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Turkish and U.S. Migrants' Institutional Experiences in Vienna,
Austria

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Abstract (English)

This master's thesis investigates the following research question: In which ways are Turkish and United States nationals' self-perceptions as migrants in Vienna, Austria impacted by their interactions with state institutions? To address this question, it compares the lived experiences of Turkish and U.S. nationals residing in Vienna, focusing on their encounters with the Viennese migration authorities (German: *Magistratsamt 35*, abbreviated MA 35) and anti-migration sociopolitical discourse.

Research findings show both shared and divergent patterns. While interviewees from both groups described similar bureaucratic encounters with the MA 35 and their awareness of anti-migration discourse in Austria, they diverge in how these experiences inform their self-perceptions. The reception of interviewees' use of German as a foreign language, which many viewed as closely linked to their outward appearance and the broader Austrian political context, provides a starting point for explaining how interviewees construct their self-perceptions. Turkish nationals more frequently interpreted institutional interactions as connected to anti-migration narratives directed at them, whereas U.S. nationals more often framed such encounters as a neutral characteristic of bureaucratic procedure rather than targeted exclusion.

Grounded in anthropological theory, this thesis draws on three main theoretical frameworks: difference making, the anthropology of bureaucracy and political imaginaries. It examines how state institutions and public discourse construct and reinforce images of "the migrant," and how individuals interpret and negotiate these constructions in shaping their self-perception. The qualitative, comparative analysis is based on thirteen semi-structured interviews with six U.S. nationals and seven Turkish nationals, supplemented by contextual analysis of relevant sources.

This master's thesis generates new knowledge via comparative analysis of migrant experiences by nationality in Vienna, contributing to a limited area of research covering the roles of state institutions and sociopolitical migration narratives in actively shaping migrants' understandings of themselves and their self-perceptions in Vienna, Austria.

Zusammenfassung (Deutsch)

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die folgende Forschungsfrage: Inwiefern werden die Selbstwahrnehmungen türkischer und US-amerikanischer Staatsangehöriger als Migrant:innen in Wien, Österreich, durch ihre Interaktionen mit staatlichen Institutionen beeinflusst? Zur Beantwortung dieser Frage werden die gelebten Erfahrungen türkischer und US-amerikanischer Staatsangehöriger mit Wohnsitz in Wien vergleichend analysiert, wobei der Fokus auf ihren Begegnungen mit der Wiener Migrationsbehörde (Magistratsabteilung 35, kurz MA 35) und migrationskritischen soziopolitischen Diskursen.

Die Forschungsergebnisse zeigen gemeinsame und divergierende Muster. Beide Gruppen berichten von ähnlichen bürokratischen Erfahrungen mit der MA 35 und Begegnungen mit migrationskritischem Diskurs in Österreich. Unterschiede zeigen sich jedoch darin, wie diese Erfahrungen ihre Selbstwahrnehmung prägen. Besonders die Reaktionen auf ihren Gebrauch von Deutsch als Fremdsprache—die sie häufig mit äußerem Erscheinungsbild und dem breiteren politischen Kontext Österreichs verknüpfen—dienen als Ausgangspunkt für die Erklärung der Konstruktion ihrer Selbstwahrnehmung. Türkische Staatsangehörige deuteten institutionelle Interaktionen häufiger als Teil migrationskritischer Narrative, während US-amerikanische Staatsangehörige sie eher als Ausdruck bürokratischer Abläufe, denn als gezielte Ausgrenzung verstanden.

Drei zentrale anthropologische Theorien unterstützen diese Arbeit: Difference Making, die Anthropologie der Bürokratie und politische Imaginationen. Untersucht wird, wie staatliche Institutionen und öffentliche Diskurse Bilder von „den Migrant:innen“ konstruieren und verfestigen und wie Individuen diese Konstruktionen interpretieren und in der Formung ihrer Selbstwahrnehmung aushandeln. Die qualitative, vergleichende Analyse basiert sich auf dreizehn leitfadengestützten Interviews mit sechs US-amerikanischen und sieben türkischen Staatsangehörigen und wird durch eine kontextuelle Analyse einschlägiger Quellen ergänzt.

Diese Masterarbeit leitet durch die vergleichende Analyse migrantischer Erfahrungen nach Staatsangehörigkeit in Wien einen Beitrag zu einem bislang wenig erforschten Bereich. Sie erweitert das Verständnis der Rolle staatlicher Institutionen und soziopolitischer Migrationsnarrative bei der aktiven Mitgestaltung migrantischer Selbstverständnisse und ihrer Selbstwahrnehmungen in Wien, Österreich.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this master's thesis is to conduct a comparative study between the lived experiences of migrants from Turkey and the United States living in Vienna, Austria, based on their interactions with Austrian state institutions. Semi-structured interviews with Turkish and U.S. nationals about their experiences with the Viennese migration authorities (German: *Magistratsamt 35*, abbreviated as MA 35) were qualitatively assessed to answer the overarching research question:

In which ways are Turkish and United States nationals' self-perceptions as migrants in Vienna, Austria impacted by their interactions with Austrian state institutions?

The definition of “self-perceptions” in this question are individuals’ assessments of their own sociopolitical standing in response to their interactions with the external sociopolitical dynamics present in their everyday lives.

The following chapters are organized to most effectively address the overarching research question. **Chapter 2: Literature and Theoretical Framework** utilizes three main anthropological theories to do so. Foremost, the anthropology of bureaucracy discusses the structural secrecy of bureaucracy and how this impacts bureaucratic clients’ interactions with state institutions (Weber 1979, 992). Furthermore, the role bureaucratic employees play in these interactions as “street-level bureaucrats” illustrates how bureaucratic clients often link street-level bureaucrats’ bureaucratic decisions to their understanding of broader political dynamics (Lipsky 2010, 3). These lenses are primarily highlighted in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, the interactional element of difference making and diffraction, as defined by Amade M’charek (2010, 308), are applied to migrants’ understandings of broader anti-migration discourse. Finally, political imaginaries are employed to indicate how right-wing representations of migrants play a role in Austria’s migration debate and in shaping migrants’ self-perceptions.

Supplementary theories are included to deepen the reader's understanding of these three theoretical lenses, including regimes of mobility, transnationalism, feelings of belonging, internalized othering, integration versus assimilation and critical whiteness. This study's methodologies are outlined in **Chapter 3: Methodologies**. Background information relevant to interpreting study results is provided in **Chapter 4: Context and Setting**. This includes a summary of Vienna's international population, international organizations and institutions of higher education in the city, the international presence at the University of Vienna and statistics on the proportion of Vienna's general population with non-Austrian nationalities. Further, public conceptualization of the MA 35 is detailed through discussion of commonly reported issues with the MA 35 from 2021 onward. A summary of anti-migration politics in Austria's right-wing political parties follows. Finally, this chapter ends by discussing media associations of migrants with crime and compares them to recent crime statistics.

Analysis of interview material begins in **Chapter 5: Navigating the Viennese Migration System**, in which the following research sub questions are addressed:

Which systemic aspects of navigating the MA 35 do migrants in Vienna see as influencing their self-perceptions?

- **How do interviewees perceive publicly available information on government and government-affiliated websites as impacting their experiences of navigating the MA 35?**
- **Which connections do interviewees perceive between government and government-affiliated websites and the broader political context in Austria?**

This chapter begins by outlining the process of applying for a student residence permit (German: *Aufenthaltsbewilligung Student*) through the MA 35 to describe the application process's detail-oriented nature. Interviewees reported challenges in accessing correct and consistent information while navigating the MA 35, claims that are compared to an analysis of government and government-affiliated websites listing documents needed for a residence permit application and general application information. Analysis support interviewee claims that informational

discrepancies. Due to the highly particular nature of applying for a residence permit, these informational discrepancies prevent interviewees from being able to adequately prepare for an appointment at the MA 35, perpetuating challenges when interacting with MA 35 employees.

The uncertainty produced by informational issues extends to interviewees' interactions with MA 35 employees, as interviewees do not know which documents employees may or may not request of them. A request for additional documents causes longer application processing times, which can necessitate migrants leaving the Schengen area to avoid breaking travel laws. On a more urgent note, some interviewees received unexplainable decisions on their applications that resulted in them either being wrongfully deported or required suing the MA 35 to confirm their rightful stay in Austria—a costly process. Interviewee statements emphasizing such informational issues underscore Weber's (1979, 992) argument that bureaucratic institutions' secrecy by design can create issues in bureaucratic clients' ability to access information. Impaired access to information also damages public trust in the MA 35, leading interviewees to speculate that their experiences are connected to right-wing politics in Austria—highlighting Lipsky's (2010, 3, 66) arguments that bureaucratic employees can represent the broader political context to bureaucratic clients.

Connections interviewees perceive between the challenges of navigating the MA 35 and right-wing politics in Austria are examined in **Chapter 6: Impacts of Learning German, Right-Wing Political Imaginaries and Outward Appearance on Migrant Self-Perceptions** through the following sub questions:

To which extent do migrants in Vienna see their self-perceptions as shaped by anti-migration discourse?

- **To which extent do the two groups of interviewees perceive reception of their use of German as a foreign language as connected to anti-migration discourse?**
- **How do images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP parties of “the migrant” play a role in influencing the two groups' self-perceptions?**

- **In which ways do interviewees discuss their appearance through physical characteristics and behavior as influencing their self-perceptions considering images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP of “the migrant”?**

“Anti-migration discourse” is defined as sociopolitical discourse which negatively criticizes and/or stands in opposition to migrants and migration. Furthermore, “the migrant” represents the political imaginary of migrants spread through anti-migration discourse. These questions are addressed by first presenting interviewee statements about how their use of German as a foreign language is received by their Austrian peers and thus impacts their self-perceptions, emphasizing the interactional nature of difference making as conceptualized by M’charek (2010, 308). Visual political materials from the right-wing FPÖ and ÖVP parties are next analyzed due to indicate common associations these parties make with “the migrant.” Finally, interviewees’ remarks on their own physical appearance and behavior in relation to “the migrant” are assessed to illustrate the impacts of this political imaginary on their self-perceptions.

The results of Chapter 6 show that the two nationality groups interviewed for this study connect Austrian peers’ reception of their German language skills to the political imaginary of “the migrant” and thus the broader anti-migration discourse. Turkish interviewees discussed an overall negative reception of speaking German imperfectly or with an accent by their Austrian peers that produces feelings of social exclusion and discouragement from further practicing German. The process of difference making through interaction is here experienced as negatively impacting Turkish interviewees’ self-perceptions. In contrast, U.S. interviewees stated that their accented or imperfect German is neutrally received by their Austrian peers and does not make them feel socially excluded or discouraged from further practicing German. Analysis of FPÖ and ÖVP visual political materials portray “the migrant” as someone who lacks German proficiency and exhibits dangerous or criminal activity— notions connect back to the theoretical section and Chapter 4. Portrayals of “the migrant” by the ÖVP draw upon the politics of fear (Wodak 2020, 173) by arguing that this individual threatens Vienna through a lack of German proficiency by resisting integration, lacking intelligence and behaving in dangerous and criminal ways. The FPÖ also connects “the migrant” to the politics of fear, while additionally drawing upon demographic panic (Wodak 2020, 173). The FPÖ associates this individual with corruption,

disorderly behavior, a disregard for women's rights and Islamic extremism—characteristics that the FPÖ presents as jeopardizing a Viennese way of life. Most visual political materials targeted migrants from Turkey and other majority Muslim countries, while only one FPÖ poster directly criticized Chiago in the United States but not in a way that extended criticism to U.S. nationals living in Vienna.

Interviewees assessed their physical appearance and behavior in relation to “the migrant” in the final part of Chapter 6. This assessment's influence on their self-perceptions mirrors that of the reception of their German language skills. Turkish interviewees reported the relationship between their understanding of “the migrant” and their physical appearance as negatively impacting their self-perceptions. Male Turkish interviewees discussed negative reception of their physical appearance as associating them with the political imaginary of “the migrant,” prompting them to modify their physical appearance to mitigate the effects of this association. Female Turkish interviewees modified their outwardly expressed characteristics in advance of interacting with their Austrian peers in a similar effort to avoid associations with “the migrant.” They focused on modifying their physical appearance by avoiding religious clothing, changing their hair color and mirroring social behavior of their Austrian peers. Overall, Turkish interviewees perceive themselves as targeted by anti-migration discourse and alter their outwardly expressed characteristics to minimize their association with “the migrant,” illustrating diffraction at work (M'charek 2010, 308). U.S. interviewees are aware of the negative connotations carried by “the migrant” and their impacts on those targeted by anti-migration discourse, but do not see themselves as targeted. Rather, their experiences with difference making in this sense neutrally impact their self-perceptions and they do not exhibit diffraction via changing their outwardly expressed characteristics in response to engaging with their Austrian peers.

The relationship between German proficiency and the political imaginary of “the migrant” thus impacts Turkish and U.S. interviewees in contrasting ways. Both nationality groups are at least aware of this relationship and perceive a connection between right-wing anti-migration discourse and their interactions with the MA 35. Thus, the overarching research question is answered by explaining that migrants' perceptions of their interactions with the MA 35 and encounters with anti-migration discourse are intertwined, but differ in their impacts on the two nationality groups involved in this study.

2. Literature and Theoretical Framework

This research project focuses on the self-perceptions of U.S. and Turkish migrants living in Vienna, Austria based on their interactions with the Viennese migration authorities and encounters with Austrian anti-migration discourse. Multiple theories are introduced in this section to assist in interpreting their interview responses with nuance. The three main anthropological theories used in this study are difference making, anthropology of bureaucracy and political imaginaries. Before introducing these theories, the relevance of migration studies, regimes of mobility and transnationalism are summarized to outline the broader relevance of this study.

Difference making arises in social interaction, through which tensions between varying individuals or groups become apparent. Social interactions impact migrant self-perceptions by serving as indicators of how migrants' presence is received in a host society. Racial variation is one focal point of difference making, as it reinforces dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Inclusion and exclusion influence (non)belonging and othering, which promote insecure belonging and internalized othering. In terms of migrants, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion prompt migrants to internalize their experiences, establishing social boundaries that can either encourage or discourage migrants from interacting with their surrounding host society. In combination with the blurring of distinction between integration versus assimilation in anti-migration discourse, certain migrant physical appearance and behavior is targeted to push for migrant assimilation. Divergences in whether migrants perceive themselves as targeted or not targeted by calls for assimilation are explained through the lens of critical whiteness studies. Critical whiteness studies assist in defining which characteristics of behavior and physical appearance are the societal norm in a host society, as well as which behavior and physical appearance is defined as not fitting the norm. This explains how some migrants fit such norms and benefit from privilege while those who do not fit experience disadvantages. Given the focus on physical and behavioral characteristics, difference making is thus an embodied experience.

Both the anthropology of bureaucracy and political imaginaries discuss the materialization of the phenomena discussed above. According to the anthropology of bureaucracy, state institution can exert symbolic violence through the actions of bureaucrats working for state institutions. Bureaucrats hold a significant degree of power over their clients, as bureaucracy is designed to theoretically enable the exercise of individual

bureaucrats' bias through their use of discretion. While bureaucracy is also theoretically based on impartiality, the ability to exercise individual bias can be utilized in ways that conflict impartiality. A power difference between bureaucrats and clients, when combined with the potential for bureaucrats to exercise bias, impacts clients' self-perception depending on how they perceive their interactions with state institutions.

Public discourse creates and reinforces representations of individuals or groups to the broader public. Such representations are called imaginaries and can take the form of narratives and/or images that a public audience comes to associate as typical of the individuals and groups that imaginaries are meant to represent. Imaginaries are at least partially fictional and become political when combined with political goals. The partially fictional nature of imaginaries carries great power because imaginaries are connected to deeply rooted cultural beliefs that are highly resistant to change. The exclusionary sociopolitical elements discussed above are paired with imaginaries in anti-migration discourse, making way for the politics of fear and demographic panic to foster pushback against migrants and migration. The following sections examine each theoretical topic at greater length.

2.1 Migration Studies, Regimes of Mobility and Transnationalism

2.1.1 Why Migration Studies?

Migration studies are especially relevant to this master's thesis because a global "revitalization of debates about borders and walls" has occurred since approximately 2015 in response to the so-called refugee crisis, attempting to increase restriction on migration (Wodak 2020, 173). Narratives of using borders to "protect the citizens inside from invaders" are increasingly referenced in politics that frame migration as a threat (Wodak 2020, 160). M'charek (2010, 309) notes that host societies impacted by these narratives sometimes deem their "'local' and 'authentic' identities" as under attack by migration and can implement "processes of Othering" as a defense mechanism, labeling migrants as others who pose a danger to their host society. Wodak (2020, 162) explains that "migration is increasingly constructed as "'a problem" that needs to be regulated" by imposing stricter border regulations and normalizing "national borders and ethnic boundaries" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 184). States' impacts on migrants via imposing restrictions and regulations mean that migrants "become the subjects of praise or condemnation, desire, suppression or fear" depending on how their presence is portrayed (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 196).

Due to exclusionary practices' involvement in who is able and permitted to migrate, migration—despite being “endemic to globalization”—is a greatly “stratifying factor, leading to a global hierarchy of movements” that “create or reinforce difference” (Salazar and Jayaram 2016, 2). This stratification is produced by states and state actors, who constitute regimes of mobility.

2.1.2 Regimes of Mobility

Migrants' self-perceptions are influenced by their awareness of limitations and restrictions placed on migration, as their interpretation of their presence in a host society is impacted by whether they see themselves as included or excluded. Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013, 188) detail the concept of “regimes of mobility,” which refers to the network of state actors that permit and restrict migration, thereby controlling who is and is not afforded greater degrees of ease in migrating. In employing regimes of mobility, “states construct forms of civic stratification in which specific migrant categories have different rights of entry and residence, and different access to rights” (Atac 2014, 277) and direct migration flows by asserting authority over which groups are permitted to migrate into its borders (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 195). Migration politics thus carry deep meaning for migrants, as it signals to them whether or not their presence is included or excluded in a host society. The ability to migrate, as discussed by Salazar and Jayaram (2016, 2), signals mobility and is associated with “three positively valued characteristics: (1) the ability to move; (2) the ease of freedom of movement; and (3) the tendency to change easily or quickly” that is assumed to result in “improvement for oneself and one's kin.” However, “the legal ability and right to travel” is not equally accessed by all, indicating that this access to mobility has “become one of the criteria by which class is defined and class privilege [is] upheld” (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 196). Migration discourse thus sends signals to migrants which they interpret as including or excluding their presence.

2.1.3 Transnationalism Against Methodological Nationalism

Conducting this research requires greater understanding of the transnational processes inherent to contemporary waves of migration. Scholars argue that migration is the norm and the assumption of stasis is not scientifically supported (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 185). Wolf (2010, 3) calls for a deeper examination of how “the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes” instead of studying human beings as isolated from one another. Studying from a perspective of isolation results in methodological

nationalism, which is defined as “an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states” (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 185). Methodological nationalism carries the implication that migration is one-dimensional, which greatly overlooks the complexity of migrant lived experience. Combatting methodological nationalism, as argued by Wolf (2010), benefits migration research by emphasizing the multifaceted impacts of migration on migrant self-perceptions. Focus must be placed on portraying the deep connections between migrants and the sociopolitical circumstances in which they live.

2.2 Difference Making

2.2.1 Diffraction and the Interactional Nature of Difference Making

Difference making, as studied by Amade M’charek, is the first of three major theoretical lenses utilized in this master’s thesis. M’charek utilizes the metaphor of wave diffraction, as seen in light waves, to illustrate the process of difference making. Diffraction is “the bending of waves around obstacles and the spreading out of [...] light rays” from a point of origin that are released into a surrounding environment (M’charek 2010, 308). Metaphorically, the point of origin represents a person, and the “rays” are signals a person releases into their surrounding environment via their physical appearance or behavior. Rays released through diffraction of multiple sources interact, or “interfere” with each other, changing how rays appear (M’charek 2010, 308). When multiple wave patterns interact with each other, they produce a changed expression of light rays. Similarly, when varying individuals or groups of people encounter each other, variations in their outwardly expressed characteristics become more apparent and such encounters can prompt changes in the expression of these characteristics (M’charek 2010, 308).

Difference making is highly interactional. M’charek (2010, 308) notes that “diffraction is about interference and about objects emerging as the very effect of interference patterns.” Outwardly expressed characteristics release signals into a surrounding environment, which responds to the expression of these characteristics. In this study, outwardly expressed characteristics are physical characteristics and behaviors expressed by migrants, while the response is the reception of such characteristics by peers native to a host society. Migrant self-perception is impacted by this reception, illustrating “that objects or subjects do not have an essence, but are indeed [...] effects of our interaction with the world” (M’charek 2010, 308). Migrants experience difference making through diffraction, resulting

in a continual renegotiation of one's self-perception. Migrants' self-perceptions are thus shaped over time by difference making through their interactions with their host society.

