

Book Review

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Integration: Buddhistische
Vietnamesen und
hinduistische Tamilen in
Deutschland.
By Martin Baumann***

Reviewed by

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Migration—Religion—Integration: Buddhistische Vietnamesen und hinduistische Tamilen in Deutschland. By Martin Baumann.
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Martin Baumann's earlier works (among others) on German Buddhists (1995) and Hindu diasporas in Europe (1998) are best known to readers of German and in the field of sociology of religion. He has now given us another informative study focusing on two groups of politically and ethnically persecuted refugees who settled as migrants in Germany and predominantly belong each to one religion: Hindu Tamils (45,000) and Vietnamese Buddhists (60,000). After an initial period of coping with settling down, seeking employment, and getting used to German bureaucracy and social life, both of these immigrant groups were able to publicly revive their religious traditions. Initially, worship took place in private apartments, and later official communal places of worship developed in the form of temples or pagodas. Public street processions were also staged in German towns to celebrate important rituals. This provided a visible sign of communal and religious identity re-formation among these two groups, which is, according to Baumann, part of the process of making themselves "feel at home" in German society — a true indicator for integration. However, such activities also provoked disapproval and outright opposition from some German residents living in the vicinity of the new shrines and temples, disapproval that once even prevented the actual building of a new temple. As a response, Baumann's book aims to provide an antidote to such negative reactions. Firstly, he informs us of the historical background of these two immigrant groups. He then examines their present-day socio-political situation and their efforts to reestablish their religious and sociocultural identity in Germany, primarily through the building of centers of worship.

Chapter one begins with a general introduction on the important role religion plays in the formation of communal identity for migrants, a fact that is often neglected in the sociological literature according to

Baumann. He also emphasizes the hotly debated fact of a new "pluralization of the religious landscape" in Germany, and especially in Lower Saxony, one of the federal states constituting his major area of study. Hannover, the principal city in Lower Saxony, is the home of two important religious centers for migrant Vietnamese Buddhist and Sri Lankan Tamils: Vien Giac, the biggest Buddhist monastic pagoda in Europe, and the Tamil Hindu temple of Sri Muthumariamman. Baumann's research on this topic was sponsored by the state government of Lower Saxony and supported by the Seminar for Religious Studies at the University of Hannover.

In his introduction, the author identifies a widespread, popular expectation among Germans concerning migrant groups: migrants should "assimilate" themselves into the dominant German culture, not just by learning how to speak and understand German, but primarily by completely adapting their social (and religious) behavior, clothing, and general lifestyle to the German environment. Essentially, they should leave their culture and religion behind (although their delicious national cuisine may be an exception here). Against such popular sentiment, Baumann attempts to cultivate sympathy and understanding for the cultural and religious particularities of Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Vietnamese in Germany. In contrast to the claimed "necessity" of complete assimilation, he stresses that the revival and establishment of migrant cultural and religious institutions in Germany help such groups to truly integrate themselves, because they are able to reestablish their own (albeit already altered and adapted) identities. Furthermore, migrant cultural and religious institutions can offer places of intercultural and interreligious contact for interested Germans.

Baumann's well-structured entries guide the reader through a wealth of detailed information in chapters two and four on the historical, ethnic, religious, and, especially, political backgrounds of Vietnamese and Tamils who have settled in Germany. The author is careful to differentiate between particular ethnic, religious, and political subgroups within the Tamil and Vietnamese communities. In the ensuing discussion of the new Buddhist pagodas or Hindu temples set up as places of worship in Germany (chapters three and five), the roles of their respective religious leaders are stressed, whereas the bulk of ordinary adherents remain anonymous, mentioned mainly in their role as sponsors of these religious-cultural centers. This orientation in the research immediately begs a number of questions about the issue of migrant assimilation raised at the start of the book. What about the position of Tamil migrants in Germany who are not practicing Hindus, or Catholic Vietnamese who will not be part of the Vietnamese Buddhist community? Do they adjust differently and identify themselves in another way compared with the majority of their fellow compatriots? Are they accepted more easily by Germans because they do not assert their identity in such "foreign" religious terms?

Chapter six is the last chapter and presents an analysis of religion, conflict, and social integration focusing on the actual "settling-down" processes of migrants. Baumann undertakes a comparison of the different types of religious institutions that Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Vietnamese have established in Germany. He does so in relation to comparative material concerning other immigrant groups in Europe. By using "public

space" as an analytical concept, Baumann demonstrates that the public visibility of "the other" through their temples, pagodas, and festivals or processions is something of a double-edged sword. On one hand, this visibility is a manifestation of cultural and religious assertion, as well as true integration by supplying an arena for religious and sociocultural identity of the migrants. This helps them to cope with the issues of living in a majority German society. On the other hand, it is exactly this new public visibility that seems to cause offense to many Germans. As examples, Baumann documents German protests about the traditional height of Islamic minarets held to "dominate" the Christian church steeples, the apparently appalling smell of incense, the "noise" of religious music and prayer during worship, the "strange" external appearance of a Hindu temple in a local German neighborhood, and so on. He concludes, however, that Hindu and Buddhist temples have already proven to be not only important places of worship for ethnic minority groups, but also places for mutual encounter and understanding between migrant communities and Germans themselves. Baumann concludes this last chapter with the words:

Even though books and readings can hardly replace the personal impression of one's own encounter and experience, nevertheless the author hopes to have compiled helpful background information and aroused interest in a true encounter. (German: *Auch wenn Bücher und Lektüre kaum den erlebten Eindruck eigener Begegnung und Anschauung ersetzen können, so hofft der Verfasser dennoch, hilfreiche Hintergrundinformationen aufbereitet und Interesse an einer Begegnung geweckt zu haben.*)

The book ends with an appendix, an extensive bibliography, and a glossary. The appendix contains Baumann's method of data collection as well as photographs, important documents, and addresses of Vietnamese-Buddhist and Hindu-Tamil centers of worship in Germany. A table informs us generally about religious communities in Germany, including membership numbers with year of data collection.

In contemporary Germany a public debate exists about whether the country already is, or whether it should or should not become, an "immigrant country" (*Einwanderungsland*). Accordingly, Baumann is extremely judicious in his use of terminology and rhetoric, attempting to pass unscathed through this German political minefield. He uses the neutral word *Zuwanderer* for immigrants, which has the sense of a group who "additionally" or later joins an already existing "original" group. He avoids the broad and inherently alienating term *Ausländer* or "foreigner," which explicitly stresses the "otherness" of people's origins, marking them as outsiders instead of stressing the fact that they are immigrants, although he also avoids the term "immigrant" (*Einwanderer*). In any case, there is a puzzling jungle of German terms for different categories of non-Germans in circulation (one which often becomes confused by Germans themselves), and Baumann takes the time to explain this terminology to his readers. Many of these terms inherently reflect crucial legal distinctions and different rights of residence or durations of stay, work permission, or social security allowances for the people thus categorized,

and apply to the position of the Tamil and Vietnamese migrants under study in this book.

Although the German government has now liberalized its immigration policies somewhat (see the book's "Vorwort und Danksagung"), there still exists deeply rooted and politically fueled prejudice against or intolerance of migrants. Some German citizens and government representatives, however, are well aware of this very dangerous and socially destabilizing tendency toward xenophobia, as witnessed recently in Cologne by a peaceful demonstration to protest against "hate of the other" with over 20,000 participants. However, the sad statistic of a more than 14 percent increase of acts of violence and criminal offences against "foreign-looking" persons and Jewish institutions in the year 2000 speaks for itself. It is this deep tension in German society that makes Baumann's new study of migrant religion and integration so very important and necessary.

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