partially dependent on self-definition, there are parts of relevant identities that are ascribed by other people. These parts, for example, refer to one's cultural background or socioeconomic status and are based on what is considered a "prototypical" group member and whether the majority thinks an individual fits into this schema (Antony, 2016; Udah & Singh, 2019). Depending on the context, certain parts of one's identity will become more salient than others. Hereby, the context may depend on the socio-political environment that can define the comparative and normative fit of one's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Although identities are socially flexible with individuals having the ability to switch from one self to the other, this is an exhausting task (Van Boven et al., 2000). Given that social identities influence the individual on multiple levels, including emotional involvement in a group, behavior (Appiah, 2018: Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and sense of belonging, and simultaneously are highly context-dependent, the difficulties and complexity of switching between different identities is evident.

The aforementioned sense of belonging is another fundamental concept that is influenced by an individual's identification. Belonging is considered as a universal fundamental need that is about the pursuit of forming and maintaining interpersonal connections (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is often associated with emotional attachment, feelings of homeliness and feelings of safety (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Belonging is directly tied to one's social identification and is constructed through one's social location, one's identification and emotional attachments and one's value system which are all ingredients underlying identities. Thus, just like social identities, belonging is dynamic and dependent on the social context an individual engages in. In a time of globalized movements of migration and industrialization, belonging is often displaced and threatened (Udah &

Singh, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006); these developments change the meaning of belonging in ways that have not yet been conceptualized (Anderson, 1983).

Biculturality and Identity

In the context of globalization and migration, all the different concepts of a person's identity undergo increasing complexity. Especially concepts relating to one's cultural identity are undergoing contradicting trends that, on the one hand, homogenize culture and, on the other hand, diversify it (Jensen, 2003). The complexity is also reflected in the literature that echoes inconsistent conceptualizations of the term (Rudmin, 2003). The APA included the term in their dictionary only in 2020, defining it as "*[t]he characteristics of and sense of belonging to a social group with a distinct culture, which can be based on location, religion, language, ethnicity, or other characteristics*" (APA dictionary, 2020). However, in the current context, millions of people live in a multicultural world in which they are exposed to more than one cultural and it is thus, important to understand the experiences of these individuals. It also contributes to our knowledge about processes of integration (Khaleque, 2016).

The internalization of more than one culture is referred to as biculturality (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Whereas there lies merit in the exposure to multiple cultures and there is a wide variation in the ways that bicultural individuals manage the internalization of multiple cultural meaning systems (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002), living with two cultural worlds means having two reference groups for social identities as well as for one's sense of belonging (Lopatková & Formánková, 2022; Vaghela & Ueno, 2017). This means that the individual needs to put in extra consideration into which reference group applies to them to which degree, and how other people classify them (Vaghela & Ueno, 2017); making this process less automatic and requiring more energy. As the individual is not exposed to both cultures equally, the impact of a given reference group varies across the socialization process and the individual's development (Benet.Martínez et al., 2002; Dennis, 2008). Another layer of complexity is added by national identities often overlapping with cultural identities. National identities refer to the belonging to the nation a person grew up in or lives in. Considering that, when growing up biculturally, one's national identification may differ from one's cultural identification, it might create a conflict between those identities. (Quan et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2021).

Thereby, the ways of identity negotiation and accompanying challenges that are associated with a bicultural identity formation are difficult to predict as it depends on the context and the generation (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Berry, 2006; Farver et al., 2002). One thing that stands out in the literature is the finding of ambiguity. It seems as if bicultural individuals feel ambiguous about the meaning of being bicultural. On the one

hand, there is a clear difficulty of maintaining a coherent sense of self when coordinating two different reference points and there is the mention of confusion, dual expectations and value clashes (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Vaghela & Ueno, 2017). On the other hand, there is a sense of pride, uniqueness, and a rich sense of community and history (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005) which might help in fulfilling the desire of a positive ingroup image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Despite the ambiguity around how to deal with multiple cultural backgrounds and the difficulties that may come with it, there have been ideas put forward that represent possible ways in which individuals negotiate their cultural identities. One suggestion has gained considerable popularity among the study of cultural psychology, namely the idea of bicultural identity integration (BII). BII refers to the degree to which the bicultural individual perceives the two cultures as compatible or oppositional. In this context, an individual high on BII becomes part of a hyphenated culture in which the two cultures are neither oppositional nor conflicting. Being low on BII means that the individual perceives the two cultures as highly distinct which often means that they experience difficulties in incorporating a cohesive sense of self in their identity (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). In line with the idea of BII, Doucerain and colleagues (2020) have introduced the concepts of identity compartmentalization in which the two identities are kept separate and identity integration in which one overarching single identity is formed.