2.2.2 Racial Components of Difference Making

Difference making is also intertwined with race because race is one example of an outwardly expressed characteristic that signals variation. Current anti-migration discourse—in Austria and beyond—criticizes outwardly expressed characteristics of migrants that are deemed to vary from established norms. M'charek (2010, 313) argues that “differences are relational” because “they materialize in the very relations that help to enact them” and become apparent in “moments of tension” between varying groups. Migrants who perceive themselves as targeted by anti-migration discourse encounter moments of tension in their interactions with their surrounding environments. M'charek (2010, 318) also states that “differences [...] are neither stable nor given” because the interactional nature of difference making means it is a highly context-dependent process. Difference making arises in interaction when a visible variation in appearance or behavior arises. This is where race and ethnicity begin to play a role. The definition of race takes two distinct forms: race is viewed as either a biological fact or a social concept (M'charek 2013, 421). From the biological perspective, race is viewed as something genetic. From the social perspective, race is seen as something fictional that produces differing social outcomes. As with difference making, “race is a relational object” because “the boundary between the “biological” and the “social” is not given or stable but one that is enacted in practices” (M'charek 2013, 420). I propose that the overlap of the biological and social perspectives combine to define race in this research, as one's outward appearance has an impact on their interactions with their environment based on the established norms in that environment.

2.3 (Non)Belonging and Othering

2.3.1 Insecure Belonging and Internalized Othering

Understanding the concept of belonging further assists in explaining migrant self-perceptions. “Belonging” is defined as “identifying with and feeling attachment to a social group” (Simonsen 2018 in Rottmann 2023, 4) and is “a personal *and* political struggle” that “migrants negotiate every day with locals and with the state via institutions that incorporate or exclude them as part of integration policy” (Rottmann 2023, 2). Belonging is impacted by both interactions with state institutions and the broader sociopolitical context in which

migrants live. Rottmann (2023, 6) notes that “hostile political discourses and anti-immigrant debates in the public sphere” play a significant role in influencing migrant feelings of belonging because they “reinforce inequalities and damage political trust and faith in democratic systems.” This can cause migrants to internalize such debates and “stake belonging on blending in and thereby becoming more or less politically and socially “invisible””—especially if they perceive themselves as the intended targets of anti-migration discourse (Rottmann 2023, 6). Rottmann (2023, 6) further argues that “rather than an accidental byproduct of the incoherent governance, fostering insecure belonging for migrants may be a purposeful strategy to keep them out of the nation” which connects to Glick Schiller and Salazar’s (2013) concept of mobility regimes. Exclusionary techniques such as othering are key to promoting insecure belonging, as “processes of differentiation and constructions of a dangerous Other are crucial to imaginations of symbolic and material walls and borders, regulating who is allowed to enter a given territory and who is not” (Wodak 2020, 161). Important to note is that “national political discourses matter for belonging,” as they can have “a significant (and negative) effect” on target groups of anti-migration discourse such as “national political discourses that position [migrants] as “other,” “temporary,” “backward,” and even “dangerous” to the society” (Rottmann 2023, 10). These narratives directly impact migrants labeled as the other because such narratives cause them to “*internalize borders* emotionally and cognitively” (Wodak 2020, 165). Exclusionary practices also distort what is thus deemed to be integration versus assimilation.

2.3.2 The Blurring of Integration and Assimilation

In the sociopolitical context of Germany and Austria, insecure belonging is reinforced through “an idea of integration as assimilation” that pressures migrants to present themselves as a “model” or “responsible” migrant to earn a sense of belonging (Rottmann 2023, 9). In Austria, integration is at the forefront of the migration debate and heavily shapes migrants’ efforts to participate in Austrian society (Schnelzer, Hintermann and Kern 2021). In the current “age of deterritorialisation [...], placelessness [...], and disembedding,” hybrid identities and transnational social spaces are formed in which migrants feel neither completely Austrian nor of their own nationality (Schnelzer, Hintermann and Kern 2021, 72, 73). Difference making is central to the assimilation versus integration debate. As argued by Nagel and Staheli (2008, 83), “dominant groups are willing to accept only certain types or degrees of difference as compatible with the wider societal aim of ‘integration’” and can push for migrants to adhere more closely to societal norms to earn acceptance or approval from

their host society. Efforts to assert belonging are prompted by “the imposition of the dominant language and culture as legitimate and by the rejection of all other languages [and cultures] into indignity” via political and bureaucratic mechanisms that migrants conceptualize as representative of migration politics and discourse (Bourdieu 1994, 62). Expectations of assimilation disguised as integration can present the language and culture of a host society as universal and thus superior to those of migrants, which “fosters both the monopolization of the universal by the few and the dispossession of all others” (Bourdieu 1994, 62). Whether a migrant perceives oneself as fitting norms influences their life satisfaction, career patterns and habits of establishing themselves within their host country (Özlü-Erkilic 2015, Winterheller and Hirt 2016). Being marked as integrated or unintegrated is thus influenced by “politics of visibility and invisibility” due to its close connection with physical appearance and behavior in contemporary anti-migration discourse (Nagel and Staheli 2008, 92). According to this logic, migrants become responsible for their own assimilation but paradoxically may lack opportunities to engage with the host culture due to internalized social borders and exclusionary practices that accompany the push for migrants to assimilate (Nagel and Staheli 2008, 83; Wodak 2020, 165).

2.4 Critical Whiteness and Politics of Visibility

2.4.1 Whiteness as Behavior and Appearance

Social pressure on migrants to assimilate is linked to critical whiteness studies, which defines the concept of “whiteness” as a behavioral and/or physical norm by which those living within a society are expected to adhere or aspire to (Nayak 2007, 738). Markers of whiteness through appearance and behavior are “chained to an index of unspoken privileges” which provide greater ease in navigating everyday life (Nayak 2007, 738). For example, a greater degree of whiteness provides people with greater “access to financial resources, educational opportunities, health care, property rights and so forth” which afford them an easier way of preserving their livelihood in comparison to those with less privilege (Nayak 2007, 738-739). Nayak (2007, 737, 738) notes that “like most social norms, [whiteness] has operated as a taken-for-granted category” which “is the rubric through which many of our ideas of citizenship and human rights are written.” Whiteness in a sociopolitical setting is what the default appearance and behavior of a society is defined as. As described by Nayak (2007, 738), whiteness in the context of this research is a spectrum of how close to or far from the host society standards migrants perceive themselves to be. Considering integration’s

role in anti-migration discourse, the lens of critical whiteness assists in dissecting how such discourse impacts migrants' self-perceptions in relation to the established norms in a host society.

2.4.2 White Privilege and Racism

Crucial to understanding whiteness is also an understanding of the hierarchies produced by white privilege. Whiteness and race are tied to the stratification produced by regimes of mobility, including the effects of racism. To define racism, I combine Foucault's (2004, in Greene 2023, 2134) definition of racism as "the discourse of a combat to be carried out "not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage"" and Wilson Gilmore's (2007, 247 in Grabham 2018, 15) definition of racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." Foucault's definition is connected to anti-migration discourse via the politics of fear and demographic panic as conceptualized in section 2.6.3 and Wilson Gilmore's definition is illustrated by various concepts related to the anthropology of bureaucracy in section 2.5.

2.4.3 Politics of Visibility

Outward appearance most blatantly categorizes individuals as either fitting or not fitting a white norm. This process is linked to the politics of visibility which produces a spectrum of "immigrant visibility" and "immigrant invisibility" on which some individuals are assumed to be migrants while others are not (Leinonen 2012, 214, 216). Visibility is "a bodily experience," as characteristics varying from established norms such as "skin color" and "cultural affiliation [...] are deemed to be 'out of place' and disruptive of the 'natural' or 'normal' order of things" in a host society (Leinonen 2012, 216). These identifiers are reinforced by the dictation of which characteristics constitute the norm in a host society, which are contributed to by anti-migration discourse. M'charek (2010, 311) writes that there is indeed a necessity for more diversity in public spaces that can be achieved by providing migrants a greater platform in host societies, but this often produces challenging circumstances. Migrants that are highly visible can be expected to assimilate be more palatable to fit norms (M'charek 2010, 311). However, expecting migrants to subdue their variation from norms in physical appearance and behavior preliminarily undermines greater

authentic representation because it implies that “diverse” individuals must act according to the established norms (M’charek 2010, 311).

Sharing her own lived experience, M’charek (2010, 310, 311) discusses the start of the Gulf War and the subsequent political symbolism that her hair, as a woman with Arab heritage, adopted. Her self-perception as a migrant with Arab heritage in the Netherlands was greatly influenced by the negative sociopolitical associations attached to her appearance, which pushed her to cut her hair very short (M’charek 2010, 311). Her aim was to appear more ethnically ambiguous in the hopes of being afforded a greater degree of ease in her everyday life (M’charek 2010, 311). Implementing this strategy to mitigate her visibility as a migrant in Western Europe is a profound response to encountering difference making. Physical appearance and behavior are crucial to migrants’ self-perceptions, as visible variations from what is presented as the norm can potentially push them to modify their visibility in their host society.

2.5 Anthropology of Bureaucracy

The second main theory employed in this master’s thesis is the anthropology of bureaucracy. Particularly the characteristics of bureaucracy that impact bureaucratic clients’ the self-perception are emphasized, given that the interviewees of this study are bureaucratic clients.

2.5.1 Symbolic Production’s Role in Producing Social Problems

Foremost, those living within the territory of a state are profoundly impacted by the degree of power the states possess. Pierre Bourdieu (1994, 56) identifies a state’s ability to exercise power over those living in its territory via “organizational structures and mechanisms [...] in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought.” A state, with its bureaucratic institutions, “imposes common principles of vision and division, forms of thinking [...] and it thereby contributes to the construction of what is commonly designated as national identity,” resulting in a framework that conceptualizes which characteristics are seen as belonging or not belonging to this national identity (Bourdieu 1994, 61). Interactions with state institutions can thus symbolize to bureaucratic clients whether their presence is accepted within a state’s territory. This symbolization is called “symbolic production,” and it fabricates bureaucratic obstacles for some in the form of “social problems” or bureaucratic challenges, while others navigate bureaucracy with a

greater degree of ease (Bourdieu 1994, 55). Migrants' interactions with the MA 35 as a state institution are analyzed in this study to assess to which extent interviewees see their self-perceptions as influenced by symbolic production. Given that some migrants' first-ever contact with the MA 35 was also often their first-ever contact with the Austrian state, this contact can prompt migrants to draw conclusions about whether their presence is accepted.

2.5.2 Street-Level-Bureaucrats and Their Discretion

In interacting directly with state institutions, migrants engage with bureaucratic employees as what Michael Lipsky (2010, 3) calls "street-level bureaucrats" who are "public service workers who interact directly with citizens." Street-level bureaucrats also "have substantial discretion in the execution of their work," an aspect inherent to the structure of bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010, 3). In the context of this master's thesis, MA 35 employees are street-level bureaucrats and able to exercise significant discretion over residence permit applications. If migrants are observant of anti-migration discourse, they may make connections between the observed discourse and their interactions with Austrian state institutions. In combination with symbolic production, migrants can conceptualize an interaction with state institutions as "an instance of political delivery" (Lipsky 2010, 3). Bureaucratic employees thus symbolize state authority to migrants through their ability to exercise discretion over bureaucratic procedures and perpetuate symbolic production. Lipsky (2010, 66) argues that "to be treated with respect, or utter disrespect, by these symbols of authority have implications for citizens' views of themselves" because interactions with bureaucrats form client beliefs regarding "whether they are or are not the kind of person to whom respect is normally granted." Interactions with bureaucratic employees thus represent the materialization of political dynamics to bureaucratic clients in their interactions with the state. Along with bureaucratic employees' discretion, this indicates a power imbalance between bureaucratic clients and employees. Lipsky (2010, 66) underscores that that, "when one person in an interaction has status and power relative to the other, the signals emanating from that person are particularly potent" and "since a person's self-concept is substantially a function of the response of others who are important to the person, interactions with street-level bureaucrats have psychological as well as material implications." Bureaucratic interactions with the state thus influence migrant self-perceptions, as a bureaucrat's discretion perpetuates symbolic production and is often connected to migrants' understanding of the broader sociopolitical context in which they live.

2.5.3 Bureaucratic Impartiality

A paradox arises in the structure of bureaucracy, as bureaucratic employees possess a high degree of discretion, but bureaucracy is also expected to be impartial. Max Weber (1979, 956, 959) highlights that bureaucratic employees are expected to responsibly serve the public and impartially adhere to bureaucratic rules, but that the lines of responsibility are blurred by the high degree of discretion which bureaucrats are afforded. Because bureaucratic institutions can likely become overloaded with work, bureaucratic employees are sometimes “undertrained or unexperienced” due to a lack of time and resources to be properly trained in the highly particular rules and regulations of, for example, the process of a residence permit application (Lipsky 2010, 31). Herzfeld (1992) argues that the concept of impartiality, without proper training, risks misuse in the form of using discretion to disregard clients’ circumstances and their need for public resources. Additionally, bureaucracy is not always transparent in its communication with clients. Weber (1979, 992) emphasizes that secrecy can be utilized by state institutions to exercise power over bureaucratic processes, which results in a lack of transparency and availability of information for those utilizing state institutions. Specific to migration authorities such as the MA 35, a high degree of bureaucratic discretion in a sociopolitical context with prevalent anti-migration discourse can provoke suspicion amongst migrants that bureaucratic employees working for migration authorities utilize their discretion to exercise personal biases when processing residence permits (Schulz and Weiss 2005, 395).

2.6 Imaginaries

2.6.1 Imaginaries as Embedded in Deep Social Meaning

Exclusionary portrayals construct images of the other called imaginaries, which impacts how a given group is perceived by their surrounding environment as well as how that group imagines themselves. According to Arjun Appadurai (1990, 5), imagination “has become an organized field of social practices” which dictates how social life is performed. Imaginaries are created when people “construct, socioculturally, peoples and places as mixtures of the assumed ‘real’ and the imaginary,” which “has the ability to contradict reality” (Salazar 2020, 770). Despite being at least partially fictional, imaginaries play a nonetheless significant role in dynamics of inclusion and exclusion due to being “part of the glue that holds groups together because they act as the ‘energetic source’ that inspires social life” (Salazar 2020, 771). Imaginaries fuel sociopolitical discourse and are highly resistant to

change “because they are culturally shared and socially transmitted” (Salazar 2020, 771). Thus, their deep embeddedness in culture is consistently reaffirmed through social practices. Borders, for example, are enacted based on imaginaries by including or excluding migrant groups’ presence within a given territory, thus also carrying meaning for these groups’ self-perception. This constructs social borders which are internalized by migrants and are either crossed or avoided based on how migrant groups understand migration discourse in their host society (Salazar 2020, 772-773). How migrants are portrayed in imaginaries indicates that “imaginaries—whether true or false, or somewhere in between—have real enough effects” upon their lived experiences and self-perceptions (Salazar 2020, 774). The aim of discussing imaginaries is not to prove whether such imaginaries are true or to which extent they reflect reality—imaginaries are *imagined* and at least partially fictional, thus they reflect assumptions that varying groups make about each other instead of representing people in a completely factual way. Rather, the aim is to underscore the existence of imaginaries and the role they play in the lived experiences of this research’s interviewees.

2.6.2 Political Imaginaries

Political imaginaries are the third and final main theoretical lens in this master’s thesis. Particularly relevant to analyzing interviewee experiences are political imaginaries of migrants, as they assist in explaining current sociopolitical elements that impact interviewees’ self-perception. Political imaginaries of migrants are the political representations perpetuated about migrants with the assistance of media, making such images “available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai 1990, 9). Such media includes pictures, videos, broadcasting mechanisms and media outlets themselves, for example. These imaginaries present “images, narratives, and ethnoscares to viewers [...] in which [...] the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed,” meaning that “the lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes are blurred, so that, the further away these audiences are, [...] the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds” about each other (Appadurai 1990, 9). This is where difference making and political imaginaries intersect, as constructing political imaginaries requires distance and interactional difference making.

2.6.3 The Politics of Fear and Mediatized Politics

Imaginarities are visible in right-wing utilization of media to spread political imaginaries about migrants, especially given that political imaginaries are constructed on the basis of distance and exclusionary mechanisms. Such images have assisted the promotion of fear-based “legitimation strategies” of migrant marginalization in the post-9/11 era and since approximately 2015 when the so-called refugee crisis since occurred (Wodak 2020, 160). A sense of community in right-wing politics is created by establishing “a shared closeness” and “on the basis of a shared antagonist” through representations of a given antagonist (Shohat 1995, 169). In the case of anti-migration discourse, a migrants is portrayed as the antagonist. Such representations are what Arjun Appadurai (1990, 298-299) defines as “mediascapes,” which are “image-centered” and “narrative-based accounts of snippets of reality [...] out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives.” Put simply, dissemination of media material—especially in today’s digital age—is widespread and often based upon only small fragments of reality from which narratives about the other are constructed, and from which public opinion is at least partially formed.

Exclusion of migrants via exclusionary practices is a key characteristic of the politics of fear, which is utilized to persuade voters that migrants pose a threat to their host society by perpetuating negative, imagined images of migrants (Wodak 2020, 162). Wodak (2020, 161-162) argues that “processes of differentiation and constructions of a dangerous other are crucial to imaginations of symbolic and material walls and borders, regulating who is allowed to enter a given territory and who is not.” In this way, anti-migration discourse especially capitalizes on the “demographic panic” of older voters, which is the “fear that a country and its population ceases to exist” due to migration and that the native population will be “overwhelmed, that their “culture” will become extinct” (Wodak 2020, 173). Right-wing politicians disseminate anti-migration discourse via “mediatized politics,” which is defined as “politics that actually depends on the mechanisms and reach of mass media, which is therefore ineffective without them” (Wodak 2020, 163). Negative political imaginaries of migrants and right-wing parties’ political gain from these imaginaries illustrates how “the power of discourse creates regimes of quasi ‘normality,’ i.e. what is deemed ‘normal,’ e.g. with regard to the political messages circulating during an election campaign” (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 237). This profoundly impacts migrants’ self-perceptions and their interactions with their host society in relation to how they are portrayed.

2.6.4 Fear-Based Migrant Imaginaries in Austrian Politics

Political imaginaries of migrants perpetuated by Austria's right-wing political parties capitalize on populism, Austrian nativism and xenophobia by portraying migrants as a threat to Austria (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 237). The extent of immigrant visibility, because of who is seen or not seen as "the migrant," is what can label migrants "as threatening or problematic by the majority population in cultural, economic, social or cultural terms" (Leinonen 2012, 216). Those exhibiting outward signals of being "the migrant" are targeted by such imaginaries, while others not identified as such receive little to no political attention due to their immigrant invisibility (Leinonen 2012, 216). Current narratives employed by Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ) about "the migrant," for example, "draw on the Nazi nativist discourses" that "recontextualize antisemitic and racist appeals of the 1930s which excluded Jews from council housing and other apartments, schools and professions" that are today used against recent migrant waves, posing significant danger to "any pluralist and liberal democracy because it is hugely divisive, excludes specific people [...] and is instrumentalized to trigger nativist movements" (Wodak 2020, 164). Not only are migrants "dehumanized" by this discourse, but also "their number is exaggerated to suggest an invasion by an alien and dangerous culture which will subsequently destroy the "pure" Christian Austrians" (Wodak 2020, 164). Boundaries between the public and private are porous, meaning that sociopolitical discourse seeps into the private lives of migrants by affecting their thought processes, opinions and actions, thereby having direct effects upon how they perceive themselves as migrants in Austria.

2.7 Conclusion

The theories above assist in explaining migrant self-perception as influenced by a multitude of factors, to which an anthropological lens contributes insightful perspectives. Migrants from the U.S. and Turkey living in Vienna, Austria who were interviewed for this study discussed constructing their self-perceptions in connection to their interactions with Austrian state institutions. The three main anthropological theories of difference making, the anthropology of bureaucracy and political imaginaries assist in explaining interviewees' process of constructing their self-perceptions. Additional theories of mobility regimes, (non)belonging and othering, critical whiteness and politics of visibility assist in explaining the relevance of the three main theories in the empirical analysis conducted in chapters 5 and 6.

3. Methodologies

Throughout my research, I observed an overall gap in knowledge regarding migrants' nationality-specific self-perceptions in the sociopolitical context of Vienna, Austria. Thus, the aim of this work is to conduct a comparative study on Turkish and United States nationals' interactions with Austrian state institutions as migrants in Vienna, Austria and the impacts of these interactions on their self-perceptions. That the two nationalities interviewed for this study appear to have little in common and originate from contrasting backgrounds was a deliberate choice of research design intended to first identify aspects of the Vienna migrant experience that are more universal, as well as to emphasize the contrasts in self-perception that arise in different nationalities' interactions with state institutions in Vienna. As this work is the first comparative study between these two nationality groups in Vienna I am able to identify, these aspects of design were intentional to both generate knowledge and data, as well as to begin mapping out how various groups of migrants construct their self-perceptions based on their interactions with Austrian state institutions.

3.1 Research Question and Sub Questions

The overall research question for this master's thesis is as follows:

In which ways are Turkish and United States nationals' self-perceptions as migrants in Vienna, Austria impacted by their interactions with Austrian state institutions?

I here define "self-perceptions" as individuals' assessments of their own sociopolitical standing in response to their interactions with the external sociopolitical dynamics present in their everyday lives. To thoroughly address this research question, sub questions are used to analyze interview responses in empirical chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 explores interviewees' interactions with the MA 35 in relation to their self-perception. Thus, the following sub questions guide the chapter's work:

Which systemic aspects of navigating the MA 35 do migrants in Vienna see as influencing their self-perceptions?

- **How do interviewees perceive publicly available information on government and government-affiliated websites as impacting their experiences of navigating the MA 35?**
- **Which connections do interviewees perceive between government and government-affiliated websites and the broader political context in Austria?**

Chapter 6 discusses the impact of anti-migration discourse on interviewees' self-perceptions, with an emphasis on right-wing politics in Austria. Thus, this chapter's sub questions are:

To which extent do migrants in Vienna see their self-perceptions as shaped by anti-migration discourse?

