



# Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany:

Immigration, Space  
and Belonging,  
1961-1990

*By Sarah Thomsen Vierra*

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Two significant phenomena in an era of globalisation, namely international migration and, as its most visible outcome, immigrant groups, have provided massive resources for and drawn the attention of academics and researchers. As a result of this situation, a vast accumulation of academic literature analysing immigrant groups through the scopes of various social science disciplines has been achieved. These studies have generally adopted a trend in terms of approaching the immigrant phenomenon within certain contexts such as the problems of integration and adaptation, mutual relationships and interactions between the host society and immigrant communities, the dilemmatic situations of belonging and preserving ethnic identities, and so on. In this respect, as constituting the largest national group of immigrants in Germany, Turks in Germany has been a significant subject of academic research considering the number of books, articles, research projects, dissertations and thesis related to them.

*Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany: Immigration, Space and Belonging, 1961-1990* by Sarah Thomsen Vierra is another recently published contribution to this body of academic literature. As the book version of the author's academic dissertation, it emerges as an outcome of a thorough review of preceding academic literature and other sources such as interviews with Turks in Germany. The author even attended Turkish courses in order to have access to sources written in Turkish language.

Given the fact that there is a vast number of academic studies related to Turks in Germany, what makes Vierra's book a significant, peculiar, contributing and award-winning work is firstly, its subjective, and secondly, its methodological characteristics. Considering the fact that a majority of academic works related to the Turks in Germany have been written by German and Turkish nationals, Vierra as an American national who views the picture from a third-party perspective has achieved an efficient and broader narrative. Secondly, Vierra, while asking the basic question- a question those interested in this subject are familiar to- of what factors lay behind the conflicting status of being caught in the middle of feeling a belonging to the German society and clinging tightly to the Turkish ethnic identity (a dilemmatic situation experienced by many Turkish Germans), revisited the concepts of integration and belonging by applying a

different approach to the question. In this sense, she aimed to build a bridge between the two poles of this conflictual situation of belonging by concentrating on the spatial dimension of the history of Turkish Germans. The author, in this respect, has resorted to the concept of spaces of belonging through which she aimed to analyse the integration process of Turkish Germans within various categories of spaces they have constructed or shaped for themselves in their social environment under each chapter of the book. As the Turkish Germans are a multigenerational society, the evolution of these spaces through a comparison between first generation versus second generation era developments have also been pointed out. In this sense, the first five chapters of the book deal with the basic spaces of social conduct namely the workplaces of Turkish immigrants, their houses, neighbourhoods, school environment and their religious centres. The social networks established by Turkish immigrants in these spaces and the mutual interactions between Turks and ethnic Germans have been analysed in these chapters within the contexts of integration, belonging and identity. The sixth chapter of the book focuses on the social, political, economic and cultural developments following the German re-unification of 1990 which have influenced the Turkish German society within these contexts.

The book focuses on the Sprengelkiez neighbourhood in Berlin, a region where Turkish Germans have constituted a significant population since their arrival in Germany via the quest worker program initiated by the German government in 1961. The sampling applied in the study therefore can be said to be limited to cover all Turkish Germans in Germany and this situation is also admitted by the author in the book as well. However, the sampling location is a proper choice considering the narrative flow of the book which places German re-unification of 1990 as an important turning point regarding the immigrant and minority issues in Germany. Sprengelkiez, in this sense, serves as a significant location given its neighbouring location to East Berlin which provided meaningful sections of social life in terms of identifying the influences of the re-unification on the issues of integration and belonging within the Turkish German community. In addition, as the author also states in her book, the case of Sprengelkiez may be helpful in analysing the similar processes and issues concerning other Turkish German communities throughout Germany as of serving as a social model.

The book can also be said to be a detailed source of references for anyone interested in this subject considering the thorough bibliography it includes and the comparisons and critiques by Vierra towards preceding studies. With its dual historical and sociological perspective, this book emerges as a significant contribution to the academic literature.