Ultimately, the use of identity strategies in the context of cultural identities depend on the broader socio-cultural context and cannot be studied in a vacuum (Doucerain et al., 2020); yet, in face of current trends of racism, the study of the ways in which cultures interact with each other on a collective and individual level is highly relevant. The social practice of racism nowadays navigated its focus from the social construction of biological race onto cultural differences (Wren, 2001), meaning that the base of racism in the difference in biological traits has been replaced by a base in cultural traits and differences. This transition is exemplified by new ways of racism, such as positive stereotyping and creating the Model Minority Myth (MMM) (Chou, 2008). Both practices include the praising of a certain minority group for their integrative success and good adaptation into the host countries that still emphasizes the status differences that lie between the minority group and the majority group[1]. It does not offer the respective minority any support in overcoming the challenges of migration, nor support in social upward mobility as the MMM does not offer them a spot in the majority group – they are just "better" than the others. Ultimately, such practices promote the social reproduction of existing power

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[1] In the context of the present paper, majority groups are equal to high-status groups and minority groups are equal to low-status groups. Acknowledging that low-status minority groups have undergone a process of being minoritized by the dominant group rather than their lower status deriving from them being a minority.

dynamics (Yu, 2006) which is in clear interest of the majority group. The act of praise is performative and allows the majority group to maintain a good reputation. Such instrumental strategies that maintain the high-status groups' reputation while defending their superiority is a common strategy for dominant group members (Teixera et al., 2020).

German-Vietnamese in Germany

The group of German-Vietnamese as well as their parents' generation is widely underrepresented in the literature and research. The history of Vietnamese migrants worldwide is complicated and diverse due to Vietnam's history of war, disruption and displacement: Vietnam was under French occupation until 1954 with Japan taking over the control of the country, followed by internal conflict between North and South of the country combined with the US invasion in 1961 (Huynh, 2021; Neale, 2001). Considering this brief and oversimplified summary of the Vietnamese history, it is clear that, due to the complicated history, separate developments of North and South, and different migration streams throughout the past few decades, the Vietnamese migrant population is incredibly heterogeneous (Neale, 2001). This heterogeneity can also be found in the Vietnamese migrant groups in Germany. Multiple migration streams entered post-war Germany that have different backgrounds and migration stories. The first wave came in the late 1970s and early 1980s which are often categorized as the refugees (often called "Boat people") that came to Western Germany (FRG), and the contract workers that came to Eastern Germany (GDR) (Bösch & Su, 2020).

The two groups have experienced different challenges: the Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR mostly had four-year work contracts that were advertised in North Vietnam. The labor agreement between the GDR and North Vietnam were not a plan for future integration and a long-term stay. The contact to Germans was not welcome, their private life was controlled, they were placed into gender- and ethnic-segregated living, their passports were taken and the content of German language lessons was limited to the work setting (Bösch & Su, 2020; Rausch, 2022). The Vietnamese migrants who were considered as refugees and came to the FRG received support and shelter. However, the FRG context was a complex one to enter. Although the FRG agreed to humanitarian aid, the government was reluctant to take in any refugees. After international pressure grew, the FRG agreed to take in more and more refugees. The sentiment in the German population was supportive at first and the treatment that the Vietnamese received in Germany was considered "privileged." The Vietnamese were a popular group; they were considered different from other non-European migrants as they were diligent and "relatively educated." The economic integration of the refugees worked well due to their diligent attitude; yet, social integration was lacking. In the 80s, however, the sentiment towards Vietnamese refugees in the FRG

started to change as the post-war economy was crashing and right-wing radicalism grew (Bösch, 2017; Bösch & Su, 2020).

After the fall of the Berlin wall, the situation for both groups of Vietnamese migrants became precarious. While the Vietnamese who originally migrated to the West were suddenly object to increased discrimination, the Vietnamese contract-workers had an insecure status and feared deportation. Additionally, there were Vietnamese migrants coming to Western Germany who originally were contract workers in the Czech Republic. With the racist attack on a housing complex in Hamburg in 1980 and another one in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992, the socio-political situation for the Vietnamese worsened (Rausch, 2022; Schwarzer, 2014). In the 90s, the reputation of the Vietnamese changed with the stereotypical image of the illegal cigarette seller, a perception that changed again in the 2000s (Bösch & Su, 2020; Bui, 2003). While studies have shown a discrepancy between the Vietnamese migrants from the former GRD and the ones from the FRG, the reputation of Vietnamese over the years changed to the better with the image the *"Vietnamese wonder"* and the *"invisible favorites"* (Bösch & Su, 2020; Taubert, 2011). Their image is characterized by socioeconomic integration and educational success of their children. However, despite the external overgeneralization of the Vietnamese and German-Vietnamese as one big community, there is little cohesion in the group due to their heterogeneity and little political activism (Bösch & Su, 2020).