- **To which extent do the two groups of interviewees perceive reception of their use of German as a foreign language as connected to anti-migration discourse?**
- **How do images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP parties of “the migrant” play a role in influencing the two groups' self-perceptions?**
- **In which ways do interviewees discuss their appearance through physical characteristics and behavior as influencing their self-perceptions considering images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP of “the migrant”?**

I define the term “anti-migration discourse” as sociopolitical discourse which negatively criticizes and/or stands in opposition to migrants and migration. Additionally, “the migrant” represents the political imaginary of migrants disseminated through anti-migration discourse—an more in-depth definition of this term is discussed in Chapter 6.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Overall, 13 semi-structured interviews with seven Turkish nationals (four male, three female) and six U.S. nationals (three male, three female) were conducted. All interviews were conducted in English. All Turkish interviewees spoke English at least a C1 level and all U.S. interviewees spoke English natively. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 47 years old. Interviewees' German proficiency in both nationality groups varied largely from less than A1 to C1. Interviewees' length of time living in Vienna at the time of interview varied from one year to 13 years and 11 months. Interview times ranged from approximately 35 to 55 minutes.

3.2.1 Interview Questions and Procedure

At the beginning of each semi-structured interview, participants were asked to choose a pseudonym. Next, they were asked for the following demographic information: age, gender, nationality, native language, level of German proficiency, level of English proficiency, length of time in Vienna (in years and months), the purpose of their migration to Vienna and their current role (student or worker). After the demographic questions, the interviews followed a structure of 7 main questions with sub questions. The interview questions and sub questions are as follows:

1. *Why did you migrate to Vienna?*
 - a. *What specific factors or reasons led you to make this decision?*
 - b. *Which resources did you need to successfully migrate?*
2. *How would you describe your first interaction with the Viennese migration authorities?*
 - a. *What happened in this interaction? Were there any events that stand out in your memory?*
 - b. *How do you feel you were treated? Do you feel you were treated in a specific way?*
 - c. *Do you think there is a reason for why you were treated this way?*
3. *Have your interactions with the Viennese migration authorities changed over time?*

- a. *If so, how have these interactions changed over time?*
 - b. *If not, how has this stayed the same?*
 - c. *In both cases, do you feel like there is a reason why this happened?*
4. *Do you know other individuals of your nationality who have had similar or different experiences with the Viennese migration authorities?*
 - a. *If yes, how were these experiences similar or different?*
 - b. *Why do you think these experiences were this way?*
5. *Have your interactions with the Viennese migration authorities impacted how you see yourself as part of Viennese society?*
 - a. *Within these interactions, do you feel that you are being marked as or seen as 'different' due to your migrant status?*
 - b. *In either case, why do you think you may be marked or seen in this way? Are there any specific reasons why you think this way?*
 - c. *Do you feel that you may be treated differently than a Viennese individual due to your background?*
 - d. *In either case, why do you feel this way?*
6. *Do you think that your cultural and/or religious background may influence how you are perceived within Viennese society?*
 - a. *Why or why not?*
 - b. *If yes, how do you think or see that these factors influence your daily life within Viennese society?*
7. *Have you ever felt discriminated against or viewed as different due to your migrant status?*
 - a. *If yes, what do you do or how do you respond? For which reasons do you think you have experienced this?*
 - b. *If yes, do you feel the need to explain yourself or your behavior to show that you 'fit in' as a migrant in Vienna? Why?*
 - c. *If no, why do you think not? For which reasons do you think you have experienced this?*
 - d. *Does this impact your view of how you are able to fit in within Viennese society? How?*

While I initially postulated that the total number of questions could be too high, their interconnected order resulted in a smooth flow that neither overwhelmed nor confused interviewees. In many cases, a question or sub question was either naturally discussed after the introduction of a main question or was able to be asked without interrupting the conversational flow. I took special precaution not to interrupt interviewees by waiting for them to fully express their responses before moving further along in the interview. If a question or sub question was missed, I waited for a non-interruptive opportunity to ask it.

Finally, I prioritized active listening during interviews by nodding, making eye contact, and otherwise expressing open body language (e.g. sitting with upright and relaxed posture, placing both feet on the ground, facing the interviewee while listening and avoiding sitting with crossed arms). To underscore active listening, I took minimal notes during interviews and recorded the entirety of the conversation with my laptop to avoid making interviewees feel watched or observed. I wanted to ensure that they would not feel as if they were under observation—choosing these elements carefully to set up the interview as a conversation between two people.

3.2.2 Interview Recording and Transcription

While interviewing, I recorded—with interviewees' verbal permission—each interview with my laptop. Each interview was transcribed with the software TurboScribe and saved in my password-protected laptop as Microsoft Word files. As I noticed the transcription software had made some minor errors in transcribing words or distinguishing my voice from the voices of interviewees, I listened to each recording to manually make corrections.

3.3 Selecting Interviewees

Given that contemporary and not historical waves of migration are the focus of this research, only interviewees who migrated to Vienna a maximum of 15 years before their interview were selected. Interviewees were initially pulled from my professional and social networks (9 interviewees total), while my contacts assisted me in utilizing the snowball method

of referring further interviewees (the remaining 4 interviewees) from their own networks. The intention of utilizing the snowball method was to lend legitimacy and trust to my interview process by new interviewees learning about the interview process from a known, trusted contact. I politely requested that my contacts reach out to potential interviewees, ask if the contacted individuals were interested in being interviewed for a master's thesis about navigating Austrian state institutions and share their interview experience with potential interviewees to provide informed insight about participating. If a potential interviewee expressed interest in participating, our mutual contact shared my contact information with them and I waited to be contacted.

United States and Turkish nationals were selected for this research due to my ease of access to both communities. I am enrolled in the CREOLE master's program at the University of Vienna, which is taught primarily in English and thus appeals to an international dynamic of students. Firstly, I have met many Turkish nationals through my studies. The City of Vienna (Stadt Wien 2025a) reported that 46,730 Turkish nationals lived within the city as of December 31st, 2024, which is one of the largest migrant groups living in Vienna. While some Turkish citizens in Vienna belong to the guest worker demographic that arrived in the 1960s, this research's limit of interviewees living 15 years or less in Vienna ensures that Turkish interviewees are part of more contemporary waves of migration. Secondly, I am a U.S. national and have ample contact with this diaspora. Due to my master's program and previous employment positions in Vienna associated with the U.S. diaspora, I have also met many U.S. nationals living in Vienna. According to the City of Vienna (Stadt Wien 2025a), 4,987 United States nationals lived in Vienna as of December 31st, 2024. This is a smaller relative percentage of the city's population, but my ease of access to this group provides practicality to conducting this research.

3.3.1 Pre-Interview Meeting

A one-on-one, pre-interview meeting was arranged with all interviewees to explain my research aim, state intentions for the interview and briefly explain the research design. Additionally, I explained that I also have experience navigating the MA 35, studying the institution in my master's program and assisting friends while navigating the institution to establish commonality with my interviewees. They were also assured that data protection is a

high priority in this research due to the anonymous nature of using pseudonyms and lack of inquiry about identifying information that could reveal their true identities. Additionally, I informed them that all interview material is stored in my password-protected laptop and only accessible by me. In the end, I asked each individual whether they would feel comfortable participating and received verbal informed consent from those who agreed. We then conducted the interview at the same meeting.

The personal and oftentimes emotional nature of interviewees' stories pushed me to think deeply about interviewee comfort and meeting preferences. Thus, I encouraged each individual to pick a meeting spot that was most comfortable for them. Many interviewees I knew beforehand opted to meet in their homes, which they deemed to be the easiest and most comfortable option. Interviewees I met for the first time decided to meet in a café or otherwise public environment that they deemed to be comfortable (for example, a common area in student housing at a low-traffic time of the day).

3.4 Analysis of Sources

A variety of sources in addition to interview transcriptions were analyzed for this master's thesis. These materials include scientific literature, Vienna population statistics, Austrian crime statistics, online news Articles from Austrian news sources, Austrian government and government-affiliated websites, and visual political campaign materials from the Austrian ÖVP and FPÖ political parties.

3.4.1 Comparative Analysis of Interviews

A comparative analysis between both nationality groups' interviews was conducted to find points of similarity and contrast both within each nationality group and between them. All 13 interviews were manually assessed to produce the evidence analyzed in chapters 5 and 6. Assessment was completed through a detailed reading of all interviews, in which thorough markings and notes were made. To determine common qualitative topics addressing the research questions and sub questions, the detailed markings and notes were categorized to identify which

topics commonly arose in interviewees' statements. Finally, categories most relevant to the research question and sub questions were selected to include in chapters 5 and 6.

3.4.2 Literature Review

For Chapter 2, Literature and Theoretical Framework, a literature review was conducted to provide theoretical framework for interview analysis in chapters 5 and 6. The three main anthropological theories utilized in this thesis are difference making, the anthropology of bureaucracy and political imaginaries. These three key theories and all additional theories are explicitly discussed in in Chapter 2.

3.4.3 Population Analysis

To analyze the international population of Vienna in Chapter 4, Context and Setting, statistics were collected from the City of Vienna's official website (Stadt Wien) and visual graphics representing the percentages of Austrian nationals, EU nationals and non-EU nationals living in Vienna were generated utilizing Microsoft Excel. This analysis utilizes most recent data regarding Vienna's population by nationality, which was from 2024.

3.4.4 Crime Statistics

Crime statistics analyzed in Chapter 4 were gathered from Austria's Criminal Intelligence Service (German: *Bundeskriminalamt*) to examine both the most recent data on femicides in Austria and overall crimes in Austria by nationality. The most recent data regarding femicides was from 2021 and the most recent statistics about crime by nationality were from 2024. A graph displaying crimes by nationality in 2024 was generated using Microsoft Excel.

3.4.5 News Article Analysis

Numerous news articles from Austrian online media were used to inform the contextual chapter of this work. Numerous news providers were utilized to provide a more holistic picture

of articles about the MA 35 and its public perception from 2021 onwards, as well as to illustrate examples of high-profile crimes in the media as discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4.6 Website Analysis

As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the Viennese migration system (MA 35) plays a significant role in the Vienna migrant experience. The process of applying for a residence permit is first outlined. Of utmost importance is knowing where migrants receive information needed to apply for a residence permit in Vienna. For both initial and extension residence permit applications, migrants receive much of the relevant information from government and government-affiliated websites. To provide adequate background information and context relevant to the Viennese migration system, multiple government and government-affiliated websites were analyzed. Relevant information includes which documents are necessary to apply for an Austrian student residence permit, the length of time required for an application to be approved, a permit's length of validity, how to submit an application and other additional categories. This analysis was conducted to determine whether informational discrepancies existed across different websites for those applying for a student residence permit and, if found to exist. The websites analyzed include the following:

- **bmi.gv.at:** The Austrian Federal Government's website for the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior
- **migration.gv.at:** The Austrian Federal Government's website for migration into Austria
- **oead.at:** The Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation website
- **oesterreich.gv.at:** The Austrian government's website for public services and information
- **wien.gv.at/kontakte/ma35/:** The City of Vienna's website for the MA 35 and its immigration and citizenship services

The number of individual webpages analyzed for each website ranged from 1 to 7. Information gathered from these websites is listed in **Table 3** in Chapter 5.

3.4.7 Analysis of Visual Political Materials from the Vienna Branches of the FPÖ and ÖVP Parties

To contextualize interviewees' encounters with anti-migration discourse in Chapter 6, an analysis of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party's (ÖVP) visual political materials was conducted. Specifically, the Vienna branches of both parties were selected for analysis to maintain relevance to Vienna's specific sociopolitical context. Although they are two distinct political parties, they exhibit similar efforts to portray migrants as posing a threat to the Austrian people, language and culture. While other political parties certainly exist and comment migration into Austria, the FPÖ and ÖVP's vocal opposition to and negative criticism towards migrants and migration is most easily identifiable.

Visual materials from both parties were found via Google Search and Google Images using the terms "FPÖ" or "ÖVP" in combination with the following words: "Migrant," "Migration," "USA," "Türkei" (German for "Turkey"), and "Amerika" (German for "America"). Criteria used to identify applicable materials from both parties were: general portrayals of migrants; migrants from Muslim-majority countries or with such a familial background; the United States and/or people from the United States; Turkey and/or people from Turkey; as well as any portrayals of or commentary on these nationality groups. The FPÖ's digital archive of election posters on the Political Academy of the Freedom Party of Austria (German: *Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut*) and the FPÖ Vienna branch's Facebook page produced visual materials matching the criteria above (one Facebook post from 2020 and six posters from between 1996 to 2020). As the ÖVP does not have an equivalent digital archive in which its political posters are made publicly available, ÖVP materials were produced by the Vienna ÖVP branch's website and two Austrian news providers (oe24 and PULS 24). Most prominently pertaining to issues of migration was the ÖVP's 2025 Vienna state election campaign, thus all analyzed ÖVP materials are from this election. One website banner from the ÖVP Vienna branch's website and two pictures of ÖVP politicians with posters from the 2025 Vienna campaign were located. Analysis identified messages that the selected FPÖ and ÖVP visual materials connect to migrants, which is explicitly conceptualized as a political imaginary named "the migrant" in Chapter 6. The assessment of these messages was then compared to both

interviewee groups' statements to observe whether they themselves as the intended targets of anti-migration discourse.

3.5 Learning Basic Turkish

Due to longstanding personal interest in familiarizing myself with the Turkish language and culture, I opted to learn Turkish at the A1 level throughout my interview and research processes. I took these courses at the Vienna branch of the Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, a non-profit cultural organization that teaches Turkish culture and Turkish as a foreign language, and attended private tutoring sessions with Turkish tutors outside of class. As I did not apply for any scholarships or funding to take these classes, the course and tutoring fees were paid using my own resources. Throughout the duration of the two semesters in which I took Turkish A1.1 and A1.2 courses, I received education in not only the basics of speaking Turkish but also became familiar with various aspects of Turkish culture including but not limited to social dynamics, cultural customs, family, work environment and religion. My reasoning behind this was to pursue my genuine interest while simultaneously gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural background of Turkish interviewees. I believed that this would provide more common ground between us by signaling that I am genuinely interested in their culture and language.

3.6 Author Positionality Statement

The core of this work closely relates to myself. Readers may notice that connections to my personal experience with the MA 35 are sprinkled throughout this master's thesis, as the topic closely relates to my personal life as a migrant from the United States living in Vienna. My position as a migrant in Vienna and my resulting experiences with the Viennese migration authorities and broader sociopolitical discourse play substantial roles in influencing my self-perception. I have blonde hair, blue eyes and pale, white skin that grants me the ability to 'pass' as Austrian—or, at the least, European—to the naked eye. My upper-middle class socioeconomic status is reflected in my achievements in higher education. When Austrians discover that I come from the United States, I believe I am positively perceived. I feel that I am greatly accepted and

able become more integrated into my environment due to the factors above. I generally have neutral or positive personal and institutional experiences as a migrant. I recognize and have observed that individuals with different characteristics and backgrounds from myself do not always have a similar experience.

As a student in the Cultural Differences and Transnational Processes (CREOLE) master's program at the University of Vienna, I have deepened my connections to many communities from non-EU countries—especially to the Turkish diaspora. This program is taught in English to a diverse cohort of master's students—many of whom are also from non-European Union countries and must regularly interact with the MA 35. Navigating the MA 35 is thus a common topic of conversation in this setting. From my own experience, I understand that navigating the Viennese migration system has potential to be challenging regardless of an individual's German proficiency simply because bureaucratic systems here may be different from one's country of origin. As with any part of being a migrant in Vienna, it is part of the learning process.

When a public lawsuit was filed against the MA 35 in 2021 due to slow processing times and suspicion of discriminatory practices in issuing residence permits, I began closely following current issues of migration in Vienna and read Austria's immigration laws in German. At this time, I was volunteering at a Syrian refugee organization where I heard firsthand the experiences of refugees in Vienna and learned more about migrant experiences outside of the U.S. diaspora. At the same time, I was working as an English teaching assistant in Viennese schools as part of a larger group of United States nationals and began volunteering to help others in this community with their questions about residence permit applications in Vienna. Afterwards, I worked at an academic exchange organization for about one and a half years where interacting with the MA 35 was a near-daily occurrence. This is where my more widespread networking with the United States diaspora in Vienna began, as I worked with a group of approximately 150 professionals from the United States working throughout Austria each academic year. As my interest in these topics grew, so did my connections to the wider international community in Vienna. While I was making more connections with the Turkish diaspora, I began to wonder how interactions with MA 35 and self-perception could possibly vary for different migrant demographics. Thus, I began to discuss navigating the MA 35 with the Turkish diaspora and began taking Turkish courses to increase my understanding.

Through my personal characteristics as described above, my involvement with both the Turkish and United States communities in Vienna and my various experiences navigating the MA 35, I find myself in a unique position to pose and investigate scientific questions about migrant interactions with Austrian state institutions and such interactions' impact on migrant self-perception. Thus, the inspiration for this master's thesis was sparked.

4. Context and Setting

Empirical chapters 5 and 6 analyze the interviews that constitute the core of this study, necessitating contextualization of the dynamics that shape interviewees' lived experiences. Providing the sociopolitical context of interviewees' interactions with the MA 35 and encounters with anti-migration discourse in Austria is crucial to interpreting their interview responses with nuance. Vienna attracts migrants with its high quality of life, educational opportunities and professional opportunities. Thus, the international presence in Vienna is summarized at the beginning of this section to emphasize the scale to which the following contextual topics and empirical chapters impact the international demographics of Vienna. The internationalization of the University of Vienna, the institution at which almost all interviewees studied, is also discussed. Additionally, contextual information about the Viennese migration authorities, the MA 35, is provided to explain public perception of the institution utilizing recent events. Furthermore, characteristics of anti-migration politics in Austria are summarized. Due to their prominent criticism of and opposition to migration, the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) are the focus of discussing anti-migration discourse. Lastly, the associations made between migrants and criminal activity are discussed to establish some common anti-migration tropes disseminated by Austrian media. Analysis of crime statistics concludes this chapter to further assess media representations of migrants.

4.1 The Scale of Internationalization in Vienna

Foremost, the internationalization of Vienna must be summarized to explain the scale to which migration shapes the city. In recent years, one of the most well-known characteristics of Vienna has been its consistently high scores on livability assessments. Vienna has consistently ranked either first or second best in global livability since at least 2022, based on characteristics including stability, healthcare, culture, environment, education and infrastructure (Begley Bloom 2025, June 18). These characteristics mean that living in Vienna involves various factors lending comfortability and ease to one's everyday life, which puts this city on the map as an appealing destination for those seeking to establish themselves while living and working outside of their countries of origin. The international makeup of Vienna's population is not, however, a new

phenomenon. Vienna has been influenced by multiple waves of migration throughout history. Such waves include but are not limited to refugees from the Middle East since approximately 2015, refugees from former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and guest workers from Turkey and former Yugoslavia starting in the 1960s (Bischof and Rupnow 2017, 14, 16), as well as refugees from Ukraine starting in 2022. Even before these migration waves, Vienna was consistently shaped by the movement of people throughout history that have long established it as a city of migration.

4.1.1 A City of International Organizations and Higher Education

A wide range of international organizations and institutions of higher education have established themselves in Vienna, appealing to international demographics of students and employees. Approximately 100 international organizations are located in Vienna, including the United Nations and its broad range of offices, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Amnesty International, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Greenpeace and many more (Austrian Embassy Washington 2025). Particularly relevant to this work is the availability of higher education in Vienna, given the high number of universities within a single city. At the time of research, there were 26 total institutions of higher education in Vienna: 9 public universities, 8 private universities and 9 universities of applied sciences and education (Stadt Wien 2025c, December 3). A vast majority of interviewees for this project were either students at the University of Vienna at or before the time of interview, emphasizing the role that higher education plays in fostering internationalization in Vienna. Even beyond this work, I recognize that a significant portion of contacts in my social circles with non-Austrian citizenships and *especially* those with non-European Union citizenships at the time of research were either currently students at one of the many public universities or were working full time after successfully graduating from one of these institutions. Higher education in Vienna is not only a starting point for many internationals, but also crucial in shaping the city's skilled workforce.

4.1.2 The University of Vienna: An International Hotspot

As almost all interviewees in this research had a student residence permit for their studies at the University of Vienna during or before the time interview, the role of this university in shaping the international dynamics of Vienna must also be summarized. The University of Vienna has a significant number of international students, staff and professors, as well as an assortment of master's programs offered in English and partnerships with numerous universities across the globe. At the time of research, the International Office of the University of Vienna's most recent international report covered statistics from the year 2024.

As of 2024, approximately 36% of all master's programs (41 out of 114 programs) offered at the University of Vienna were taught in English, indicating the accessibility of higher education at the University of Vienna to international students from non-German-speaking countries (University of Vienna International Office 2014, 16). Greater accessibility is reflected in statistics illustrating international student demographics. For example, one third of all students at the University of Vienna (14,922 out of 44,711 total) had a non-Austrian nationality (University of Vienna International Office 2024, 13) and the University of Vienna student body represented over 120 different countries (University of Vienna International Office 2024, 12). Furthermore, 52% of academic staff, 58% of newly appointed professors and 48% of PhD candidates all had non-Austrian nationality (University of Vienna International Office 2024, 5). Given that such substantial proportions of those working or studying at the university of Vienna have non-Austrian nationalities, it must be emphasized that the migrant experience and thus also the MA 35 and discourse regarding migration in Austria hold influence the students and employees at the University of Vienna.

