

## Tradition and Survival

A tumultuous civil war is currently tearing Syria apart, resulting in a large number of Syrian citizens who wish to flee their homeland. The nations of the European Union are the main targets for Syrian refugees as they seek a more harmonious country to call home. While some nations are avidly against letting an entirely new culture into their midst, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel believes that "The fundamental right to asylum does not have a limitation...As a strong, economically healthy country, we have strength to do what is necessary" (Faiola). Germany already allowed refugees into its borders in small amounts. However, soon after fully opening its border to thousands of Syrian refugees, "Germany introduced border controls...and dramatically halted all train traffic with Austria...[Germany] could no longer cope with the overwhelming number of refugees entering the country," in the words of *The Guardian's* foreign correspondent Luke Harding. For the moment, Germany has reached its limit. There are some who believe that the border should stay closed and that the refugees are a burden. Others see the refugees as a beneficial and welcome change.

The financial resources necessitated by incoming refugees are one of the main fears of the anti-refugee individual. According to the award-winning Russian news network *RT*, "German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said that hosting the migrants will cost the government, federal states and municipalities 10 billion euros this year as opposed to 2.4 billion euros in 2014" ("Germany"). The funding that the refugees require comes from the taxes of the German people. German citizens have been and will be paying for the Syrian migrants to transition into German society, making each new refugee another expense for the German people. *Washington Post* Berlin Bureau chief Anthony Faiola explains that "Language classes, social support and

other forms of aid — a single refugee [in Munich], for instance, gets about 350 euros (\$392) a month in addition to housing — are set to cost Germany many millions.” Those who do not agree with the presence of the refugees in Germany see this expenditure as a misuse of funds. The fact that the grand total increases with each refugee that enters the nation causes concern. It is not cheap to support thousands of individuals who arrive in Germany with no material wealth.

However, the Syrian refugees are not without their own contributions to the German economy. German *New York Times* reporter Katrin Bennhold reveals that “The migrant crisis is not just a humanitarian imperative, it is an opportunity. Germany has among the lowest birthrates in Europe. The population is shrinking and aging...Businesses in the region are looking for 3,000 apprentices.” Germany has a need of its own, and it turns out that Syrian refugees could be helping Germany by helping themselves. First they need to attain the proper training, and that will take time. “An aging population...and low birth rate are eating away at its pool of skilled labor....shortage of qualified workers...If nothing is done to reverse the trend as many as 3.9 million jobs will need to be filled by 2040” (“Germany”). Germany did not get to its current economic standing without a certain level of strategy. While the cost of aid for the refugees adds up, they will eventually repay Germany by restoring the balance between workers and retired folks. Of course, that can only happen if integration goes smoothly.

Public opinion of refugees puts a damper on the process of acculturation. The German city of Erfurt is a particular example of the struggle to acclimate refugees. When a group of refugees passed through the capital city of Thuringia, one older German woman voiced her fears: “‘Will you be building a mosque next?’ she demanded. ‘Will they wake us up with their prayer at 5 a.m.?’” (Bennhold). Beyond worries of financial burden and overwhelmed resources, the

most traditional Germans dread the idea of Islamization. The fact that the majority of the refugees are Muslim strikes fear into the majorly Christian citizens. They are not prepared for changing a culture they have preserved for so long. The likelihood of successful assimilation is doubted by others, such as Erfurt headmistress Sabine Iffarth, who believes ““We fail to integrate the losers in our society, and then we ask them to integrate the refugees”” (Bennhold). Iffarth finds that Germany is too imperfect to take in and improve the migrants. According to her, Germany should be able to integrate even its most disadvantaged citizens before it can aptly integrate the Syrian refugees. The refugees can only benefit German society if they can be properly naturalized.

Despite the doubts of some German citizens, there are others who hold high hopes for the migrants. In an interview with independent German news station *Deutsche Welle*, Austrian philosopher Dr. Immanuel Fruhmann stated that “it's a matter of the refugees enriching German culture rather than the fear of Islamization.” While there is no denying the Muslim religion of the refugees, that does not mean Germans and Syrians are incompatible. They can learn from each other. Fruhmann recognizes the necessity for mutual understanding in order to make the best of the situation. For those who feel that Germany has a responsibility to help the weak, the refugees hold a more spiritual benefit. Germans who seek for redemption for World War II are particularly compassionate towards the refugees. ““We caused so much suffering many years ago during the war, when we invaded other nations and did many horrible things,’ said Schriever, the German janitor who turned out to greet refugees here with a pile of his used clothes. ‘Now it is our time to heal those who suffer,’ he said” (Faiola). The rescuing of Syrians from their war-ravaged homeland is a chance for guilty Germans to make up for past transgressions. They

find that perfectly preserving their own culture is not more important than saving lives. They can overlook the doubts of their comrades in hopes of making a positive difference.

Germany remains divided over whether the Syrian refugees are or ever will be beneficial. Still, Germany is struggling to take in more refugees. Certain individuals argue that refugees should be kept out of Germany for the sake of preserving German culture and preventing economic disaster. Some other individuals deem the refugee crisis worthy of the risk. They cannot ignore the suffering of their fellow humans and find philanthropic opportunity in the midst of crisis. However, the nation as a whole continues to dedicate itself to integrating as many refugees as it can. Germany's trials will be a helpful reference for any future decisions about welcoming refugees into European nations.

## Works Cited

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