The positive image of the Vietnamese migrants in Germany transcends to the children generation of German-Vietnamese. This generation is considered as the *"Vietnamese wonder"* who succeeded against all odds (Bösch & Su, 2020). Apart from their glorious reputation, there is little attention brought to the hyphenated identities of German-Vietnamese. Most contemporary research focuses on the perception of their parents' generation, the first generation of Vietnamese migrants, who experience distress and worry about their work and the upbringing of their children. Further, they report feelings of isolation, marginalization and speechlessness (Nguyen et al., 2021; Scheidecker et al., 2020). The only studies that investigate the second generations' perspective have been conducted outside of Germany. In the United States, the second generation often experiences being ascribed the panethnic label of being Asian which is associated with being foreign, socially awkward, nerdy, and technically competent (Huynh, 2021). One of the few studies in the European contexts investigated online discourse of the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese in the Czech who are also considered as a model minority. The study found persistent intergenerational conflict between the parent generation and the child generation due to the acculturation gap, language difficulties, diverging parenting styles, and high expectations that the Vietnamese parents put onto their children. The sample of Czech-Vietnamese

reported fears of not meeting their parents' expectations, resulting pressure in education and their career, and concerns about economic stability. The discrepancy between the rather Confucian tradition of parenting and the rather Western lifestyle of the Czech creates a desire in the youth to have a warm relationship with their parents while still being grateful for all that their parents have done (Lopatková & Formánková, 2022).

These findings across different contexts resonate with research done on second-generations Eastern Asians living in the West where the panethnic label Asian and the accompanying model minority image is ascribed in a variety of contexts. As outlined above the MMM has its origins in racist practices and research investigating the MMM in samples that have been ascribed the panethnic label of being Asian shows that the MMM has an effect. Studies found internalization of racialized stereotypes, such as White beauty standards (Vaghela & Ueno, 2017); higher identity conflict which is associated with poor mental health outcomes (Vaghela & Ueno, 2017); mental distress due to the experience of microagressions (Garcia et al., 2019); shame about their parents' language skills (Kohli, 2014); sense of inferiority (Rondilla et al., 2017); feelings of shame, embarrassment and self-hate; and a preference for European or American culture (David & Okazaki, 2006). The problem is that the ascription of the MMM and the panethnic label Asian homogenizes a very heterogeneous group that, in reality, cannot be homogenized. It limits the individual in exploring their own identity narrative because the dominant outgroup offers them a positive social identity but only under the condition of falling into the stereotype of the diligent and grateful Asian. In order to fit into the majority and benefit from the opportunity of social mobility, they feel pressured to fulfill this stereotype (Huynh, 2021; Lopatková & Formánková, 2022; Yu, 2006).

Current Research

In view of the provided information, the present research focusses on the perspective of German-Vietnamese by investigating their lived experience of growing up and living in Germany. The exploration of their experience was done via semi-structured interviews that focused on their experience of living in Germany, their sense of belonging and identity, and their perception of the public reputation of Vietnamese in Germany. Afterwards, the interviews were analyzed for common themes that emerged across interviews, as well as differences. Throughout the analysis, the research question in mind was: What are the lived experiences of German-Vietnamese living and growing up in Germany like, and what challenges do they experience? The concepts of identity and belonging were used as a guiding framework throughout the exploration of the research question.

Study Methods

The sample was recruited via a convenience sample and the snowball technique. The researcher contacted German-Vietnamese in their network to ask whether they may know someone who is interested and willing in participating in a study that investigated the lived experience of German-Vietnamese. Potential participants were contacted with information about the research and the research process. After they agreed to participate, they received an information sheet and an informed consent form. Following the signing of the informed consent and clarification of any open questions, an interview was scheduled. Out of the eleven contacted individuals, ten responded and agreed to participate.

The interviews were conducted between November 2021 and January 2022. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online, either via Google Meets, MSN Teams or Zoom. All interviews were conducted in the participant's native language, namely German, and lasted about 40 to 80 minutes.

The interview protocol was established by the researcher based on literature research that focused on potential topics of relevance. The topics that emerged were sense of belonging, identity and MMM. The questions were open-ended and the interview was semi-structured to leave room for the participants to share their own exploration of these topics (see Appendix). In order to maintain a focus on belonging, identity and the MMM, keywords and quotes that included these topics or were associated with the topic were included in the questions. After all interviews were conducted, transcribed and translated into English, the original recordings were deleted for the purpose of privacy. The study was approved by the Ethics procedure of the University College Groningen.

Finally, all interviews were analyzed by using the steps of narrative analysis to identify the thematic contents. The idea behind narrative analysis is that people view and understand their own lives in a narrative, so in order to make meaning of the data, it is useful to study it in the way that the participant understands their own lives. Hereby, the aim is to have a holistic and person-centered insight into the participant that allows the researcher to discover their context and explore new findings within this context. The narrative analysis consists of five readings of each interview: The first reading that is combined with listening to the audio file had the goal of extracting the gestalt of the interview, meaning an overarching topic that dominates the narrative of the interview. Attention to other thematic contents is still paid. The next reading aims at identifying other voices that are included in the participant's narrative, which may include their social network or the wider societal context. The third reading focuses on identifying bigger patterns in the interview. Finally, the last two steps concern creating links between the interview and existing literature as well as the other interviews that were conducted in the realm of the study (Josselson & Hammack, 2021).