4.1.3 Population Analysis: Vienna's International Residents

To conclude this subsection, I emphasize some of the most recent statistics published by the City of Vienna on the magnitude of international residents living in the city. The latest data regarding Vienna's population at the time of research was from 2024, which includes numbers of the city's total population and the population by nationality. Below, I have included graphs

illustrating the population demographics with an emphasis on those interviewed for this research, as well as tables recording the percentages of each specific demographic discussed.

In 2024, the total population of Vienna was recorded at 2,005,760 people (Stadt Wien 2025a) (see: **Figure 1** and **Table 1**). 64.6% of the population (1,295,341 people) had Austrian nationality and 35.4% had non-Austrian nationalities (710,419 people) (Stadt Wien 2025a). Of the population possessing non-Austrian nationalities, 14.7% of the total population (295,597 people) had European Union nationalities and 20.7% of the total population (414,822 people) had non-EU nationalities (Stadt Wien 2025a). Important to note from this information is that the 35.4% of individuals with non-Austrian nationalities must all interact with the MA 35 on a regular basis. 20.7% of the total population with non-EU nationalities—which is roughly one in every five residents—must regularly interact with the MA 35 to the same extent as the interviewees of this study.

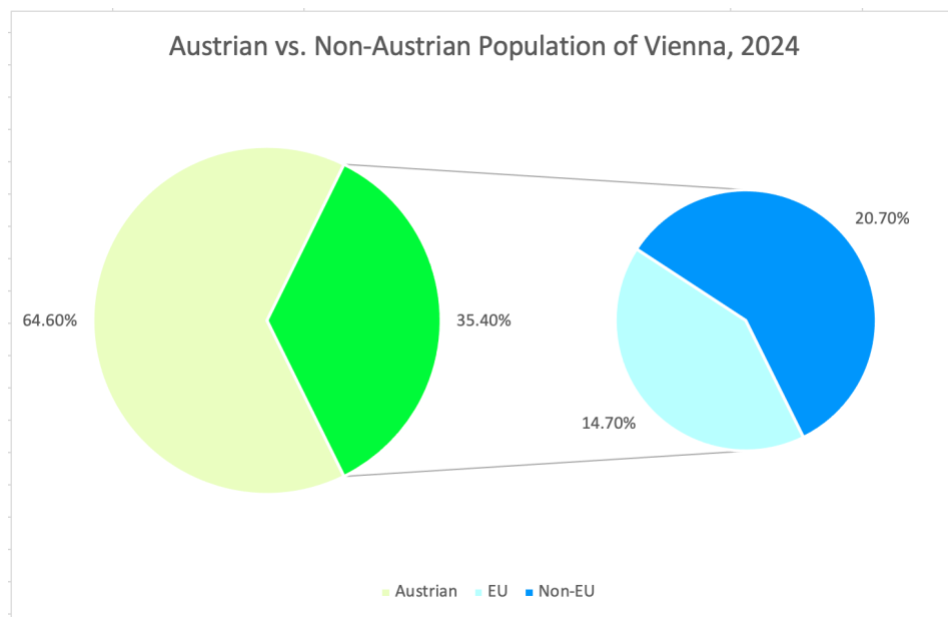


Figure 1: Proportions of Vienna’s population with either Austrian or non-Austrian nationality, including the proportion of non-Austrian nationals with EU or non-EU nationality (Stadt Wien 2025a).

Nationality	Percentage of Total Population	Number of People
Austrian	64.6%	1,295,341
EU	14.7%	295,597
Non-EU	20.7%	414,822
		2,005,760 Total

Table 1: Proportions and numbers of Vienna’s overall population, consisting of Austrian nationals, EU nationals and non-EU nationals (Stadt Wien 2025a).

Looking closer at those with non-Austrian nationality in Vienna in 2024, I opted to show which proportion of non-Austrian citizens is constituted by European Union and non-European Union citizens, as well as to indicate the proportion of this population consisting of Turkish nationals and United States nationals (see: **Figure 2** and **Table 2**). Of the total 710,419 people with non-Austrian citizenship in Vienna in 2024, 41.6% of the non-Austrian population (295,597 people) had EU citizenships, while the remaining 58.4% (414,822 people) had non-EU citizenships (Stadt Wien 2025a). 6.6% of non-EU citizens (46,730 people) had Turkish nationality and 0.7% (4,987 people) had United States nationality (Stadt Wien 2025a).

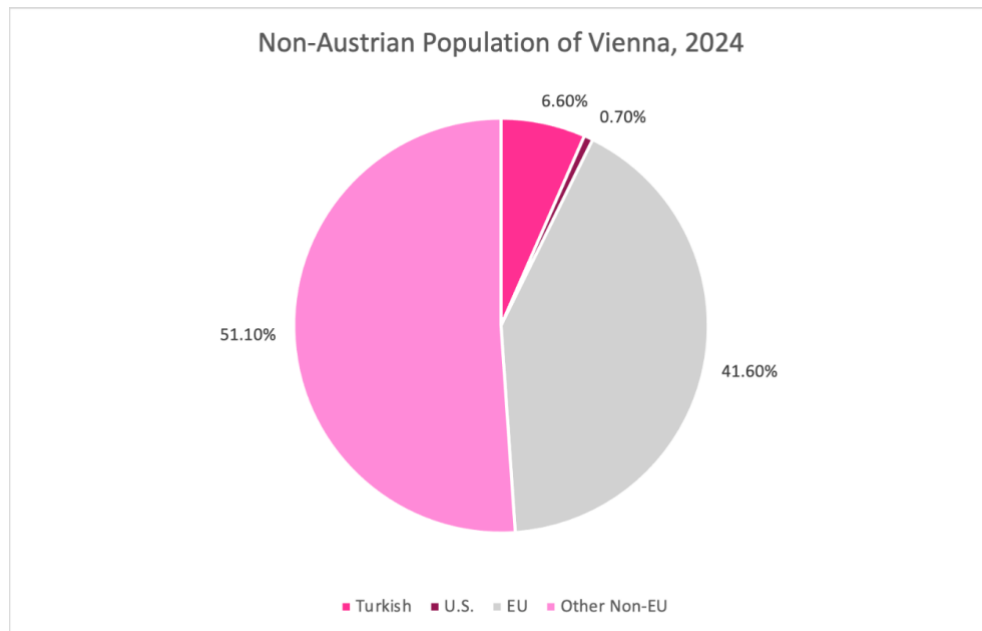


Figure 2: Proportions of non-Austrian residents in Vienna with EU nationalities, as well as those with Turkish and U.S. nationalities and other non-EU nationalities (Stadt Wien 2025a).

Nationality	Percentage of Non-Austrian Population	Number of People
Turkish	6.6%	46,730
U.S.	0.7%	4,987
EU	41.6%	295,597
Other Non-EU	51.1%	363,105
		710,419 Total

Table 2: Proportions and numbers of Vienna’s non-Austrian residents including EU nationals, U.S. nationals, Turkish nationals and other non-EU nationals (Stadt Wien 2025a).

Overall, the proportion of Vienna’s residents with non-Austrian citizenships constitute a significant percentage of the total population that must engage with the MA 35. In total, over one-third (35.4%) of Vienna’s population in 2024 possessed non-Austrian nationalities and thus was required to interact with the MA 35 to differing extents. Just over one-fifth (20.7%) of Vienna’s population in 2024 had non-EU nationalities and was required to interact with the MA 35 to the same capacity as the interviewees in this work. Residents with non-EU nationalities constitute almost 60 percent (58.4%) of the non-Austrian population of Vienna, meaning that approximately 60 percent of all non-Austrian nationals living in Vienna must regularly interact with the MA 35.

4.2 Popular Conceptualization of the MA 35 as an Institution

In recent years, the MA 35 has become seen as one of the most problematic government offices in Austria. One article about migrant struggles with the MA 35 stated that (translated from German) “probably no other office in Austria has been talked about and criticized so much in recent years” due to the challenging nature of navigating the institution (Tomaselli 2023b, August 3). During my own time in Vienna, I can distinctly recall my first two to three years interacting with the MA 35 as being influenced by significant elements of fear and confusion that have since turned into vigilance, general skepticism and sometimes irritation. While I myself have had a relatively positive—or at the very least neutral—experience, the flurry of stories one

hears regarding the challenges of navigating the MA 35 still sparks the aforementioned emotions no matter how successfully I have navigated the system or how long I have stayed in Austria. I state this not to place myself at the center of this contextual chapter, but to emphasize that an aura of difficulty and sometimes even fear emanates from the MA 35 for many migrants and is built into their experience of navigating the Viennese migration system. The application process and interviewee experiences with the MA 35 are discussed more in-depth in Chapter 5. This subsection serves the purpose of describing public conceptualization of the MA 35 as an institution and where such points of view originate.

4.2.1 The 2021 MA 35 Scandal

A public scandal about the MA 35 came to light in 2021, marked by a pronounced uptick in official complaints about the institution an emphasis on a lack of transparency and access to information residence permit applications. In one 2021 interview that shocked the public, an anonymous MA 35 employee disclosed that, although the MA 35 stated they were available by phone after 13:00 on any business day, employees almost never answered the phone unless they could see it was an internal phone number or that of a superior calling (ORF.at 2021b, August 17). Further, the anonymous employee explained the reasoning behind such behavior and was quoted saying (translated from German), “The moment in which one of our speakers picks up the phone and answers a question, word gets out among the applicants. This quickly leads to a large number of applicants becoming informed and getting the impression that they can now get answers from us and get their requests processed. And then they all come in-person the very next day. And then the whole office is full” (ORF.at 2021b, August 17). While the employee later expressed understanding of and concern for the consequences that this has on migrants and their wellbeing, this particular quote was interpreted by the public as the MA 35 keeping information regarding application affairs under a metaphorical lock and key to avoid applicants’ increased knowledge of their own circumstances. This resonated with many migrants at the time, as they experienced the challenges described above. By alluding to information scarcity being built into the structure of the MA 35, this employee believed that any information received by migrants would be quickly communicated to further migrants and the migrant community would quickly make attempts to apply their understanding of such communication to their own cases and thus

try to have better prospects of getting their paperwork handled. This, in turn, produced more stress for MA 35 employees and further pushed them to be noncommunicative, creating a cycle of both informational and communicational scarcity. This interview sparked public outrage and discussions of reform.

4.2.2 Issues with and Concerns About the MA 35 Until 2021

Even before the scandal, stories about the MA 35 taking unexplainably prolonged amounts of time to respond to people's applications were commonplace, portraying the institution as unreliable and difficult in the public mind (Tomaselli 2021, December 12). Stories of people needing to leave Austria due to these prolonged waiting times were commonplace (Brickner and Tomaselli 2021, August 27; Tomaselli 2021, December 12). A substantial number of migrants encountered a processing time of many months, if not over a year, to receive their extended residence permits (ORF.at 2021 a, August 7). Those who waited over a year for their permits experienced especially challenging circumstances, as even after their application would be approved, the residence permit they were waiting for would often already be expired by the time they received notice of its approval. These migrants would thus have to immediately apply for another new permit, involuntarily repeating the cycle of long waiting times and a lack of communication with the MA 35. In response to the 2021 scandal, public complaints about the MA 35 were gathered to assess which issues were most prevalent and where they arose in the application process. By August 2021, 430 formal complaints had been gathered about the MA 35 and their perceived inefficiency and unfriendliness—twice as many as the year before (ORF 2021a, August 7). Stories started accumulating of applicants being dismissed from their MA 35 appointments without reason, amongst other issues highlighted by analysis of these complaints (Brickner and Tomaselli 2021, August 27). It came to light that the MA 35 had commonly caused issues in the following ways: by losing files, exhibiting hostility towards migrants and allowing prolonged waiting times for applicants receiving residence permits (Tomaselli 2023b, August 3). Public discourse turned to concern over the ways in which this impacted the well-being of migrants, as the MA 35 is responsible for international students at the university level, skilled workers, partners of Austrians or other EU citizens, those applying for the Austrian nationality, migrants from within the EU and many more (Tomaselli 2023b, August 3). This is all especially

relevant because roughly every one in three (36.4%) of all people living in Vienna as of 2025 had a non-Austrian citizenship, a figure that has steadily increased since the 2021 MA 35 scandal (Stadt Wien 2025b, October 12). Independent of whether these individuals with non-Austrian nationalities have European citizenship, they must still interact with the MA 35 to and are thus impacted by the institution.

Another 2021 interview with a woman who described her experience of arriving at the MA 35 for an appointment underlined themes of disorganization, non-transparency and information scarcity. She first waited hours in line for her scheduled appointment because her knocks on the door were ignored and then, when a worker came to speak to her, he ran away after she explained that she arrived for an appointment (Zdziarski 2021, August 9). Furthermore, the woman reported seeing (translated from German) “hundreds of applications [...] just lying around in plain sight,” stating that “this is an unbelievable misuse of highly personal data that anyone can view publicly” (Zdziarski 2021, August 9). In response, a spokesperson for the City of Vienna denied that the photograph taken by this woman of the stacks of applications lying around in the hallways of the MA 35 office was authentic, arguing that (translated from German) “there are strict internal regulations in place within the City of Vienna regarding the storage of files, which are also observed in our office” (Zdziarski 2021, August 9). The photo indicates that the statement offered by the spokesperson could be false by visually indicating that the application for a residence permit and migrant data privacy were not being properly handled at the time. On the same note, a video was leaked in 2021 of MA 35 employees smoking and consuming hard liquor in an MA 35 office that was allegedly the same as the office with hundreds of applications sitting out in the open (Brickner and Tomaselli 2021, August 27; Postl, 2021 August 21). This raised further concerns that ultimately called for reform of the MA 35.

4.2.3 Reform and Persisting Issues

Considering these incidents, public opinion of the MA in recent years has been skeptical and the examples discussed above serve the purpose of explaining how this public conceptualization has materialized. Thus, a reform process was initiated (Secerovic 2024, March 4). By 2023, the MA 35 made efforts to improve its communication and its user-friendliness—however, direct communication still remained a challenge that resulted in prolonged waiting

times and thus necessitated many having to leave Austria to avoid overstaying their allotted visa-free travel days or to overstay a travel visa previously issued for them to enter Austria (Tomaselli 2023b, August 3). Monthly appointments made at the MA 35 were estimated to be 1000 per month by March of 2024 and yearly appointments were estimated at approximately 150,000, which was a fourfold increase in comparison to the previous year (Secerovic 2024, March 4). The MA 35 hired many new employees in response to this sharp increase in appointments (Secerovic 2024, March 4). Lastly, the MA 35 had become noticeably more accessible by phone as of this time, as the average waiting time for a phone call to be answered was calculated to be 74 seconds by 2024 (Secerovic 2024, March 4). This is a notable improvement from before, when many would not be answered at all.

However, some of the same problems from before persisted according to formal complaints. There was once again an influx of formal complaints about the MA 35 in 2023. For example, some found themselves again waiting around a year for an appointment (der Standard 2025, June 25; ORF.at 2025, June 26). At this time, a record number of 17,700 complaints requiring legal action against the MA 35 were received, which was roughly 1,400 more than in the year before (Der Standard 2025, June 25). In one 2023 news article that interviews three migrants experiencing problems with the MA 35, a lack of clear communication, a lack of receiving information about their residence permit applications and prolonged waiting times while navigating the application process were commonly discussed (Tomaselli 2023a, August 3). Frustrations emerged for these migrants in the form of a lack of clear and correct information regarding documents required for an application and a lack of communication with MA 35 employees about their applications (Tomaselli 2023a, August 3). While some issues with the MA 35 have been solved, others persist. Understanding these challenges lends perspective to interviewees' discussion of navigating the MA 35 in Chapter 5 and the institution's influence on their self-perceptions.

4.3 Anti-Migration Politics and Austria's Right-Wing Political Parties

Crucial to understanding the relevance of anti-migration discourse to this work is having background information on Austria's right-wing political parties. While the right wing does not

represent the political beliefs of the entire Austrian population, its vocal opposition against migration and migrants themselves stand out as opposition against migrant presence in Vienna. Xenophobia plays a significant role in right-wing Austrian political parties' discussion of migrants and migration into Austria, positioning people such as my interviewees at the center of a migration debate that impacts their self-perceptions as migrants. Before visual examples of common themes in right-wing migration debate are examined closely in Chapter 6, this provides background information on these common themes in right-wing rhetoric. The two parties most relevant to this discussion are the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) due to their calls for restricting migration and their perpetuation of xenophobia towards migrants—especially migrants in Vienna.

The expectation of migrants to assimilate is oftentimes presented by these parties as integration. Schnelzer et al. (2021, 71) state the following:

“In Austria, migrants and their descendants are continually called upon to “integrate” into an Austrian “we”, which however remains undefined. [...] Who the societal “we” is and who the “others” are is steadily negotiated and cannot be defined easily in migration societies like the Austrian.”

Schnelzer et al. (2021, 71) argues that defining an exclusionary Austrian label is difficult because Austria has been and continues to be heavily influenced by migration. The expectation of assimilation in lieu of integration—as introduced in the theoretical section—subjects migrants in Austria to expectations of changing oneself to achieve integration. Despite Austria's longstanding relationship with migration, right-wing desires to define an Austrian (“we”), which Schnelzer et al. (2021, 71) note is co-created by defining a migrant label (“others”) as standing in contrast to the definition of Austrian. Given the interactional aspect of defining “we” and “others,” this process highlights the relational and interactional elements of difference making as addressed by M'charek (2010, 308, 313). Strictly defining the meaning of Austrian remains challenging due to Austria's longstanding relationship with migration, shifting right-wing attempts to first define what is *not* Austrian.

4.3.1 Nativism and Opposition to Migrant Presence

Beginning in the early 1990s, Austrian right-wing politics began focusing more intensely on restricting migration (Atac 2014, 280). The FPÖ has concentrated on nativist politics since at least 1999 and was successful during that year's national election due to its (translated from German) "intense anti-foreigner rhetoric" (Schulz and Weiss 2005, 395, 397). The party portrayed migration as (translated from German) "foreign infiltration," labeling it as a threat to Austria's democracy and freedom (Schulz and Weiss 2005, 397). These themes have persisted to today, still shaping FPÖ and now ÖVP discussion of migration, pushing for more opposition to migrant presence in Austria. Of the 23 districts in Vienna, districts known to have higher proportions of migrants have consistently been ridiculed by right-wing politicians and right-leaning media outlets for allegedly being in decline—linking the FPÖ and ÖVP's discussion of migration to Wodak's (2020, 163) concept of mediatized politics. In 2023, Karl Mahrer, an FPÖ politician in Vienna, called Vienna's 10th district, Favoriten, a (translated from German) "crime ghetto," as well as accused (translated from German) "Syrians, Afghans, and Arabs" of "taking away power" from Austrians at the Brunnenmarkt street market in Ottakring, Vienna's 16th district (Fink 2024, April 3). Favoriten and Ottakring have been historically known for their Turkish population and now the presence of Middle Eastern refugees, which has attracted heavy criticism from the FPÖ and ÖVP. While these statements have been proven inaccurate, the action of speaking about migrants in this way nonetheless signals that these parties oppose migrant presence in Vienna. By targeting migrant presence in these districts, Mahrer and other leaders "claim to speak and act on behalf of the *people*" to defend the "homogenous whole" of the "true" Austrian people and claim to "represent the *will* of the nation" (Wodak 2020, 170). These strong anti-migrant sentiments both criticize and oppose migrant presence in Austria, fitting the definition of anti-migration discourse in Chapter 6's research sub question in the methodologies section.

4.3.2 Imaginaries of the Past: The Fictionalization of Politics

Right-wing politics in Austria strategically draw on historical events to support their viewpoints, a tactic that activates deep-rooted beliefs about the "we" and "others" discussed above by Schnelzer et al. (2021, 71). Both the FPÖ and ÖVP commonly draw upon a fear of

Muslims, reaching back to Ottoman presence in Europe in the 1600s, attempting to win over voter support through activating cultural memories that are deeply intertwined with Austrian history. These deeply rooted cultural memories are imaginaries, as defined by Salazar (2020, 771). Traces of the Siege of Vienna, which occurred on September 12th, 1683, are still referenced by nativist politics in Austria today. This defense of Vienna from the Ottoman Empire represented to Austria at the time not only a territorial victory, but more importantly a religious victory as an army of soldiers from Christian nations fought against the Ottomans, who were Muslims (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 232, 241). Narratives associated with the siege portray the victory against the Ottomans as one of Christian supremacy, asserting that Islam and Muslims are inferior to Christianity and Christians because this victory has long been portrayed in Austria as tied to a Christian destiny (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 232). This victory asserts “a valiant past through which the idea and imaginary of Vienna as ‘ours,’ as a symbol of the Occident are realised and sustained,” (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 244).