Participants

The participants were between 19 and 25 years old. Four participants identified as male, one as non-binary, and five as female. Half of the participants were students, two working students and three participants were working, either employed or self-employed. Considering their background, nine participants reported that their parents originally migrated to the Czech Republic before coming to Germany after the Berlin wall fell and one participant reported that their father was a contract worker in the GDR.

Reflexivity

For the reader to be able to get a proper overview of the research, it is important to note that the researcher who conducted the interviews and constructed the interview protocol is not German-Vietnamese. The researcher has a German background and grew up in a place where she was exposed to the German-Vietnamese culture through her network. While this allowed her an insight into the community, she is by no means an expert or a representative. Throughout the process, she consulted individuals from the community that did not participate in the research – which also included a pilot interview with a member of the German-Vietnamese community. The researcher consulted her confidant about the content of the questionnaire. Further, throughout the research process, the researcher consulted peers in the field of Social Psychology and read through relevant research thematizing culturally appropriate research practices. Regardless of the effort put into ensuring that the research is appropriate to its context, the data analysis and findings need to be considered in a critical way.

Findings

Theme 1: The Vietnamese Language

"I think that the most important thing is that I was raised bilingually.". – Khieu Anh

Although the interview protocol did not include the topic of language, it was a re-occurring topic across the interviews. The Vietnamese language came with a strong sense of connection with their Vietnamese parents and living the Vietnamese culture together through speaking the language. For Khieu Anh, speaking Vietnamese at home, also with her brother, was one of the crucial aspects about creating a "Vietnamese world" which she described as a safe space. The language, in her case, however, also created a separation from the outside world, as she also reported that her German peers mimicked the language; something that was perceived as hurtful by her. Other participants with a fluent command of Vietnamese resonated with this sentiment, explaining how the language connects them to other German-Vietnamese of their generation, as well as to their family; creating a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging that comes with the language seems to be promoted in certain subcultures as one participant shared that, as a teenager, he went to K-Pop and Asian parties. He remembered the

parties to be an important point of connection that was fostered by the language, a mixture of Vietnamese and German.

"[…] with the first generation, they really speak hardcore Vietnamese because the parents were also afraid that they would otherwise forget their roots and that you then don't speak any Vietnamese anymore, but from the second generation, onwards, it's all a bit more relaxed." - Mai

However, there is an intergenerational change to be observed. Mai and other participants with younger sibling reported lower levels of Vietnamese in that generation which complicates the communication with their parents. The language barrier hindering the relationship to their parents resonates with the findings of Lopatková and Formánková (2022) in the Czech sample. Other participants with a non-fluent command of Vietnamese reported the language not only being a barrier to their relationship with their parents but also in daily life. Due to the lack of German skills in their parents, participants explained how they were expected to help them with bureaucratic, "adult" matters from a young age onwards.

"Like I can speak Vietnamese but I've got the feeling that only my mother understands me and all the others don't. Like my mother and I have kind of built our own language of German and Vietnamese [inaudible]. And other people just don't understand me somehow". – Quyen

Quyen and another participant reported speaking Vietnamese only on the level of somehow being able to communicate with their parents, mostly speaking a mixture of Vietnamese and German. According to their report, this worked with their parents but created a disconnect to their other Vietnamese relatives with whom they have not established this kind of communication. One participant perceived it as restricting when relatives from Vietnam were in Germany and he felt like he could not express himself the same way around his parents and sister as he was used to. This example exemplifies that the belonging to Vietnamese culture is complex and depends on contextual factors. In this case, the relationship to the Vietnamese culture was identified to be related to the parents' linguistic upbringing.

Theme 2: The Social Network

"The older I am becoming, the more I realise like: Mh, I would have liked to have more Vietnamese friends to expand my knowledge about Vietnam. Yes, I am lacking that the older I get, definitely." – Ellie

Although most participants described that their network is predominantly German or mixed with other nationalities, there seems to be a desire to connect to people with a multicultural background. Oftentimes, this connection is sought because they feel that there is value and a special way of understanding each other based on the experiences with a migration background. This layer of understanding seems to not always be evident in their

German friends. For example, Ellie also told the researcher that her German friends do not have a regard for cultural practices, such as taking off your shoes when entering the house. She does not blame her friends for it, but she appreciates this regard in her friends who grew up biculturally. The desire to seek connection to others with a bicultural background for the sake of a certain kind of understanding hints at a desire to feel belonging on a level the German majority society cannot offer.