Given that this victory was portrayed as a sign of Christian supremacy, an imaginary about Turkish and Muslim individuals persists from this portrayal that is reflected in anti-migration discourse today (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 232). Notably, such narratives are deeply embedded in Viennese sociopolitical discourse, collective memory and even curriculum in public schools (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 244). This selective presentation of history in politics is what Wodak and Forchtner (2014, 232) define as the “fictionalization of politics,” or “the blurring of boundaries in politics between the real and the fictional, the informative and the entertaining.” Presenting selective representations of historical events fictionalizes history and generates an incomplete base of knowledge from which discourse originates and is disseminated. In this way, criticism and opposition are established by the FPÖ and ÖVP and against migration. An “overt rhetoric of scapegoating, persecution and victimhood—now referring to ‘invading Muslim hordes’ and immigrants—has been central to the FPÖ’s strategy and is increasingly mimicked by the governing parties,” producing a narrative of migrants as posing a threat to the Austrian population (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 239). The FPÖ and ÖVP frame migration as an endangerment to Vienna, fabricating a need for “defending Vienna against another, current Turkish siege” by drawing upon demographic panic as discussed in the theoretical section of this work (Wodak and Forchtner 2014, 244; Wodak 2020, 173). Concrete examples of FPÖ and ÖVP anti-migration discourse are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

4.4 Negative Associations with Migrants: Violent, Dangerous and Criminal

While the right-wing parties certainly do not represent all Austrians' or specifically all Viennese individuals' political preferences, the presence of anti-migration discourse still occupy space in broader sociopolitical discussion. In my multiple years of researching migration discourse in Austria, representations of migrants as violent, dangerous criminals have stood out to me as some of the most prominent points utilized to criticize migrant presence. For example, in a 2024 media interview with elderly Viennese residents of Favoriten, residents reported experiencing a (translated from German) "feeling of threat" in response to migrants' presence in their apartment buildings, stating that migrants bring "piles of dirt" into their homes, and that they want "away with the work-shy, knife-wielding people" (John 2024, October 25). In this same article, media focus on districts in Vienna with higher proportions of migrants attempts to argue that "knife attacks and youth gangs" are exclusive to such districts, thereby presenting them as threatening to public safety (John 2024, October 25). This resembles discourse regarding the Brunnenmarkt in Ottakring, which is commonly discussed as example of failed integration due to the presence of migrants from majority Muslim countries—although perspectives from outside of right-wing discourse perceive the Brunnenmarkt as exactly the opposite (John 2024, October 25). While the elderly residents of Favoriten mentioned above reported perceiving the vast majority of migrants as unproblematic, they connected their perception of danger posed by migrants to an imaginary of a distant, elusive group of migrants that they themselves were unable to explicitly define (John 2024, October 25). This indicates that right-wing anti-migration discourse has constructed this imaginary of dangerous migrants that is challenging to pinpoint, yet it nonetheless influences discourse that criticizes and/or opposes migrant presence in Vienna.

4.4.1 Migrant Crime: The 2020 Vienna Terrorist Attack and 2021 Femicides

During my first year living in Vienna, I distinctly remember seeing a high amount of media coverage on crimes committed by migrants and those with migrant backgrounds. It gradually became clear to me that each time I saw a story related to a migrant or someone with a migrant background committing a crime, a perpetrator's nationality or migration background was

explicitly mentioned and that if a perpetrator's religion was mentioned, it was almost always if they were Muslim. Both the 2020 terrorist attack in Vienna and the 2021 femicides of two women occurred during this time window, and the reporting on these crimes assist in emphasizing my perception. The perpetrator of the 2020 terrorist attack in Vienna was an Austrian citizen, yet his North Macedonian heritage was emphasized by Austrian media in connection to his activities with the Islamic State. For example, the first paragraph of one article covering the one-year mark after the attack is translated from German as follows:

It was the most serious terrorist attack in Austria in decades: On November 2nd, 2020, a 20-year-old supporter of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group shot at passers-by. The Austrian-born man with North Macedonian roots deliberately chose the location and timing: The entertainment district near Vienna's Schwedenplatz was well-visited on the evening before further lockdown"
(ORF.at 2021d, November 2).

Media coverage of this attack explicitly called the perpetrator "the Austrian-born man with North Macedonian roots" immediately after mentioning his affiliation with a terrorist group, centering otherness in relation to his migration background, his religion and his perpetration of a crime (ORF.at 2021d, November 2). I do not dispute the tragedy of this attack. I rather emphasize the influence that language holds over the portrayal of migrants and individuals with migration backgrounds in the media, especially when a major crime such as this terrorist attack takes place. When such a rare, tragic incident occurs and a perpetrator's characteristics connected to being a migrant or an individual with a migration background are emphasized in public representation of the individual and their crime, these aspects become publicly bound to negative and otherwise undesirable behavior that can be generalized to the broader migrant community. Such representations imply that criminal behavior is inherent to migrants and can be applied to further individuals with similar characteristics to the perpetrator of such a horrific crime.

In the example of the 2021 femicides of two Somali women in Vienna, media coverage emphasized the perpetrator's Somali nationality while further emphasizing his crime of brutally murdering his ex-wife and her friend, his intoxication at the time of the murders and allegations

of rape filed against him in the previous year (ORF.at 2021c, September 14). Additionally, it was explicitly mentioned that he (translated from German) “sought asylum” in Austria, thus drawing attention to his refugee status in connection to his crimes and intoxication (ORF.at 2021c, September 14). Again, I do not dispute the terrible nature of his crimes. Rather, I once again argue that associating rapists and murderers with the Somali nationality—a migrant group that is well-known as coming from a majority Muslim country—perpetuates narratives of crime as inherent to this demographic and to the broader migrant community as was also illustrated in the example of reporting on the 2020 terrorist attack. Upon speaking with my peers and colleagues who also migrated to Austria, I learned that my perception on this emphasis of migrant crime is also so well-known in my social and professional circles that a vast majority of my peers and colleagues were familiar with it. As discussed in the theoretical section of this work, these assertions of who migrants supposedly are generate imaginaries of them that are perpetuated by politics and the media. These imaginaries seep into public sociopolitical discourse about migration.

4.4.2 Crime Statistics

Fink (2023, April 4) argues that both the ÖVP and FPÖ typically ignite topics of debate through combining “two of their favorite topics: crime and foreigners” by asserting that these two are closely associated with each other and that migrants pose an inherent danger to Austria. However, Austria is, in international comparison, certainly safer than a vast majority of other countries across the world (Fink 2024, April 3). According to the World Population Review’s Safest Countries Index, Austria was ranked the third safest country in the world in 2025 based on criteria of “high levels of wealth, social welfare and education” (World Population Review 2026, January 19). Despite this ranking, a focus on crime persists in right-wing anti-migration discourse. While it is true that individuals with non-Austrian nationalities have committed crimes in Austria, the presentation of such statistics is often misleading. To support my argument, I turn to statistics on the femicides committed in Austria in 2021, which is the most recently published data regarding the nationalities of femicide perpetrators in Austria. The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior recorded that 29 femicides were committed in Austria in 2021 (Bundesministerium für Inneres Bundeskriminalamt 2022). Of the 27 perpetrators, eight had

non-Austrian nationality—one each of Serbian, Syrian, Afghan, Bosnian, Romanian, Canadian, Kosovan and “undetermined” nationality—while the remaining 19 perpetrators all had Austrian nationality (Bundesministerium für Inneres Bundeskriminalamt 2022). Despite an emphasis on non-Austrian nationality and femicide perpetrators in the media, 60% of femicide perpetrators in Austria in 2021 had Austrian nationality. This illustrates that femicides are not exclusively perpetrated by individuals with non-Austrian nationalities.

Statistics illustrating overall crime in Austria by nationality indicate even starker deviations from discourse regarding migrant criminal activity. Austria’s Federal Criminal Police Office reported that a total of 335,894 crimes occurred in all of Austria in 2024, with 178,836 crimes committed by people with Austrian nationality and approximately 157,058 committed by people with a non-Austrian nationality (Bundeskriminalamt 2025, 14). The 157,058 crimes committed by non-Austrian nationals is certainly a significant figure, but the breakdown of crimes by nationality indicates that there is neither a single nationality that contributes to a vast majority of these crimes nor do the statistics support right-wing claims that crimes in Austria are inherent to exclusively migrants from Muslim majority countries. After the approximately 180,000 Austrian perpetrators, the next highest nationalities were Romanian nationals (18,926 perpetrators) and German nationals (13,632 perpetrators) (Bundeskriminalamt 2025, 14, 15). The remaining top 10 non-Austrian nationalities that contributed to crime in Austria in 2024 are indicated in **Figure 3** below, which are relatively low numbers per nationality in comparison (Bundeskriminalamt 2025). Additionally, six out of the top 10 non-Austrian nationals that contributed to crime in Austria in 2024 had nationalities from non-Muslim majority countries. Simply put, non-Austrian nationals who commit crimes in Austria are not exclusively from Muslim majority countries and their contributions to overall crime rates by nationality are relatively low—Romanian nationals, for example, were the greatest non-Austrian contributors to crime and contributed to 5.6% of total crime in Austria in 2024 and Germans, the next largest group, contributed to 4.1% of total crime. Importantly, these crime statistics were measured throughout all of Austria and not exclusively in Vienna. It does not appear that certain nationalities are inherently criminal or that crime is inherent to the city of Vienna itself.

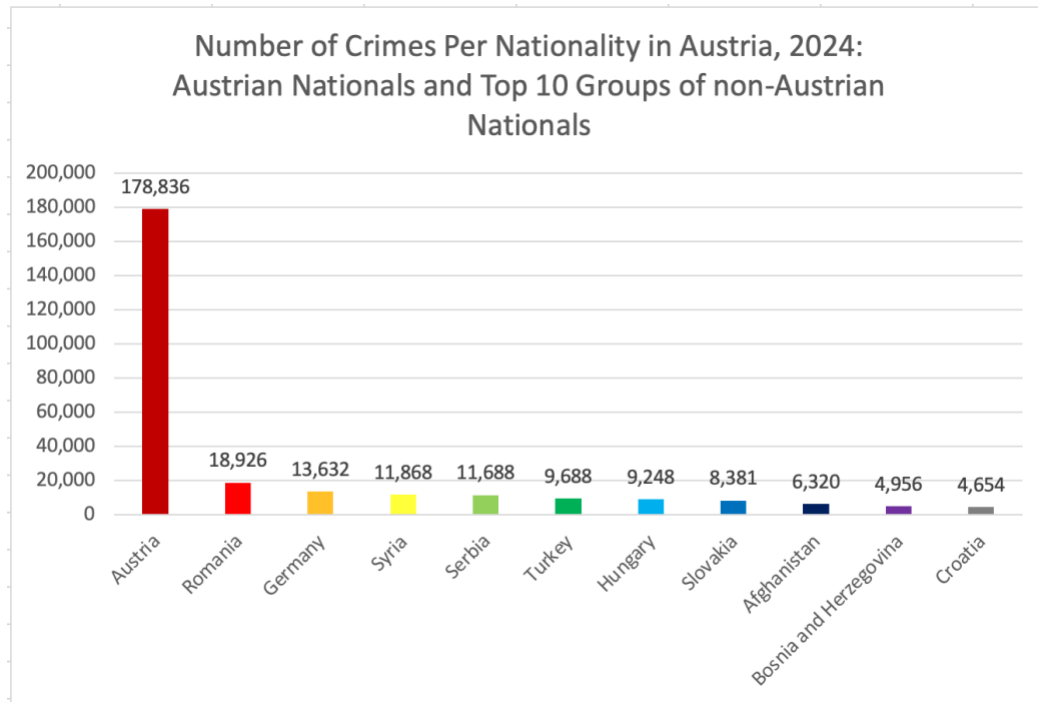


Figure 3: The number of crimes committed in Austria in 2024 by Austrian nationals and the top 10 groups of non-Austrian nationals who committed crimes in 2024 (Bundeskriminalamt 2025).

4.5 Conclusion

Analyzing this variety of factors provides contextual information useful to interpreting the results of this work's interviews in chapters 5 and 6, which focus on the impacts of interactions with the MA 35 and encounters with anti-migration discourse on the self-perceptions of migrants in Vienna. The background information presented above on the scale of internationalization in Vienna, the MA 35 as an institution, right-wing politics in Austria and associations made between migrants and crime in the media provide crucial insight into the current sociopolitical conditions in which migrants in Vienna are situated.

5. Navigating the Viennese Migration System

This chapter's first section provides background information relevant to understanding the Viennese migration system by mapping out the particular nature of applying for a residence permit in Vienna, including the amount of preparation involved each time a migrant applies. The second section addresses topics that Turkish and U.S. interviewees relate to accessing information about applying for a residence permit, which many interviewees report influences their ability to navigate the Viennese migration system. Finally, this chapter bridges to migrant interactions with the MA 35 to whether migrants perceive these interactions as connected to the broader Austrian political context.

When gathering information on applying for an Austrian residence permit and understanding the application process, migrants have two main sources of information: information on government or government-affiliated websites and MA 35 employees themselves. Researching this topic is important for studying migrant access to information about applying for a residence permit in Vienna and explaining how engaging with the MA 35 as an institution impacts migrants' self-perceptions. The research sub questions answered in this chapter are thus:

Which systemic aspects of navigating the MA 35 do migrants in Vienna see as influencing their self-perceptions?

- **How do interviewees perceive publicly available information on government and government-affiliated websites as impacting their experiences of navigating the MA 35?**
- **Which connections do interviewees perceive between government and government-affiliated websites and the broader political context in Austria?**

Again, “self-perceptions” is defined as individuals' assessments of their own sociopolitical standing in response to their interactions with the external sociopolitical dynamics present in their everyday lives.

My research findings indicate that both nationality groups perceive challenges in navigating the Viennese MA 35, which is influenced by their perception of publicly available information on government and government-affiliated websites, as well as their interactions with MA 35 employees. To assess the extent to which their claims about publicly available information hold true, government and government-affiliated websites that provide information about applying for a residence permit in Vienna were analyzed and then connected to interview excerpts. Connections between interviewee perception of websites and interactions with MA 35 employees are then examined. This examination indicates that the two nationality groups diverge in their reasonings behind how they explain their interactions with MA 35 employees. This chapter concludes by discussing interviewees' postulations of their MA 35 experiences as connected to the broader Austrian political context, bridging to Chapter 6.

5.1 Background Information on Applying for a Residence Permit

Understanding interviewees' navigation of the Viennese MA 35 necessitates an explanation of the process of applying for a residence permit in Vienna. Because all interviewees have non-European Union nationalities, they must all apply for a residence permit to live in Vienna. For first-time applications, individuals must book an application appointment at the Austrian embassy, consulate or honorary consulate responsible for the country or region thereof in which they live at the time of application (oesterreich.gv.at 2024b, May 15; oesterreich.gv.at 2024c, May 15). At the time of this research, there were 10 locations in Turkey and 30 locations in the United States at which individuals can submit a residence permit application (Bundesministerium für Europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten 2024). Under certain circumstances, those planning on residing at an address within Vienna can book an appointment at an initial application center (German: *Erstantragszentrum*) in Vienna (oesterreich.gv.at 2024a, May 25; oesterreich.gv.at 2024c, May 15; Stadt Wien 2024c, October 22). Such circumstances applicable to this research include family members of those with Austrian, EU or EEA passports; applicants of a Red-White-Red card who already reside legally in Austria; and those allowed to travel into Austria without needing a visa (applicable to US nationals) (oesterreich.gv.at 2024b, May 15; oesterreich.gv.at 2024c, May 15). These circumstances are not an exhaustive list of

those permitted to apply within Vienna, but rather a listing only of the specific circumstances which apply to the interviewees of this research.

For individuals extending their residence permit, an appointment must be booked at the specific migration office responsible for the city district in which the individual lives (oesterreich.gv.at 2024b, May 15; Stadt Wien 2024b, August 9). Individuals residing within the city limits of Vienna have their applications processed by a branch of the Viennese government responsible for migration—the MA 35 (German: *Magistratsabteilung 35*) (Bundeministerium für Inneres 2024c). It is the responsibility of individual migrants to identify the department (German: *Referat*) responsible for their individual case and to book their appointment at this responsible office, regardless of whether they submit a first-time application (German: *Erstantrag*) or an extension application (German: *Verlängerungsantrag*) (oesterreich.gv.at 2024b, May 15; Stadt Wien 2024b, August 9; Stadt Wien 2024c, October 22).

While a wealth of circumstances exists for the entire scope of internationals applying for an Austrian residence permit, only four different types of permits were evaluated as applicable to the interviewees according to their past and present circumstances at the time of interview. A vast majority of interviewees either had a student residence permit at the time of interview or have had one in the past. Two interviewees (Dalim and Ahmet) had family member residence permits at the time of interview, two interviewees (James and Karl) previously had residence permits for special cases of dependent employment, and one interviewee (Vanessa) had a Red-White-Red card for full-time employment at the time of interview. Due to most interviewees having a student residence permit at some point and 2 interviewees having family member residence permits, only these two types of residence permits will be focused on in this section. The specificities of each type of residence permit are discussed in-depth below.

5.1.1 Student Residence Permit (*Aufenthaltsbewilligung Student*)

12 out of 13 interviewees had a student residence permit (German: *Aufenthaltsbewilligung Student*) either at the time of interview or sometime before—thus, this work’s central focus is placed on student residence permits. To submit a first-time student residence permit application, an application form must be accompanied by a list of documents

which are specified in **Table 3**, with deviations between initial and extension applications. This information is specified in **Table 3** and assessed in the subsection “Key Takeaways from Table 3.” A commonly addressed topic amongst interviewees is uncertainty in terms of where to access accurate and consistent information about applying for a student residence permit. It was not until searching for the information necessary for this section that I realized a vast majority of the information I have previously collected to assist myself in applying for a student residence permit was collected from my social networks of friends and colleagues who had been through the same process before. Strikingly, collecting this required me to look through 14 different webpages specifically associated with Austrian student residence permits, spanning a total of five different government or government-associated branches. Interviewees discuss discovering discrepancies across these websites. This assists in explaining the uncertainty interviewees commonly mentioned when seeking out accurate and consistent information. While applicants are responsible for their own applications, discrepancies could create challenges to them successfully applying for a residence permit.

5.1.2 Family Member Residence Permit (*Familienangehöriger*)

Two interviewees, Dalim and Ahmet, had a family member residence permit at the time of interview. For a family member residence permit, individuals are permitted to apply within Austria if they are family members (this category includes “spouses aged 21 or over at the time of submission of the application,” “registered partners ages 21 or over at the time of submission of the application,” or “unmarried minor children (including adopted children and stepchildren)”) of “Austrians, EU citizens, other EEA [European Economic Area] (from Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway) or Swiss citizens who are permanently resident in Austria” (oesterreich.gv.at 2024c, May 15). For such Austrians, EU citizens and EEA citizens, certain legal requirements must also be met for a family member residence permit to be allowed. Specifically, these individuals must be “employees or self-employed workers in Austria,” “have sufficient resources and comprehensive sickness insurance cover for themselves and their family members not to need to claim social assistance or compensatory allowances during their stay” in Austria and those whose “principal aim of their stay is to obtain a qualification, including professional qualification, from a state school or legally recognised private school or education establishment and they have

sufficient sickness insurance cover and sufficient resources for themselves and their family members” (oesterreich.gv.at 2024d, May 16). Such a residence permit is what interviewee Dalim applied for as his first-ever residence permit. Additionally, interviewee Ahmet applied for this permit after multiple years of being a student and after marrying an Austrian national.

5.2 Interviewee Interactions with the MA 35

In the interviews conducted for this study, interviewees were asked to describe their experiences interacting with the MA 35 over time and their perceptions of the MA 35 as an institution. Interviewees overall indicated encountering common challenges while navigating the MA 35. Their greatest concern in navigating the Viennese migration system stems from accessing correct information. These challenges took the form of reported discrepancies in official information on government and government-affiliated websites and inconsistencies in communication with MA 35 employees. Interviewees explained that these issues cause confusion and create obstacles that stand in the way of them successfully navigating the Viennese migration system. I have become familiar with these challenges through my own experiences and see a disconnect between migrants and the MA 35 that indicates a lack of understanding of the specific challenges faced by those applying for a residence permit. Discourse with Austrian friends and colleagues has sometimes turned to bewilderment at foreigners’ seeming inability to navigate the migration system, as they, of course, must not navigate this system. They are therefore also unfamiliar with the nuances of navigating the MA 35 and how even the smallest the discrepancies in publicly available information can result in large issues for a residence permit application. Overall, understanding migrant experiences with the MA 35 serves the purpose of explaining why migrant conceptualizations of the institution discussed by interviewees exist.

The highly particular nature of the residence permit application process and the far-reaching impacts of even the smallest unclarities go undetected by those who do not need to undergo this process. I would like to emphasize the importance of small particularities to a residence permit application, as one missing or incorrect piece of information poses the risk of an application either being significantly delayed or getting rejected altogether. Understanding these

particularities is vital to mapping out the effects that issues related to navigating the MA 35 have on migrants.

5.2.1 Informational Discrepancies on Websites

Websites related to applying for an Austrian residence permit are rife with detailed information regarding the application process and the required documents—so much so that these websites arguably appear to those uninvolved as having no identifiable discrepancies or errors. However, interviewees report discovering either missing or contradictory information on these websites that have complicated their application process in the past. Interviewees viewed government and government-affiliated websites as inconsistent sources of information due to having conflicting or missing information. This was most clearly discussed by interviewees Vanessa and Maria. For example, Vanessa noticed key differences between German and English translations of the MA 35 website by stating that the German version provided much richer detail in terms of the required application documents:

I look at the MA 35 website. [...] The German version of the website specifies more documents than the one that's in English. Absolutely.

Maria additionally discussed noticing similar discrepancies in German versus English translations of informational websites, with outdated information that she identifies as a barrier to successfully navigating the migration system:

And there are a lot of systemic things in place to create different barriers. Even that all the documents are in German and the translation for the document in English is out of date. [...] Even online, it still doesn't feel like I can say with a hundred percent certainty what everything is.