"[…] you became a teenager and you wanted to be cool and you wanted to hang out with White kids and all." – Thuong

"I have integrated well, very well, also have mainly German friends, like except for Linh." – Thuy

Despite the desire to connect with other German-Vietnamese or other bicultural individuals, there were reports of seeking distance to the Vietnamese community in their childhood and teenage years, if such a community was present. Here, having a German network and friendship group seems to be a sign of good integration and fitting into the majority. In this context, Thuy also said that, as a teenager, she actively disengaged with the Vietnamese community and tried to be as far away from the culture because she did not want to be "Asian" anymore. Other participants reported a strict separation of their *"Vietnamese" home* and their German outside world because they did not want these worlds to be mixed – hereby, clearly separating their two reference points of identification. Another strategy that was observed was to disregard the Vietnamese influence in their network. One participant reported not having any Vietnamese friends and never having had a desire and when he talked about the influence of his family, he said that they were cultivated in Germany and *"are completely not like that [meaning Vietnamese]."* Another way of distancing oneself from the Vietnamese network was to perceive that *"[the other Vietnamese families] are different than us […]."*. This form of intraethnic othering has also been found in American-Vietnamese samples by Huynh (2021).

Theme 3: The MMM and Racism

"[…]I stood out, like that I look a little different, definitely true somehow. But I actually never had any bigger problems because of my skin colour or anything. […] from experience, I always hear: 'Yeah nah, you Asians don't count. You adapt.'. Then I always think: 'Great, so you exclude others but you don't count as in there, but you still do it.'. But I'll say, it is, I think, a little more positive. I think, I never had it difficult.". – Thanh

Thanh described important elements of the MMM: the alleviation of a minority over the other minorities and the ascription of the panethnic label "Asian". He is still regarded as different and personally feeling this difference, but the majority accepts this difference to a degree while still creating a distance between

the majority and the "better them", and an even wider distance between the German majority and the other "them(s)". Other participants also reported this experience of "positive differentiation" in instances where people asked them where they are from and their response was that it is impressive how well integrated they are and how good their German is. There are mentions of it being slightly strange to hear that they speak their native language surprisingly well; however, it is still regarded as a compliment by the participants.

"[…] I just find it very important to find out, also from the others, from the other people that you interviewed, how their school life was. Because I found school really a little annoying, like you didn't really have another person that you can ask […]. You really do need a parent that can speak German, that really had a German education. […]." – Quyen

Quyen described the challenges he experienced in school due to his parents not being able to guide him through the school system. Nevertheless, he never felt like he could reach out to the teachers or that someone approached him to support him. Another participant reported a similar struggle. Studies on the MMM in education have shown this disregard of challenges in the educational system in the United States (Yu, 2006) based on the perception that the model Asian students are able to do it themselves because they are so "smart". The homogenisation of the experience of German-Vietnamese and the disregard of their challenges can also be seen in the reports of other participants who say that they are often categorised as Asian and that they feel that they are just being thrown "in the same pot."

"Like I think, for one, I also wanted to look German, like not Vietnamese. […] I think, that was the biggest part. Simply that I wanted to look German, that I don't, that I am not being insulted as a Chinese or I don't know what." – Thuy

Another observation in this context is internalised racism in which the racialized minority comes to believe and internalize the stereotypes of the majority group (James, 2017). In the case of Thuy, she internalized White beauty standards based on her experience of being discriminated for her Vietnamese looks which were overgeneralized to be Chinese. Simultaneously, being White would also mean that she would fit into the majority. Another participant mentioned the internalisation of beauty standards explicitly, saying that, as they got older, they realized that they have been actively seeking to only date White men. The same participant also said that they caught themselves thinking *"Vietnamese people are stupid."*

"Especially as it came from a, from a white person and against Whites, […] you didn't really say anything, right? Because then you're afraid to be discriminated or to, to be rejected from a society, or that feeling that it causes […] that was way worse, right? And when you did say something against it, what if, if that

has an extreme effect that they don't want anything to do with me [...]. And this fear was way bigger, right?" –
Khieu Anh

Notably, there are reports of active fear of marginalization and discrimination. Khieu Anh, for example, reported conscious fear of opposing the White majority society out of fear of discrimination and rejection. Other participants shared experiences of racism where they have been insulted as "Ching Chang Chong" [derogatory German slur for Asian]. Despite the MMM that has been ascribed to German-Vietnamese, the experience of overt racism is not eliminated. This seems to have become normalized, however, as most participants tell stories of being insulted on the street, followed by justifying it as being normal and everyone else experiencing it, too.

"I think, that [Vietnamese] totally deserved that [title of the role model migrant], like, but it is also just a word, because the word doesn't really have a lot of impact. Yeah, now when it is about representation, [...] it is just not really appreciated." – Khieu Anh

Simultaneously, Khieu Anh pointed out how the MMM does not carry a lot of meaning in reality. As Yu (2006) put it, it is a *"disingenuous compliment"* (p. 329) that has little impact. Other participants reflected a similar sentiment saying that the MMM originates in the *"silent integration"* of their parents as they do not oppose anyone and just work. It is pointed out that it seems like the title is only given to the Vietnamese and their children because they do not oppose and that this should not be the sign of ideal integration.

"I think what is also very, very interesting now is, how the second generation is developing here, the second and third generation. How is their position [...]. I'd like to hear more stories in the media and in film, theatre, music. How we, as German-Vietnamese citizens establish. Because we have a completely different story." – Thuong

Nonetheless, Thuong did report that he feels that his generation is special, a sentiment that Benet-Martínez and colleagues (2002) describe as a common characteristic in the perception of biculturals and their two culture reference frameworks. It might be a form of social creativity, in which the participant tries to alleviate their group image due to their unstable position in the dominant majority group.

Theme 4: Strict upbringing and performance pressure

"*School was always a big topic or generally is with Vietnamese always a big topic. They always say you need to be good at school. And that is obviously something good but I think the way that they show you is just sick sometimes. That we were always yelled at because of it and we always got into trouble and you were always afraid to bring home bad grades. I cried countless times. My brother also cried countless times because of it. And also now with time, it is getting better with my brother. But my mother is still very strict in regards to that.*

Unless you get older. [...] I think you will always experience some pressure because you don't know it any different. If it would have continued in my last two years of school, then I definitely think, I would be miserable [...]". – Chau

Chau described what was thematized in a lot of other interviews, namely, the performance pressure and the expectations of diligence. There were reports of pride in regards to the strong work ethics; nevertheless, they came with performance pressure and the fear of not being able to live up to parents' expectations. There were reports of struggling with this attitude while growing up. Their friends enjoyed a relaxed upbringing and they could not understand why their parents were so strict. Other participants seemed to be able to understand their parents nowadays, saying that their parents just wanted the best for them, but that it was difficult as a child to see this. The male participants seemed to have struggled less with the aspect of strict upbringing than the female participants which, according to the report of one male participant, relates to gender differences in the parents' role expectation.

"[...]like if the generation of my parents, for example, if they would have dealt with German culture from back then, in their times, where they came to Germany. I believe then we children wouldn't have any difficulties, for example, always translating something for our parents, what is written on official papers.". – Ellie

In combination with performance pressure and strict upbringing, participants had to take over responsibilities from a young age onwards. In Ellie's case, those were administrative tasks due to her parents' limited German skills. In other cases, participants had to play the role of the *"third parent"* for their younger siblings. Due to their parents' limited integration into German society and knowledge about the education system, the parents relied on the support of the older siblings which was perceived as a burden at times. The participants who did not have any siblings or older German-Vietnamese peers to look up to perceived this lack of support from their parents in these matters as difficult. They felt left alone. Simultaneously, there is an awareness that their parents had to work hard, too. According to some participants, their parents worked even harder and had to take much more responsibility from a young age onwards. There is a wide-spread acknowledgement across the interviews that their parents would do anything for them. However, this does not necessarily justify the perceived lack of effort to learn the German language. It seemed to be difficult for both the parents and the children to negotiate their different experiences. Berry and colleagues (2006) described such a generational gap in the discrepancies of cultural integration as the acculturation gap and name it as one of the prime difficulties for families in acculturation processes.

Discussion

The present paper offers an exploration of the lived experiences of German-Vietnamese living and growing up in Germany. Contrary to the public perception that only considers German-Vietnamese in the context of the silent model minority citizen, German-Vietnamese experience challenges related to their cultural background in Germany. Indeed, as can be derived from this sample, German-Vietnamese seem to have succeeded in many regards: they are integrated in the labour market, successfully attain their education, and are integrated in the German majority society. Nevertheless, they experience specific challenges in relation to their cultural background that are neglected in public discourse, a discourse that already excludes Vietnamese in the mainstream media. Representation has not been a main focus in the present investigation, but it was a topic that has come up in the interviews. Despite the success of German-Vietnamese and their decade-long history in Germany, they are still not represented in the German public media. Arguably, the generation of German-Vietnamese is still relatively young; nevertheless, even the general discourse does not include narratives about German-Vietnamese and their parents with the exception of news about migration waves in the 80s and some bad press about illegal activities in the 90s (Bui, 2003). Challenges that the group has experienced, such as the attacks in Hamburg and Rostock-Lichtenhagen in the 90s, have received little attention up until today (Schwarzer, 2014). There are growing voices from German-Vietnamese individuals with Mai Ti and Vanessa Vu being the most mentioned ones in the interviews, but they are still exceptions. Yet, they are talking about their background (Vu, 2018) and their newly gained attention in the public media is a positive trend. In light of findings of digital media facilitating a multicultural sense of belonging, the role of media is not to be underestimated (Yoon, 2018).