Besides confirming Vanessa's argument by stating that she experienced the same issue with websites, Maria also expresses that she is not able to feel confident that she is informed enough to be prepared for her residence permit application appointment at the MA 35. These aspects are

not unique to Vanessa and Maria, as a vast majority of interviewees reported encountering the same problems. Thus, I turn to analysis of government and government-affiliated websites that provide information about Austrian residence permit applications to either confirm or deny these claims.

5.2.1.1 Website Analysis

The above statements, amongst others, necessitate an evaluation of the websites containing residence permit application information to either support or combat interviewees' claims. However, upon searching the internet for a relevant assessment I noticed that no such assessment exists. Thus, I conducted an analysis myself for the student residence permit application process. There are several websites which migrants can access for the necessary information to apply for an Austrian student residence permit. I surveyed 14 different webpages from five different websites and compiled relevant information about the required application documents and information about the process itself in **Table 3** to assess claims that informational discrepancies exist. For the purpose of saving space, the table begins on the next page and is intended to be examined before reading the section titled "Key Takeaways of Table 3."

5.2.1.2 Key Takeaways of Table 3

Foremost, the number of webpages consulted for each website varies from one to seven, meaning that migrants are sometimes able to find relevant information on one centralized webpage but must often search around between webpages to get the full scope of information offered by each website and may not be able to easily locate all relevant webpages. Furthermore, each website is missing information for at least one category recorded in **Table 3**—missing information is indicated by a solid gray box. The City of Vienna (*Stadt Wien*) shows only one box of missing information, but four separate webpages were consulted to source all necessary information. Ironically, migration.gv.at, the official Austrian government website for migration, shows the largest amount of missing information with 15 empty boxes. Given the title of this website and the "-.at.gv" ending, it is easily identifiable as the official Austrian government website about migration, but it is misleading due to missing a majority of information. The range

5.2.1.3 Table 3

	oesterreich.gv.at¹	bmi.gv.at	migration.gv.at²	Stadt Wien	OeAD (ÖAD)³
# of Webpages	1	7	1	4	1
Length of Permit Validity	1 year			1 year ⁴	1 year “if all requirements are met”
How to Submit?	In-person (mandatory)			In-person (mandatory) ⁴	
Length of Approval	Authorities must decide on application within 90 days	“The authority must decide within 90 days” ⁵			Within 90 days “if all necessary documents have been submitted”
Form of ID	Valid passport	Valid passport ^{6, 7}	“Passport, identity card or proof of citizenship in combination with an official identification with photo”	Valid passport, a copy of all pages is needed for the first application ⁴	“Valid passport,” a copy of all pages is needed for the first application
Passport Photo	Passport photo 45 x 35 mm, no older than 6 months	“Photo of yourself” or “passport photo” 35 x 45 mm ^{6, 7}		Passport photo not older than six months ⁴	3.5 x 4.5 cm color picture “not older than 6 months”
Health Insurance	“Proof of health insurance that covers all	“Proof about sufficient health insurance in Austria” such as ÖGK	Self-insurance for students and the requirements to apply	“Proof of health insurance that pays benefits in Austria and	“Proof of health insurance covering all

¹ oesterreich.gv.at 2024b, May 15² migration.gv.at, 2025³ OeAD, Agency for Education and Internationalisation 2025⁴ Stadt Wien 2024d, December 31⁵ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2024c⁶ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2023b, September⁷ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2024b

	risks” (translated from German)	“self-insurance for students” or “private insurance” ⁶ ; “insurance policy (covering all risks),” ⁷ ; one page lacks any information ⁸		covers all risks, such as ÖGK or private insurance” (translated from German) ⁴	risks” such as private or ÖGK student insurance
Proof of sufficient funds for a year of studies	Pay/wage slips, pension, employment contract, investment capital, a liability declaration or “sufficient own assets.” The amount needed is not specified.	Pay/wage slips, pension, ^{6, 7} employment contract, property ownership, ⁶ investment capital or “own assets in sufficient amount.” ⁷ The amount needed is not specified.		Pay/salary slips, employment contract, or a savings account for which the origin of funds is explained ⁴ . The amount needed is not specified.	Savings account with “applicant’s name” that is “accessible from Austria” and a declaration of regular expenses. Authorities may/may not ask for the origin of funds. Amount of funds is specified, with extra funds needed for insurance and housing if applicable.
Additional Documents?	“If necessary, further evidence” (translated from German)	“If required by the authorities, you must also present additional documents” ⁷		“You may be required to provide additional documents” (translated from German). ⁴	“The residence authorities may require the submission of further documents and confirmations”
University Acceptance (Initial Application)	Confirmation of admission to program of studies	Letter of acceptance or enrollment confirmation to program of studies ⁶		Enrollment confirmation for picking up residence permit ⁴	Confirmation of admission for initial application if applying outside of Austria, proof

⁸ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2025

					of enrollment when applying in Austria.
Apostilles, Certifications, Translations	Certified translations and apostilles may be necessary for foreign documents. Specific information not provided.	Certified translation for documents not already in German “if requested by the authorities.” “Most authorities will accept documents in English.” ⁷ Specific information not provided.		Certified translation for documents not in German or English. Some may need apostilles. ⁴ Countries requiring these are specified in a separate webpage. ⁹	Certified German translation recommended for all documents. “Documents in English language are also accepted in some cases.” Some documents require apostilles—specific information not provided.
Information about Application Fees?	Includes application fees			Includes application fees and fees for travel documents or other certificates that may or may not be charged ⁴	Includes application fees and fees for travel documents or other certificates that may or may not be charged
Criminal Background Check		“Only for initial application“ ⁶		From country of origin, no more than 3 months old ⁴	From “country of residence,” no more than 3 months old, “legalised and afterwards translated”

⁹ Stadt Wien 2024a, January 10

Housing Documents		Proof of cost of living, as well as a housing agreement or rental contract. ⁶ Secured housing is not required to submit the application. ^{7, 8}		Proof of cost of living in a bank statement or rental contract ⁴	At least 3 months of housing must be secured. Proof of rental contract or housing agreement. Registration of residence must be shown to collect the permit
Continuation of Studies (Extension Application)		“Confirmation, of being allowed to continue your studies”, “proof of successful studies in the last academic year” ⁶ , “a successful continuation of studies in the previous academic year” ¹⁰		Completion of at least 16 credits in the last academic year, confirmation of studies and study sheet ⁴	“Proof of academic success,” “confirmation of your continuing university enrolment” and at least 16 credits completed in the last academic year
Credit Report				A current credit report from the Austrian KSV ⁴	“Current extract from the files of an officially recognised credit reference agency”
Fingerprints				For an extension, the MA 35 will scan fingerprints ⁴	
Copy or Original Documents?		“The documents must always be submitted in original and in copy” ⁷		All documents are requested in original ⁴	

Table 3: Websites analyzed for information regarding applying for an Austrian student residence permit. Sources are cited in footnotes. Missing information is indicated by boxes filled in with gray. Significant discrepancies in information are indicated by boxes filled in with orange.

¹⁰ Bundesministerium für Inneres 2024d

of information missing from different websites indicates that migrants must consult multiple webpages and sometimes multiple different websites to know all the documents they must bring to an appointment and to understand the process.

Discrepancies in information are indicated by a solid orange box in **Table 3**, depicting where inconsistent information appeared between different websites' provided information. Admittedly, some inconsistencies are so minor that they do not appear as such to the untrained eye. However, the strict nature of the MA 35's requirements means that even a small mistake can pose risks to a migrant's application. While numerous discrepancies were observed across the categories of information in **Table 3**, only three will be highlighted here: length of approval, proof of sufficient funds for a year of studies and apostilles, certifications, translations.

One of the most crucial aspects appears on the first page of **Table 3** under the category of length of approval. Crucially, the ÖAD states that an application is approved within 90 days, but only after all documents have been submitted. As this piece of information is missing from the other websites, it appears to readers that an application will be approved within 90 days no matter if extra documents are submitted after the initial submission. Given that U.S. nationals have 90 days of visa-free stay in Austria and Turkish nationals require an entry visa that is also time-limited, time is of the essence during a residence permit application. If migrants are unaware of this stipulation because this information is not presented on all websites, they may risk overstaying the time in which they are able to reside in Austria without a residence permit.

Furthermore, several inconsistencies existed in the list of methods migrants can use to prove that they have enough financial capital to support themselves for a full year of studies. While an employment contract and/or confirmation of wages, for example, appear more commonly across websites, other methods such as pension, investment capital, property ownership and a liability declaration appear sporadically. Even more crucially, the specifications of a savings account vary. While the ÖAD states that such an account must have the name of the applicant on it, must be accessible from Austria and that the authorities may or may not ask for an explanation of the origin of such funds, the Stadt Wien lists that a savings account can be presented and that the origins of the funds must be explained. Lastly, only the ÖAD specified the yearly amount of funds needed for different age groups of migrants applying for a student

residence permit, as well as that extra funds which may be needed for the cost of housing and health insurance.

Finally, the issue of information regarding apostilles, certifications and translations arises in the specific language used to inform migrants about whether documents will need any of these for a residence permit application. For example, the Stadt Wien says that documents in either German or English are acceptable, while the BMI states that English documents are accepted by “most authorities” but that authorities may specifically request them in German—which risks wasting further time if this request is, indeed, made—and the ÖAD reports that English documents are accepted, but only sometimes. The ÖAD additionally states that German translations are recommended, which conflicts with other websites. Only the Stadt Wien has a country-by-country list of which documents require apostilles, certifications and/or translations.

5.2.1.4 Summary

To summarize, the level of completeness and consistency of information about residence permit applications on government and government-affiliated websites varies. This creates challenges for migrants seeking to successfully navigate the residence permit application process. Thus, interviewee claims are supported by this evidence.

5.2.2 Information Received from MA 35 Employees as Contradictory and Inconsistent

Furthermore, interviewees commonly discussed that information received from MA 35 employees has often proven to be incorrect and/or inconsistent, meaning that establishing a foundation of knowledge beyond publicly available information analyzed in the previous section is challenging. Beyond the information found through website analysis, interviewees underscored the complicating effects of inconsistent and contradictory information received from MA 35 employees upon their navigation of the MA 35 and overall conceptualization of the MA 35 as an institution.

5.2.2.1 Missing Documents as an Informational Issue

Foremost, interviewees noticed that the required documents listed online versus what MA 35 employees say they need or don't need from them do not match. This means that, while migrants make the necessary preparations for their MA 35 appointments, their experience is shaped by a certain degree of uncertainty. This uncertainty exists because many interviewees anticipate their interactions with MA 35 employees at appointments to result in requests for more documents which they were not previously aware of, indicating deviations from the rules that were presented to them via the websites analyzed earlier in this chapter. Interviewee James shared his experience with this uncertainty and discussed it taking the form of not knowing what will be requested of him:

Unfortunately, it doesn't really feel standardized as far as I don't think the staff know everything that they require from you. [...] Sometimes they need it, sometimes they don't. I don't know in which instances they need it, which they don't. [...] So I think that the working with the people is hard to stay consistent on. Sometimes they require you to bring it all beforehand, sometimes they require only some things when you apply and some things when you pick up your permit. [...] I think that their rules are inconsistent.

James argues that there is no certainty in terms of which documents will be requested at his appointment, as he has no understanding of which ones in comparison to the websites will be requested or deemed unnecessary by MA 35 employees. Furthermore, he has been asked for this changing assortment of documents at various times throughout his application process and cannot identify a consistent pattern.

This holds true for Vanessa as well, as she stated that she regularly receives requests for further documents despite thorough preparation based on website information and further clarification with MA 35 employees at her appointment:

And they always—I think with the first time too—I was certain that I had everything. But they said, “No, email us or come back with a different appointment about this missing paperwork you need.” And then I came back with it and I said, “Is that everything you need? Is that absolutely

all of it?” And they said, “Yes.” And then I get a letter in the mail saying that I have to leave because I’m missing something.

Vanessa emphasizes a key point that she has received a letter at least once from the MA 35 stating that she is no longer allowed to stay in the country due to conflicting information between publicly available information and her interactions with MA 35 employees. This indicates that migrants experience real-life, negative consequences because of conflicting information, a point which will be further examined in the next sub section.

Further, Edward offered a clear example of receiving conflicting information about purchasing health insurance for his residence permit application that resulted in his application almost getting rejected:

We bought the medical insurance because you had to show medical insurance, and the guy at the embassy said, “Yeah, this goes.” We get here, and I go to get my visa and they’re like, “No, this doesn’t work.” [...] But it was just like now I’m stranded there. I had all my stuff outside of the healthcare thing, but I couldn’t get [my residence permit]. They were just, very bad at clearly communicating what I could do for healthcare insurance.

Edward was initially in contact with a migration office employee at an Austrian embassy who informed him that his purchased insurance met all requirements for a student residence permit. However, upon arrival to Vienna he learned from another employee that the insurance was not sufficient. Due to this, he was unable to receive his residence permit and faced a prolonged waiting time that risked him getting deported. This issue is further discussed in the next subsection.

Ultimately, a majority of interviewees expressed that they do not see themselves as confident in the MA 35 as an authority and as an institution due to such inconsistencies in the information which they receive. Vanessa narrated:

I didn’t really have a lot of confidence in it because the people working there themselves had to either ask someone else or even when I’ve asked them things, it turns out later not to be true.

She indicates damage to her belief that the MA 35 is a trustworthy institution due to informational errors that impact her and many others negatively when the presence of incorrect information impacting her livelihood is highly prevalent. In all of these examples, a risk is posed to interviewees' residence statuses when information is unclear or contradictory between sources. Some real-life consequences thereof are examined in the next subsection.

5.2.2.2 Real-Life Consequences of Conflicting Information

The impacts of the informational discrepancies found on websites and received from MA 35 employees themselves have consequences upon migrants' livelihoods that are well-known enough within the migrant community that some recognize it as an everyday phenomenon. For example, Bianca stated:

I feel like everyone has some kind of story like, "And then I had to fly to the UK because they didn't process it fast enough. Then I had to get out of the Schengen zone."

She notes that many of her international contacts can report having to leave the Schengen Area altogether due to prolonged processing times and the informational discrepancies discussed above. Edward, for example, explained that his issue with health insurance from the previous section caused significant delays in the processing time of his student residence permit application. This pushed him to create a backup plan of going to Serbia indefinitely in the case of a rejection to apply again and wait indefinitely until the process succeeded:

It was just something that was very stressful for me because you have that 90-day Schengen thing. I'm not 100% aware how the laws work around that, but basically I finally got my student visa on day 88. So I already had a plan that if I didn't get [my residence permit] that I'd immediately get a bus to Serbia, and then try again from Serbia, and then use my last few days of my Schengen visa to then get the healthcare stuff set up so that I wouldn't miss too many classes, but also not break the law.

He describes the many bureaucratic moving parts involved in making his backup plan, including his 90 days of visa-free travel, picking a location outside of Schengen and strategically applying for another student permit while indefinitely staying there. While leaving the Schengen area was not necessary in Edward's case, others were not as fortunate.

Dalim narrated what I can only describe as a rollercoaster of an experience with the MA 35 for his initial application upon moving to Austria after finishing a master's degree in Italy. He emotionally recounted the experience:

They sent me back to Turkey, by the way. I didn't want to tell you the story. After Italy, I came here. I moved here from Italy. I had my Italian card and I applied from here. And they told me, "You can stay here. I mean, you can wait for your card." That guy [at the MA 35], by the way, told me that I can stay here. They sent me a letter that I can stay here. I asked the question three times maybe. You know what I mean? I wasn't sure because I also researched on the internet, but I couldn't find anything. So, I asked the person. They sent me a letter. And they sent me back to Turkey. [...] I was always contacting with [the MA 35] and they told me, "Oh, my god. You cannot stay here. How did you do that?" [...] I just learned that I have to go back.

It is vital to note that Dalim was informed he could wait in Austria with his still-valid Italian residence card and was not made aware of any time restrictions that may have been applicable in his case. As he could not locate any information online regarding his situation, he was in regular contact with MA 35 employees to ensure that he would not break any laws. However, after receiving confirmation from an MA 35 employee and consistent communication with the MA 35, he suddenly received a deportation letter reprimanding him for staying in Vienna during his application process, was later arrested by Austria's migration police and subsequently deported. Dalim's experience with being deported despite receiving confirmation that he could stay in Vienna while waiting for his permit not only undermines trust in the authorities, but the conflicting information he received portrays the MA 35 to him as untrustworthy.

Ahmet recounted a similar experience when applying for an extension of a previous student residence permit. In the previous academic year, he completed more than the legal requirement of 16 ECTS credits in his field of academic studies, yet still encountered problems:

Actually, I took 20 credits, but two classes were out of my field, they said. But actually it was. Both of them were topics of feminism and women working—in the social area. [...] It was actually close to my field. I was studying politics. Feminism should be close to my field. [...] And they said, “Okay it’s not your field. You shouldn’t have taken these classes. And you just took these classes only to get easy credits. And we don’t accept this.”

Despite completing more than enough university credits relevant to his field of studies, Ahmet indicated that an MA 35 employee denied that two courses were relevant to his degree and subsequently denied his renewal application. This ultimately resulted in Ahmet being deported to Turkey and having to sue the MA 35 for his right to return to Vienna, a lengthy and exhausting process. Again, this portrays the MA 35 as untrustworthy to migrants such as Ahmet due to the contradiction between the legally stipulated number of credits international students must complete and an MA 35 employee’s decision to deport him although he fulfilled this requirement.

Lastly, I interviewed Çiğdem and her sister Meryem who separately recounted Çiğdem’s experience of suing the MA 35 for the same reason, further emphasizing this unfortunate impression of the MA 35:

Meryem: We had to go to the court. We had to hire a lawyer.

Çiğdem: And even when I was at the court, I had to sue them to get my residence permit.

I myself remember this experience from the year before I conducted these interviews, as it stands out in my memory that Çiğdem provided at least the appropriate number of credits to the MA 35 but also received a letter of deportation like Ahmet. Neither of us could find an explanation as to why her documentation from University of Vienna—including an official letter from the department of her studies—was not accepted by the MA 35. Luckily, she was able to find a lawyer quickly enough to provide documentation that she was awaiting a court verdict and therefore could stay in Vienna in the meantime but was not allowed to leave Austria to conduct her usual academic and professional activities. During this waiting period, she also spent thousands of euros on legal fees—all of which were due to the issue of the MA 35 inexplicably

finding a problem with her ECTS credits. Meryem additionally experienced the same issue not at the time of her interview, but a few months afterwards when the MA 35 made the same claim about her completion of over 16 ECTS credits.

I emphasize these points not to frame the MA 35 as an evil or ill-intentioned institution, but rather to emphasize that there is evidence of a systematic, informational issue regarding the process of issuing Austrian residence permits that, due to the presence of informational discrepancies and miscommunication from the sources that migrants assume they can consult, has deep impacts upon migrants' everyday lives and their wellbeing. Furthermore, that such issues are conceptualized as common knowledge amongst migrants unfortunately indicates that migrants have distrust in the institution and perceived a divide between migrants and the MA 35.

5.3 Conclusion: Speculation of the MA 35 as Connected to Right-Wing Politics

Migrants interviewed for this study conceptualize the MA 35 as unreliable due to the discrepancies in publicly available information regarding the process of receiving an Austrian residence permit and contradictions in information received directly from MA 35 employees as discussed above. The power imbalance inherent to interactions between migrants as bureaucratic clients and MA 35 employees as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010, 3)—coupled with a lack of transparency in information—produces frustration for migrants navigating the MA 35 such as the interviewees of this study, who attempt to establish connections between the experiences described in this chapter and the broader Austrian political context based on their understanding of anti-migration discourse. In this way, interactions with the MA 35 and its employees represent the broader anti-migration discourse in Austria to migrants such as the interviewees of this study (Lipsky 2010, 66) and how migrants perceive themselves as handled by MA 35 employees represents “an instance of political delivery” that impacts their self-perceptions (Lipsky 2010, 3). Interviewees' focus on informational issues and a lack of understanding of residence permit decisions furthermore reflects Weber's (1979, 992) argument that the secrecy inherent to state institutions results in a lack of client access to information and a lack of transparency for bureaucratic clients. These issues have far-reaching consequences upon interviewees' self-

perceptions as migrants in Vienna. As stated by Maria, a lack of general accessibility to correct information about the particularities of applying for a residence permit led to speculation that these issues are motivated by politics beyond the MA 35:

None of this shit is digitized or online and I think that's another kind of intentional choice. It's not that there isn't money or infrastructure in these things, it's being like, "Why would we put more money in allowing more people in and facilitating people's processes?"

Interviewees are thus not accusing the MA 35 of intentionally causing them harm, but rather the MA 35 becomes representative to them of a broader political and social context of anti-migration discourse in Austria. If migrants perceive a connection between the MA 35 and anti-migration politics, they indicate perceiving themselves as intended targets for anti-migration politics. This was explained by Ahmet, who made a connection between experiences at the MA 35 and how this affects his mindset negatively:

Then you start to think about, "Okay, all Austrians here are the same. All Viennese people are the same. They don't want us in here basically and I should go back."

Clearly, a layered issue exists for migrants because of these informational issues. Migrant wellbeing is jeopardized due to systemic issues in the migration system, migrants sometimes perceive a division between themselves and their Austrian peers as a byproduct of issues with the MA 35, and these very issues within the Viennese migration system persist while anti-migration discourse focuses on criticizing migrants as individuals instead of finding solutions to the structural issues at hand. Of special relevance is Austria's right-wing politics, as it places a priority on criticizing migrants to push back against migration. To emphasize this, interviewee Karl notes media focus in recent years on the MA 35 as a site of migration politics and its connection to Austria's right-wing parties:

There's been a lot of scandalous news articles that have come out about the MA 35, especially, you know, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, we will see if anything ever happens. But with the ÖVP and we'll see, maybe the FPÖ in power, we will probably have to wait quite some time until meaningful reform is carried out.