The challenges experienced by the participants are in line with previous research in bicultural individuals. For one, there is the discourse of ambiguity (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005) in which there is a sense of dual expectations and value clashes that participants have reported in their upbringing and their parents' parenting styles, simultaneously, there is a sense of uniqueness. One participant pointed out how they are excited to see the development of German-Vietnamese as they perceive it as a very special and unique group. Further, although the qualitative nature does not allow for a definite assessment of identity negotiation strategies, there are indicators of participants, for example, using identity compartmentalization (Doucerain et al., 2020) in which they create a *"Vietnamese world"* at home and separate the German outside world. The latter may also be an indication of cultural frame switching in which the individual switches between different cultural lenses depending on environmental cues (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Finally,

there are implications of an intergenerational acculturation gap that has been found in other samples of participants with a Vietnamese background (Lopatková & Formánková, 2022).

Another line of research that is represented in the present study is the MMM. Hereby, the application of the panethnic label of being Asian is present as observed with other model minorities of Asian origin in other contexts (Chou, 2008; Huynh, 2021; Lopatková & Formánková, 2022; Vaghela & Ueno, 2017; Yu, 2006). Further, the internalisation of stereotypes associated with the group that is often found in model minority groups has also been present in the current study. The participants reported internalisation of White, European beauty standards and sense of inferiority (Huynh, 2021; Rondilla et al., 2007). Another finding consistent with the MMM is in the realm of education (Yu, 2006), in which the participants perceived that there were no resources and no support that they could seek to help guide them through the education system. There is also the perception that the MMM is a *"disingenuous compliment"* (Yu, 2006, p. 329) as it does not actually regard the group of German-Vietnamese but only the needs of the majority group.

Overall, the lived experience of German-Vietnamese indicates a successful integration on socio-economic measures, such as integration in the labour market and education. Their social integration shows no signs of marginalisation from the German majority society. Nevertheless, their challenges are not to be disregarded which are in line with findings in the context of biculturality and the MMM. They experience overt racism and signs of internalisation, the acculturation gap between them and their parents poses a challenge to their family dynamics, and they undergo considerable performance pressure in regards to education and early responsibilities.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Most importantly, the study consists of self-reports of a small sample of individuals. The sample consists of individuals from the middle class who have completed the highest level of secondary education in Germany. As multiple participants have pointed out, they are aware of other German-Vietnamese who experienced more explicit difficulties with their bicultural background and this study has not been able to include these individuals. Additionally, the study does not include the investigation of challenges in line with other identity markers, such as low socioeconomic background or gender. Although there was variety in the gender identification in the sample, the nature of the study did not focus on any other identity markers. Bicultural populations are heterogeneous (Thai et al., 2021; Vaghela & Ueno, 2017) and in combination with other factors, such as individual difference variables (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002), they influence an individual's lived experience. Thus, t is important to consider multiple factors that represent the diversity of experiences in the

population. This will avoid taking a reductionist approach that solely studies identity and belonging along the lines of someone's cultural background (Yuval-Davis, 2010).

Furthermore, the present research has not considered intergenerational differences within the group of German-Vietnamese. The interviews have revealed that there seem to be variations across the different sibling generations. Here, the pattern of variation could not be identified. Some variables were indicated that seemed to influence the variation and included the parenting style of the parent, the age difference between siblings, number of siblings, and the existence of a Vietnamese social network. It would be interesting for future research to investigate these generational differences, especially in regard of language. Two participants reported that their younger siblings basically spoke no Vietnamese while their parents' command of German was limited. It would be an interesting study to explore the communication between the parents and children in these instances of not speaking the same language fluently.

Overall, it is important to consider that the study was explorative in nature. There is a scarcity of research investigating the experience and perspective of German-Vietnamese and therefore, the present study still leaves considerable gaps in the field. However, it may serve as a basis for future studies that explore the experiences and challenges of German-Vietnamese or other understudied bicultural groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploratory in-depth study of the lived experience of German-Vietnamese in Germany has shown the complexities of growing up with a bicultural background in Germany. The German public perceives the Vietnamese migrants and their children who live with the hyphenated identity of being German-Vietnamese as the role model migrant. A group that works hard and is successful despite the hardship of the history of migration. Yet, German-Vietnamese experience little of this positive recognition in the public sphere. While the present sample may perceive the racism directed towards them as less intense than the racism directed at other migrant groups in Germany, they showed experiences of internalised and overt racism, in addition to performance pressure and an acculturation gap with their parents. The results show that, in Germany, as it has been shown in other countries (Chou, 2008), the MMM is rather performative. "Alleviated" minorities still experience challenges and in the case of German-Vietnamese, they receive little attention in the public sphere and experience little representation. Being a model minority, they are expected to remain silent and enjoy the "privileges" of being a model minority. They are expected to fulfil the image of MMM and accordingly, they do not receive extra support in areas where support may be useful, as a model minority is expected to succeed regardless. Especially in regards to education and language, there is no support. As adolescents, German-

Vietnamese had to be responsible from a young age onwards and simultaneously live up to the expectations of successful integration that, in this context, is characterised by educational attainment and social integration. Ultimately, the role the German majority group has ascribed to the German-Vietnamese mainly benefits the German majority as they can claim successful integration of a minority group without having to implement and work on successful integrative strategies. Hereby, the German-Vietnamese found a way to integrate and master their experienced challenges mostly by themselves.