Karl cites the right-wing Austrian political parties as identifiable players in this dynamic, noting, however, that he does not believe that tangible change will happen as long as at least one of the parties is in power.

Thus, Austrian right-wing politics' impacts on migrant self-perceptions must be brought into discussion due to the connection interviewees make between right-wing politics and their interactions with the MA 35. Given that informational obstacles have become common knowledge in migrant communities, migrants are often left speculating that a lack of change to the challenges they face are enabled by right-wing political motives to push back against migration. In the next chapter, the presence of right-wing political imageries and narratives about migration are discussed as having profound impacts upon migrants' self-perceptions.

6. Impacts of Learning German, Right-Wing Political Imaginaries and Outward Appearance on Migrant Self-Perceptions

This empirical chapter lends perspective into how interviewees perceive their experiences with the MA 35 as connected to the wider political landscape in Austria, with a focus on anti-migration discourse. The chapter begins by presenting interviewees' statements about how their practice of German as a foreign language is received by their Austrian peers, which both nationality groups connect to anti-migration discourse but report diverging receptions thereof. As concluded in Chapter 5 Interviewees connected their experience with the MA 35 to anti-migration discourse of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). Visual materials from these parties are discussed to identify which aspects of anti-migration discourse these political parties use to construct a political imaginary of "the migrant," a figure that is the intended target of anti-migration discourse. Particular attention is paid to both parties' Vienna branches due to their portrayal of migration as a threat to the Austrian people, language and culture as discussed by Bourdieu (1994, 62), Wodak and Forchtner (2014, 237) and Wodak (2020, 164). The impacts of the FPÖ and ÖVP's conceptualization of "the migrant" is experienced in contrasting ways by the two groups of interviewees. Migrants' encounters with anti-migration discourse illustrates the interactional nature of difference making and diffraction as conceptualized by M'charek (2010, 30). Such portrayals of migrants influence how interviewees believe themselves to be received in their host society. Migration is a top issue of debate in Austria and beyond, necessitating analysis of anti-migration discourse and its impacts on migrants' self-perceptions. This chapter concludes by assessing interviewees' reflections on their own appearance and behavior in relation to visual representations in the analyzed FPÖ and ÖVP materials that impact their self-perceptions as migrants living in Vienna.

Overall, this chapter examines interviewees' encounters with anti-migration discourse, with a specific focus on the impacts that this discourse has their self-perceptions. Thus, this empirical chapter answers the following research sub questions:

To which extent do migrants in Vienna see their self-perceptions as shaped by anti-migration discourse?

- **To which extent do the two groups of interviewees perceive reception of their use of German as a foreign language as connected to anti-migration discourse?**
- **How do images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP parties of “the migrant” play a role in influencing the two groups’ self-perceptions?**
- **In which ways do interviewees discuss their appearance through physical characteristics and behavior as influencing their self-perceptions considering images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP of “the migrant”?**

“Anti-migration discourse” is defined as sociopolitical discourse which negatively criticizes and/or stands in opposition to migrants and migration. Additionally, “the migrant” represents the political imaginary of migrants disseminated through anti-migration discourse.

My research findings suggest that the two groups of interviewees experience diverging receptions of their use of German as a foreign language and that their self-perceptions are influenced by the imaginary of “the migrant” in contrasting ways. This imaginary does so in a manner that leads interviewees to assess themselves on a scale of how closely they believe they adhere to or how far they stray from norms associated with “the migrant.” Finally, interviewees connected this assessment to their outward appearance and behavior.

6.1 Speaking German as a Site of Politics

One of the most central topics in the Austrian migration debate is migrant German proficiency. The interviewees of this study commonly discussed reactions to their practice of the German language as an indicator of difference making as theorized by M’charek due to the interactional nature of practicing language (2010, 308). The Turkish and U.S. nationals interviewed for this work discussed divergent receptions of their practice of German, which they further connected to images about migrants that influences their self-perceptions in contrasting ways.

6.1.1 Turkish Interviewees

Turkish interviewees emphasized that their experiences learning and speaking German as a foreign language are greatly impacted by difference making. They commonly report feeling judged and criticized for their efforts to speak German, regardless of if they have a beginner or advanced level of German language skills. This makes difference on the basis of their mistakes and/or accents. Such a phenomenon discourages interviewees from utilizing the language and constructs barriers in accessing opportunities to practice with Austrian peers, as Turkish interviewees commonly perceived themselves to be excluded due to their imperfect German skills. Thus, difference making based on speaking German often carries negative implications for this group of interviewees and their self-perceptions.

Interviewee Kaan, who studied at an Austrian high school in Istanbul and speaks a minimum of C1 German, described an interaction with an Austrian woman of his age of mid-20s in which she criticized his German for seeming non-native:

I was chatting with a girl, and she asked me, “Where are you from?” And all in German, by the way. I was like, “I’m from Turkey, but, like, how did you get it?” She said, “The way you speak makes it obvious that you’re not from Austria.” I was like, “Daaaaaamn.” I never thought about it before. That might have an impact on my self-confidence, maybe.

Although he did not describe perceiving this interaction as blatantly xenophobic, the important point from this interaction is that difference is made through the direct singling out of Kaan as foreign based on his language skills and that this impacts his self-confidence negatively. Furthermore, Kaan discussed his worries that his language level “is not good enough” due to interactions like the one above and describes the discouragement it causes within him to practice German and his confidence in using it:

Even though I speak German, it’s not perfect. [...] I think my German is not good enough because of my accent, or because I just stopped practicing or something. It’s like, a spiral. Once you stop talking, it just goes down and down, and you just... Then you completely stop talking, so this definitely affects my social interaction with people.

Kaan views his higher level of German language skills as invalidated by interactions in which he fears his Austrian counterparts may criticize him based on speaking German imperfectly, thus finding himself in a cycle of being fearful to speak at all. This sense of discouragement is also experienced by other interviewees.

Çiğdem, a female interviewee in her 40s, describes her German skills as beginner and discussed receiving negative reactions from Austrians while speaking. In the following example, she discusses encountering hostility while shopping and being criticized by a Viennese woman in a bakery while practicing German in public:

In Spar, Billa, Bipa, sometimes [the Viennese] can be very rude and you don't understand what's going on. Because you pay or you do something. I don't know, they might be very rude all of a sudden. [...] Once I was in Ströck and I was saying something, but there was a woman, she was whispering behind me like "Ausländerin" or something like this because of my German.

She describes Austrians as reacting negatively to her German skills, who may unexpectedly become "rude" and criticize her when it becomes apparent that she speaks German at a beginner level. The word *Ausländerin* means "foreigner" in German and often has negative connotations in Austria. This example highlights that difference making related to speaking German has negative impacts on Çiğdem's self-perception. In turn, she rhetorically asked the following to indicate that this aspect of difference making results in a lack of opportunities to practice German at all:

But once they behave like this, how can I improve my language? With whom I'm allowed to speak?

In this state of wondering, Çiğdem, asserts that, if people negatively single her out for speaking imperfect German so regularly, she has no opportunities to practice. Ironically, criticism and exclusion of migrants for imperfect German prevents them from improving their German language skills in the first place. In this way, she reveals a cycle of migrants attempting to improve their German but feeling unable to practice with natives due to the exclusion they

perceive themselves to be met with. She went on to state that she sees learning German as, based on her lived experience, a discriminatory process due to the skepticism she is met with:

It will always be discriminatory. It really discouraged me to learn more German because I realized that if you speak not like a native, you will be always a migrant. So what is the purpose to learn German? [...] That's why people cannot learn German, I realized.

Through her experiences, Çiğdem has come to believe that Viennese people will always push away people like her who do not speak German perfectly. She perceives imperfect German skills as negatively viewed by her Viennese counterparts. Because of this, she herself has become so discouraged from learning German that she no longer sees a purpose in trying. Furthermore, she believes that this is also why other foreigners struggle to learn German. Importantly, she has explained that migrants are not necessarily resistant to learning German but rather lack opportunities to practice and improve. Therefore, some become so discouraged that they are unmotivated to continue learning the language.

Ahmet, a male interviewee in his 30s, agrees with Çiğdem and Kaan, expressing discouragement from socially interacting with Austrians due to his beginner level of German and perspective on difference making in these interactions as carrying negative connotations:

The problem is... I don't also force myself to be a part of the Austrian community. Somehow. Because there's a language barrier, or course. Even if they speak English, I still feel uncomfortable making friends if I only speak English.

Not being able to converse in German with Austrians and having to use English as an alternative creates distance and a sense of social exclusion for Ahmet, which prevents him from engaging with his Austrian counterparts.

For interviewee Eylül, motivation for learning German has altogether been lost due to the belief that she will never be accepted as Viennese due to the negative connotations that arise in her experience with difference making:

I stopped improving my German. (laughs) Like, I know it's bad. I know it would have helped me. Maybe it's not so rational. But I really lost my motivation to be a part of the Viennese society because they're never going to accept me anyway. I know that for sure, so I'm just going to do my own thing and have my own life.

Eylül acknowledged that losing her motivation to speak German may be detrimental to integrating into her surroundings but describes her sense of discouragement from learning the language as greater than the desire to improve her German.

Discouragement from learning and speaking German is described by Turkish interviewees as a factor that makes them feel negatively impacted by their experiences with difference making in Vienna, as they perceive themselves as looked down upon for imperfect language skills. This pressure results in them hesitating to interact with Austrian or Viennese peers, as they feel discouraged to do so because of the criticism they have faced while trying to learn German.

6.1.2 U.S. Interviewees

U.S. interviewees also discussed German language skills as influencing their experiences with difference making, but in contrast to Turkish interviewees' discussion thereof. While this group agrees that the difference making involved with using German as a foreign language impacts their self-perceptions, they report this as being a much less negative experience. For example, Bianca does not speak any German and discussed the following:

Any way that the Austrian authorities have made me feel about my positionality in Vienna is the same way that anyone has the capacity to, because I don't speak German. So, it's the German, it's the language that creates more of a feeling of a certain positionality than my visa status.

She explains her lack of German skills as impacting her experience with difference making the most, as she lacks the ability to understand Vienna around her in the city's native language. However, Bianca framed this element as a practical communication issue and not an exclusionary mechanism. As she did not report any negative interactions resulting from lacking

German proficiency, Bianca does not report having a similar understanding of difference making as Turkish interviewees.

For interviewee Vanessa, learning German and using it in her everyday life serves the purpose of providing her with comfort in navigating social situations:

I do get a lot of weird questions when people find out I'm American. [...] So this automatically defines you as a person. But I think in day-to-day interactions, because I can speak German, I normally don't face any kind of [generalization].

Vanessa describes that her Austrian peers may ask strange questions when they learn of her nationality, but she ultimately notices that showing them her German proficiency deters them from generalizing her based on her nationality. For Vanessa, speaking German as a foreign language does not carry negative meaning in relation to difference making. Rather, practicing German often goes unquestioned by her Austrian peers.

To further discuss practicing German and difference making, Maria emphasized her ability to speak German as an instrument with which she has a greater ease of navigating her everyday life:

I think also being able to speak German and at least handle daily interactions in German—those privileges do help integrate me a bit more. To me, I don't see them as visible barriers.

Maria did not report negative reception of her speaking German as a foreign language, which contrasts with the experiences of Turkish interviewees and indicates neutral meaning in difference making. She also discussed a greater feeling of integration as a function of her learning German:

The German comes in to be like, "Hey guys, I took the time and effort and paid the money to learn German." Because I think if anything, it's been those sorts of feelings like, "You're in Austria, speak German." So I think like more so those comments of like, "Oh you speak German

here. We're losing the language. All these Americans, everyone's speaking English now." And it's like, "Well, but we also speak German." So, I feel like that gives me the edge to fit in more.

Maria acknowledged the presence of political pressure on migrants to acquire German language skills and the conceptualization of migrants as not speaking German but does not report it as negatively impacting her self-perception. Rather, she is enabled to use German to more easily interact with Austrian peers instead of feeling discouragement from doing so.

While James somewhat echoes Turkish interviewees' connection between imperfect German and difference making, he reports this as having a vastly less negative degree of consequence on his life. Although he is proficient in German and can successfully navigate his everyday life, he notes that he speaks with an accent which distinguishes him as a migrant:

Yeah absolutely, I think I'm treated different. One, because although I speak German, I still speak with an accent. I don't speak Viennese or with an Austrian accent So there's kind of a disconnection there.

He reports this creates a "disconnection" from his Austrian peers but does not state that this negatively influences his self-perception. In fact, James instead reports that difference making carries overall positive implications for him and does not believe his accent was a great disadvantage.

In line with James' discussion of accented German not being a disadvantage, Edward also reported experiencing positive reactions to him practicing German despite his accent. In his case, Edward believes that his efforts to learn and speak German have been received positively by his Austrian friends:

I think it's the effort thing, right? Like, even when my German was way worse and it was kind of cringey how hard I was trying, I think people understood and appreciated that I was trying very hard. And the fact that I'm often the only foreigner in a group of Austrians, I think was a thing of that.

Edward's personal experiences are marked by a lack of exclusion which leads him to believe that the positive reception of his German skills reflects Austrians' appreciation of his efforts, as well as that they must see how hard he's trying to learn. Difference making thus has positive effects on Edward's self-perception. As a result, Edward does not see his imperfect German skills as something that negatively impacts him. Rather, he asserts that his efforts to learn the language are received positively by his Austrian peers.

6.1.3 Summary

Overall, both U.S. and Turkish interviewees cited reception of their German language skills as influencing their self-perceptions. The difference making process of interaction with their Austrian peers, however, manifests in contrasting ways. Turkish interviewees commonly discussed speaking German with an accent or making mistakes while speaking as negatively received by their Austrian peers. This negative reception is felt as exclusionary, thereby creating barriers to them accessing opportunities to practice. Therefore, the difference making that occurs for Turkish interviewees practicing German as a foreign language carries negative implications. U.S. interviewees also perceived the effects of speaking German imperfectly or with an accent, but not negatively. Their German language skills may thus draw attention, but they report a more neutral reception instead of being negatively singled out for such characteristics.

6.2 Analysis of FPÖ and ÖVP Visual Political Materials

As stated in the conclusion of Chapter 5, interviewees speculated that Austrian right-wing parties play a role in their interactions with the MA 35. The FPÖ and ÖVP were explicitly cited as political parties of interest, as both parties have disproportionately contributed to anti-migration discourse in Austria. Thus, analysis of both parties' visual political materials in connection to anti-migration discourse is conducted in this subsection. Common factors involved in anti-migration discourse that were identified by this analysis include German proficiency as presented above, dangerous and criminal activity as summarized in Chapter 4, Turkish people as discussed in Chapter 4, and religion as contextualized in theoretical section and Chapter 4. Ultimately, the goal of this analysis was to observe who the FPÖ and ÖVP target with anti-

migration discourse and which connotations these visual representations carry. These representations construct political imaginaries of “the migrant” as is defined below, which draws upon theories of the politics of fear (Wodak 2020, 162) and demographic panic (Wodak 2020, 173).

6.2.1 2025 ÖVP Posters: Unintegrated and Criminal Migrants

ÖVP campaign materials from 2025 directly relate to interviewee statements regarding their use of German as a foreign language. The conservative Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) broadly attacked migrants in the 2025 Vienna election, associating migrants—sometimes those from majority Muslim countries or those with this background were specifically targeted—with lacking German language skills and committing crimes. The frontman of this election, Karl Mahrer, is remembered for his 2023 criticism of spaces where migrants from majority Muslim countries or those with this background gather and have established businesses. Specifically, he alleged that they are “taking over the power” from Austrians in public spaces (Kroisleitner and Rachbauer, 2023, March 23; ORF.at 2023, March 23). There are strong associations between xenophobic ÖVP narratives, Islam, Arabs and Turkish people, which establish no clear distinction between distinct groups of people. Thus, those connected to majority Muslim countries are categorized into a homogenous group that poses a threat to Austrians, their language and their culture by the ÖVP.

The ÖVP’s 2025 Vienna state election campaign made sweeping accusations against the migrant community in general. The ÖVP chose 2 key issues to emphasize in connection to each other: migrants lacking German language skills and migrants committing crime. **Figure 4** (Die Wiener Volkspartei 2024, December 9) shows the ÖVP’s “German is compulsory” campaign displayed in a banner from their website, in which the party portrays migrants as lacking German language skills and thus being unintegrated into Vienna. An example of a “German is compulsory” poster is shown in the background of the left side of the image and in a blue box on the right side followed by the statement “integration needs language.” This portrays the migrant community as illiterate and thus as problematic because it is assumed that the migrant community is unintegrated. This and the following ÖVP materials do not specify who the

intended targets of this campaign are, leaving interpretation open-ended and easier to generalize to the migrant community at large.

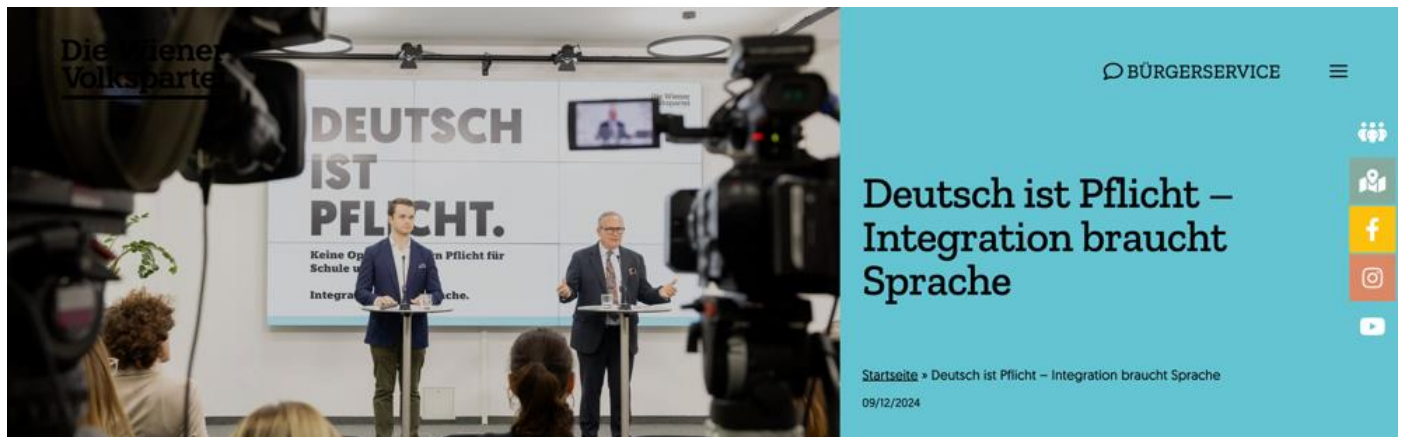


Figure 4: Website banner from the ÖVP’s Vienna branch website from their 2025 campaign in Vienna. Text in turquoise translated: “German is compulsory—Integration needs language” (Die Wiener Volkspartei 2025).

Figure 5 is a poster from the same campaign which reads “German is mandatory, habibi” with another line underneath that reads: “Make Vienna smart again.” The Arabic word “habibi” is used to refer to one’s significant other or to affectionally address one’s friend—thus indicating that migrants from majority Muslim countries are addressed. Beyond the fact that this campaign draws upon Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” slogan, an association is made between Muslim migrants lacking German language skills and therefore also intelligence. As previously stated, the ÖVP makes no clear differentiation between distinct groups of people, meaning that this campaign is likely intended to address both the larger migrant community from majority Muslim countries.

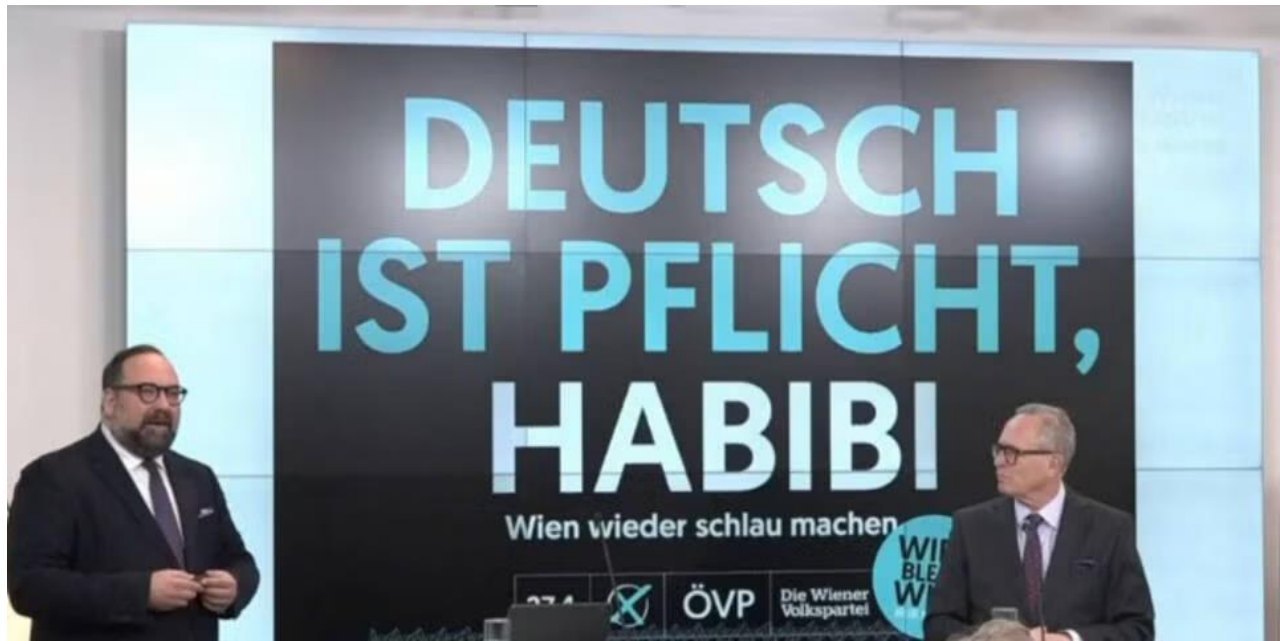


Figure 5: 2025 Campaign poster for the ÖVP Vienna branch. Translated: “German is compulsory, Habibi. Make Vienna smart again” (oe24.at 2025, March 17).