Overall, this exploratory investigation sheds light on the expectations of integration and acculturation in Germany – a context in which these topics are highly relevant considering that an estimate of 11.43 million individuals with a migrant background live in Germany (Statista, 2021). In the case of German-Vietnamese, it seems as if a minority is only regarded as a role model if they remain silent and contribute to the system without any additional support in the process. This image is perceived to only be to maintained if the minority lives up to the expectations of this image.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol (English translation)

Text written in Italics indicate follow-up question if the conversation flow steers in that direction)

Prior to the interview:

- Introduction of the background of the research

- Explain that they can withdraw at any time

- Explain they only need to answer questions they are comfortable with

1. Would you mind telling me a few things about yourself?

2. What was it like for you to grow up in Germany?

2a) Going back to your parents…

3. I have a citation from the author Khuê Pham:

"[Could] there be anything wrong with the question of where someone comes from? Those who ask the question can usually answer it. They are people whose parents and grandparents have grown up in this country, whose names sound familiar and sometimes appear dozens of times in the phone book. People who ask this question usually aren't satisfied with a simple answer. Instead, they keep asking more questions: […] 'Are you more Vietnamese or more German?'"

Could you comment on this?

3a) What are your experiences in regards to the situation Khuê Pham is describing here?

3b) And what is it like now? Has anything changed in your perception?

3c) Is there any conflict between those two identities for you? How do you deal with it?

4. Where do you feel like you are belonging?

4a) What does that place/person/group mean to you?

4b) Have you ever experienced a situation in which you did not feel like you belong?

5. An article from the magazine "Cicero – Magazine for political culture" asked the question: "Why is it then that Vietnamese seldom get the chance to use their voice in public debates?". What is your perception in regards to the question?

5a) What are your thoughts regarding the term of "role model migrant" used for Vietnamese migrants in Germany?

5b) Do you believe that other migrant groups that are situated in Germany have a particular opinion about Vietnamese migrants?

6. Do you have anything to add?

Interview Protokoll: Die Kinder vietnamesischer Migranten in Deutschland (Original)

Hintergrund:

- Einleitung zu dem Forschungsthema
- Erklärung, dass das Interview jederzeit beendet werden kann
- Erklärung, dass einzelne Fragen nicht beantwortet werden müssen
- Erklärung, dass sie um die Ergebnisse bitten können!

1. Magst Du einfach mal ein paar Dinge über Dich selber mit mir teilen?

2. Wie war es für Dich in Deutschland aufzuwachsen?

2.a) Noch einmal kurz zu Deinen Eltern: …

3. Ich habe hier ein Zitat von der Authorin Khuê Pham:

„Kann etwas schlimm sein an der Frage, woher man kommt? Wer sie stellt, kann sie für sich selbst meistens beantworten. Die Eltern sind in diesem Land groß geworden und die Großeltern auch, der Name hat Tradition, klingt vertraut, und im Telefonbuch stehen manchmal Dutzende andere, die genauso heißen. Wer so fragt, gibt sich mit einer einfachen Antwort meist nicht zufrieden, sondern fragt weiter:[…]'Bist du mehr vietnamesisch oder deutsch?'".

Was sind Deine Gedanken zu diesem Zitat?

3.a) Was sind Deine Erfahrung bezüglich der Situation die Khuê Pham hier darstellt?

3.b) Und wie ist es für Dich jetzt? Hat sich etwas in Deiner Wahrnehmung verändert im Laufe der Jahre und im Vergleich zu früher?

3. c) Ist für Dich da ein Konflikt zwischen diesen zwei Identitäten? Gehst du mit diesem Konflikt irgendwie um?

4. Wo fühlst Du Dich zugehörig?

4.a) Was bedeutet dieser Ort/diese Person/diese Gruppe für Dich?

4. b) Hattest Du jemals das Gefühl, dass Du nicht dazugehörst?

5. Ein Artikel des Magazins „Cicero ‑ Magazin für politische Kultur" stellt die Frage ***„Warum tauchen Vietnamesen dann in öffentlichen Debatten so selten mit eigener Stimme auf?"***. Wie ist Deine Wahrnehmung der implizierten Unterrepräsentation von Vietnamesen?

5.a) Was denkst Du über die Bezeichnung „Vorbildsmigrant" in Bezug auf die vietnamesischen Migranten in Deutschland?

5.b) Glaubst du das andere Migrantengruppen oder Minderheitsgruppen in Deutschland eine Meinung gegenüber den Vietnamesen haben?

6. Hast Du irgendwas hinzuzufügen?