Lastly, in the same campaign, the ÖVP builds connections between drug crimes, migrants and deportations in **Figure 6**. The translation of **Figure 6** addresses a mother from the perspective of her child, stating that an unspecified “man with the cocaine will soon be gone” (PULS 24 2025, March 17). This is in reference to the ÖVP and FPÖ’s calls for immediate deportation of migrants with criminal records, a trope that is commonly associated with Muslim individuals as contextualized in Chapter 4. Paired with the attacks on migrants’ German language skills, this campaign collectively targets the migrant community overall, portraying them as unintelligent criminals who pose a threat to Vienna’s youth. Specifically, men of this demographic are framed as the threat, conveying a belief that danger accompanies such migrant men.

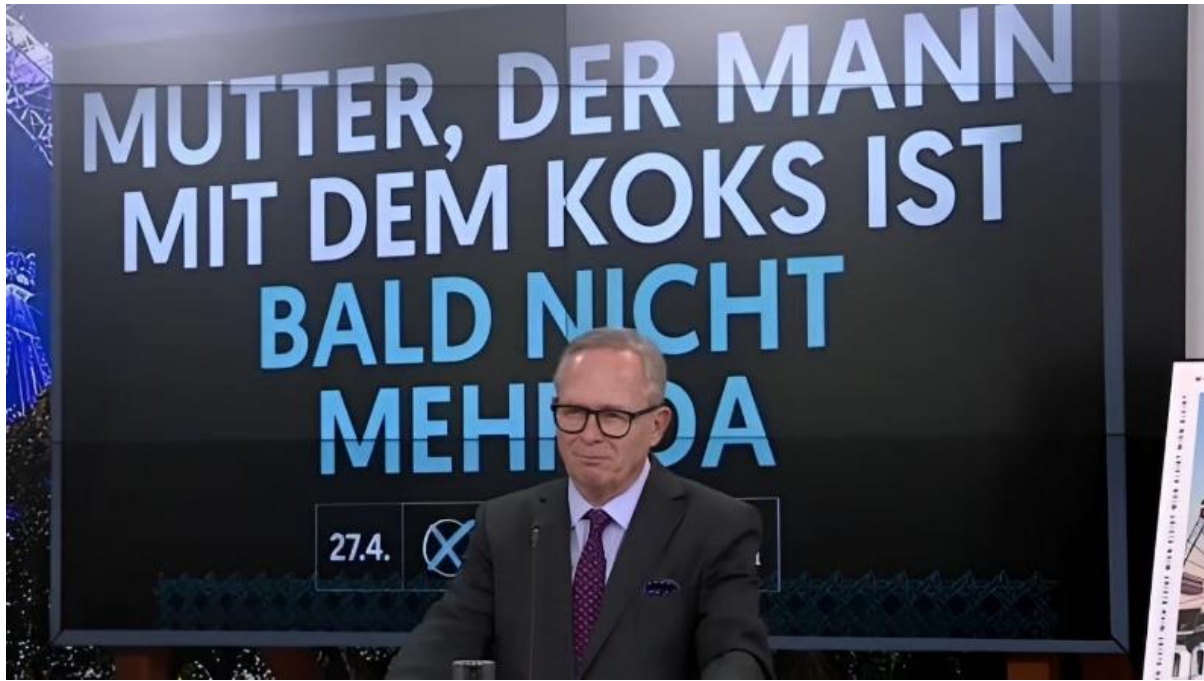


Figure 6: 2025 campaign poster for the ÖVP Vienna branch. Translated: “Mother, the man with the cocaine will soon be gone” (PULS 24 2025, March 17).

Overall, the ÖVP establishes tropes of the political imaginary “the migrant” as an individual with imperfect German proficiency or a lack thereof, resistance to integrating into Vienna, a lack of intelligence and dangerous, criminal activity according to the political materials above. By perpetuating imaginaries of migrants as posing threats to Vienna, the ÖVP draws upon the politics of fear to criticize and oppose their presence (Wodak 2020, 173).

6.2.2 FPÖ Posters: Visual Representations of Migrants

While the ÖVP materials above discuss associations made with migrants’ German proficiency and criminal behavior, they do not address physical appearance or behavior of migrants. I now turn to FPÖ political materials, which more directly describe aspects of appearance and behavior associated with “the migrant.” The FPÖ is well-known within migrant circles for being the most outspoken Austrian political party in its opposition to migrant presence in Vienna. In this subsection, a selection of the FPÖ’s political posters is examined for

representations of migrants as posing danger to Austrians with special focus on the two migrants group interviewed for this study. Representations of “the migrant” by the FPÖ draw on both the politics of fear (Wodak 2020, 162) and demographic panic (Wodak 2020, 173) via emphasizing outward appearance and behavior of “the migrant.”

6.2.2.1 2005: Corrupt Turks

In 2005, the Vienna FPÖ’s candidate Heinz-Christian Strache led campaigns that directly targeted Turkish people. While these posters are from earlier years, they indicate the origins of more recent rhetoric against migrants from Muslim-majority countries and specifically Turkish people. In 2005, the campaign accused Vienna’s then-mayor of letting Vienna become Istanbul by allegedly spending €40,000 of taxpayer money on Turkish flags—a claim of which I was unable to find any evidence—and stating in both of the 2005 campaign posters below that “Vienna may not become Istanbul” (**Figure 7, Figure 8**, Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2205a). Most obviously, the FPÖ utilized Istanbul as an example of what Vienna should not be. Additionally, alleging the fraudulent use of taxpayer money to purchase Turkish flags connects Turkey and Turkish individuals corrupt and thus incorrect behavior. Beyond what these posters explicitly state, they imply that Turkey and signs thereof are negative by relating symbols of Turkey to corruption. This connects Turkey and Turkish people to the political imaginary of “the migrant.”



Figure 7 (left): 2005 campaign poster for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Translated: “Vienna may not become Istanbul! He says What Vienna thinks” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025b).



Figure 8 (right): 2005 campaign poster for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Translated: “No tax money for the Turkish tent, Mr. Mayor Häupl! SPÖ, ÖVP and Green Party provoke the Viennese general public with a sea of Turkish flags for €40,000 in tax money. FPÖ-HC Strache: Vienna may not become Istanbul! He says what Vienna thinks” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025b).

6.2.2.2 2010: Muslim Women as Non-Viennese

In his 2010 campaign, Strache accused the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) of supporting “forced headscarf,” an outward sign of women being Muslim that the Austrian political right associates with the oppression of women (**Figure 9**, Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025c). Directly underneath this accusation, his campaign poster states, “For US, it’s about the VIENNESE” (**Figure 9**, Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025c), creating a direct connection between the FPÖ and a conceptualized native group of Viennese. In addition to this connection between Strache and the ‘native’ Viennese, the FPÖ marginalizes Muslim women as non-Viennese by establishing headscarf as inherently oppressive and endangering women’s rights. Muslim women are thus excluded from the FPÖ’s representation due to its claim to protect women’s rights that it alleges are damaged by women wearing headscarves. Thus, a clear line of division was created between the FPÖ and Islam, as well as the FPÖ and Muslims with a specific focus on religiously dressed Muslim women as excluded from being Viennese. Thus, Islam and women’s religious clothing, as well as disregard of women’s rights, is connected to the imaginary of “the migrant.”



Figure 9: 2010 campaign poster for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Translated: “WE protect women’s rights. The SPÖ protects forced headscarf. For US, it’s about the VIENNESE.” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025c)

6.2.2.3 2020: Disorderly and Dangerous Migrants

A few years later, the FPÖ again exhibited anti-Turkish sentiment and Islamophobia in the 2020 Vienna state election, as is seen in **Figure 10** and **Figure 11** below. One campaign poster from FPÖ candidate Dominik Nepp (**Figure 10**, Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025d) accused Vienna's mayor, Michael Ludwig of the SPÖ, of appropriating Vienna from the 'native' Viennese and turning it into a city dominated by Turkish people. The FPÖ portrays Vienna as having been made into a Turkish space, as is seen by the Turkish flags and seeming civil unrest on the left side of the poster. All color is drained from the image except for red in the Turkish flag, emphasizing this symbol of Turkish nationality or heritage in connection to disruption. In contrast to this, the FPÖ portrays Nepp's version of Vienna on the right side through a white Viennese family peacefully enjoying a meal in their garden, with smiling faces and loving behavior shown between multiple generations sitting at the table. Nepp's side of the poster is strikingly bright and colorful, conveying an overwhelmingly positive tone. From this, it is to be inferred that Turkish people represent disorderly behavior that jeopardizes peace, while the white Viennese stand for peace and upholding an orderly way of life. Again, Turkish people and disorderly or dangerous behavior are associated with the imaginary of "the migrant."



Figure 10: 2020 campaign post for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Left side translated: SPÖ Michael Ludwig: HIS VIENNA!" Right side translated: "Dominik Nepp: OUR VIENNA!" (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025d)

Again in 2020 the Viennese FPÖ directly criticized Turkey and Turkish people on its Facebook page with a poster that references their 2005 campaign by stating, “Vienna may not become Istanbul” (**Figure 11**, FPÖ 2020, June 28). The accompanying caption labels Turkish President Erdogan as a “dictator” and accuses him of using Turkish people (called Erdogan’s “compatriots”) as “remote-controlled weapons,” posing a “massive risk to homeland security” and to “Western Democracy.” Alongside this inflammatory language, Nepp marginalizes Turkish people by re-utilizing Strache’s methods from years before. This example frames Turkish people as being controlled by a loyal to a dictatorial foreign leader, exhibiting somewhat traitorous behavior and thus posing a threat to peace in Vienna. Here, dangerous and undemocratic behavior is associated with the imagery of “the migrant.”



Figure 11: 2020 Facebook post of the Vienna FPÖ branch. Translated: “The radicalization of Turks living in Vienna by the Islamic dictator Erdogan is a massive risk to homeland security—this has been clearly demonstrated by the riots in the last few days! Erdogan uses his compatriots as remote-controlled weapons against western democracy. The FPÖ very clearly says: Vienna may not become Istanbul! Therefore, at the Vienna election on October 11th, vote FPÖ!” (FPÖ 2020, June 28)

In the last poster (**Figure 12**, Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025d), an image of Muslim women, indoors and covered head-to-toe in black burqa, is shown on the left side with a picture on the wall of an assumingly Middle Eastern man sitting next to a machine gun. Like the women, the man is unidentifiable because, except for his eyes, his entire face is covered with a dark scarf that the West associates with Islamic terrorism. The words “HOME SWEET HOME” are written next to the man in bloody red letters. Although not typical dress of all Muslims, this poster portrays Muslims and Islam as dangerous, especially because the Muslims in this poster are unidentifiable. It evokes feelings of danger because Islamic face coverings in public spaces and public buildings have been banned in Austria since 2017 (oesterreich.gv.at 2024a, April 11). Exclusively Islamic face coverings are banned by this law due to fears that if those wearing them are unidentifiable in public, they may be able to conduct illegal activities. Outside the window in this image, a red Islamic cross looms in the sky behind the tower of the St. Steven’s Cathedral, a symbol of Austria’s deep-rooted Catholic tradition. The left side of the text states that the SPÖ, ÖVP and Green Parties support radical Islam. On the right side of the poster, Dominik Nepp stands outdoors under a blue sky with a young white girl, both smiling and looking up to St. Stephen’s Cathedral. The text on this side of the poster reads “Our home,” implying that Nepp and the FPÖ will keep Vienna Christian and that the city will remain the home of those like him, while the Muslims on the opposite side of the poster may *not* call this version of Vienna their home. This poster associates religious extremism and fear with “the migrant.”



Figure 12: 2020 campaign poster of the Vienna FPÖ branch. Left side translated: “SPÖ (social democrats), ÖVP (Austrian People’s Party) & Green Party: Radical Islam”. Right side translated: “Dominik Nepp: Our home!” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025d)

6.2.2.4 1996: Vienna May Not Become Chicago!

In a singular incident in 1996, criticism of Chicago in the United States was brought into the Vienna state election by the FPÖ’s rhetoric that Vienna is not allowed to become Chicago. This is likely referring to the high number of homicides and crime happening in Chicago in the 1990s, which portrays the city of Chicago as dangerous and an example of what a city should not aspire to be. While this is indeed an attack on the city of Chicago, it is not necessarily an attack on the United States. Furthermore, this poster does not portray migrants from the U.S. in Vienna in a negative light. This is the only FPÖ or ÖVP poster I was able to find regarding the United States in contrast to the high number of posters that target Muslims and Turkish people specifically.



Figure 13: 1996 campaign poster of the Vienna FPÖ branch. Translated: “We stand by it: “Vienna may not become Chicago!” Dr. Rainer Pawkowitz. He says what he thinks. And he loves Vienna.”

6.2.3 Takeaways from the FPÖ and ÖVP’s Visual Political Materials

Lacking intelligence and German proficiency, accusations of criminal behavior, portrayals of Islamic extremism and allegations of dangerous tendencies are all connected to the political imaginary of “the migrant” by the ÖVP and FPÖ materials above. These portrayals draw heavily on the politics of fear as conceptualized by Wodak (2020, 162) through their assertions that dangerous or criminal behavior and Islamic extremism are characteristics of “the migrant.” These aspects imply that a peaceful, orderly way of life in Vienna is threatened. Furthermore, these portrayals also evoke demographic panic (Wodak 2020, 173) by asserting that threats are posed to the Viennese language and culture by “the migrant” through lacking German proficiency, threatening women’s rights by imposing radical Islam and by exhibiting disorderly or corrupt conduct. Turkish nationals are explicitly connected to this imaginary via explicit references to Turkey in the images and texts above, as well as through references to Islam. On the other hand, there is an overall lack of connection between U.S. nationals and the political imaginary of “the migrant,” with only one FPÖ poster criticizing Chicago in the 1990s. The next subsection examines both interviewee groups’ statements to assess whether they view the political imaginary of “the migrant” as impacting their self-perceptions.

6.3 Physical Appearance and Outward Behavior in Connection to “The Migrant”

Throughout the interview process, interviewees commonly connected the reception of their use of German to their physical appearance and behavior, as well as broader anti-migration discourse to their self-perceptions as migrants in Vienna. Thus, the following sub sections analyze both interviewee groups’ discussion of their appearance through physical characteristics

and outward behavior related to aspects of “the migrant” as defined in the analysis of the ÖVP and FPÖ posters above.

6.3.1 Turkish Interviewees

Turkish interviewees indicated an overall perception that their physical appearance most directly associates them with the political imaginary of “the migrant” observed in the FPÖ and ÖVP materials discussed above. Male interviewees reported being received more harshly for their appearance in relation to stereotypes of dangerous Muslims and Turkish people, while female interviewees exercised a higher degree of agency in their appearance and behavior through making intentional efforts to appear less Turkish or less Muslim. Both emphasize the interactional nature of difference making and indicate diffraction at work through the changes they make to their outwardly expressed characteristics (M’charek 2010, 308).

6.3.1.1 Male Turkish Interviewees

Male Turkish interviewees Başar and Ahmet discussed experiencing more direct discriminatory behavior due to their physical appearance while Kaan, another male Turkish interviewee, reported a quite contrary experience. Başar, a Turkish male interviewee in his late 20s, described receiving hostile and skeptical looks from Viennese interlocutors in public settings towards the beginning of his time in Vienna due to his physical appearance as a Turkish man:

Yeah when I take the trolley, you can see the looks. For example, I had like this (motions with hands to show a larger beard than he currently has), okay? [...] And my hair was a buzzcut because I’m not going to pay 50 euros for a barber, it’s dumb. [...] So, it used to be a buzzcut. [...] I remember people seeing me while they’re walking with their kid and they’re holding their kid (makes a gesture of protectively holding a child and moving away from him) and I’m like “Nice, I’m giving the vibes.” When you’re in the trolley, the looks are exactly like that, also. Like, when you’re in the trolley, they’re like... (squints eyes, looks pointedly at me with hostility). [...] Because of the beard and skin color, it’s not a nice combination of those, right? [...] That’s how they learned and they’re applying the things that they learned. I hope I can change it for the people I know, but for the people I do not know, I cannot do anything about it, right?

Başar discusses his skin color, beard and hair as outwardly expressed characteristics identified by Viennese people as threatening and to be avoided due to the assumption that he may represent the stereotype of a dangerous Muslim and/or Turkish man—this is emphasized by the hostile looks he received in public transit or on the street, as well as by people sometimes avoiding him. He recognized that these reactions may be due to how such people are socialized to think about Turkish men and Muslim-appearing men but also knows that he cannot change all people's assumptions about him as he is unable to show everyone otherwise. Notably, Başar no longer wears his beard or hair as he did at the time of these interactions, opting to instead wear his beard short and his hair long to avoid this type of attention. He illustrates diffraction as described by M'charek (2010, 308) by adjusting his outward appearance based on these interactions with Viennese interlocutors.

While Başar releases control over what his interlocutors seem to think of him, he indicates that he believes some prejudices about people like him unfortunately run deep. As a further example, he cited the reaction of an acquaintance to the revelation of his nationality:

It impacts how they see me. When I say I'm Turkish, it's done. You cannot make any progress further. [...] The weird thing is, for example, I had my friend's friend, like we went outside one day. He came and said, "Let's hang out," or whatever. He was an Austrian, so he didn't know that I was Turkish. We were talking a lot, and after, like, 45 minutes or an hour later I said, "I'm Turkish." [...] And he got, like, ice cold. [...] Because he thinks—he said, actually—that "All the Turkish people here is trying to create an Islamic invasion in Austria."

Strikingly, the acquaintance's behavior became cold when he learned of Başar's nationality despite the two of them getting along well before the topic arose in conversation. Başar then explained that the acquaintance responded by citing right-wing sentiments of a Turkish Islamic invasion of Austria (Wodak 2020, 160), an interviewee's most explicit interaction with right-wing conceptualizations of their nationality. It became clear that, while Başar did not take the interaction personally, this contributed to a later interview statement where he states he believes he could never belong to the category of Viennese due to assumptions he observes about people of his nationality.

Ahmet described similar experiences based on his physical appearance. His hair and stature lead him to believe that he is excluded for how he looks:

For example, I'm not blonde, I'm not tall, I'm a completely different person. And they start to look at you [thinking], "Okay, he's a foreigner, he's not Austrian, he's not one of us. Let's start bullying him." This kind of stuff probably. I can't talk 100% sure, but that's my point of view actually, in general.

He cites examples of his hair color and short stature as aligning with stereotypes of Turkish people, which he sees as negatively associating him with the imaginary of "the migrant." It is the specifically the associations of this imaginary with a Muslim-appearing and/or Turkish-appearing "migrant" that influence his self-perception as excluded and unwanted in social settings.

To underscore his argument, Ahmet detailed two experiences—one in public transit and one on a main shopping street in Vienna—in which he perceived himself as negatively targeted for his appearance. The first experience, which occurred in the shopping street, is one that he attributes to having a longer beard at the time:

I was waiting in Mariahilfer Straße somewhere and then my beard was really five times bigger [than it is now]. It was a really huge one. [...] And then a guy came. "Are you hipster or Taliban?" he asked me. [...] (laughing) I said, "I'm a Taliban. I'm going to bomb myself." [...] Then he said "Yeah easy, easy, easy." And then he ran away. Then I just walked. Actually, I was waiting. A police officer came to me and asking questions. But nobody came. And yeah, he was too direct, actually. He just came. "Are you a hipster or Taliban?" (laughs)

Although Ahmet laughed at what he believes is a ridiculous interaction, he was noticeably saddened as he shared this story due to the assumptions he perceives are made about his appearance in connection to the political imaginary of "the migrant." More shocking to Ahmet than the direct nature of this interaction was that, due to his appearance and his categorization as a dangerous version of "the migrant," he perceives approaching man's prejudice as so deep that he couldn't even recognize Ahmet was joking in response to his blunt remark. Similar to Başar's

indication of diffraction (M'charek 2010, 308), Ahmet also now wears his beard short to avoid such interactions.

Another interaction of a similar nature occurred while Ahmet was in public transit:

And then another one, it was really midnight. I was coming back to home and then a guy sat next to me on the metro U1. And then he started to say (mimicking Islamic prayer), "Allahu Akbar." But he was moving his head from bottom to top. "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar." He kept saying "Allahu Akbar" at least 10 times and he was getting louder every time he said it. [...] Looking at my face like this (widening his eyes, making direct eye contact with me, motioning that the man was sitting directly across from him). Not next to me. [...] He was blonde, no beard, nothing. 25 years old guy. Something like that. He kept doing this. And then I just laughed. And I joined him. I did the same thing. And then he stopped. And he left.

Again, Ahmet was made conscious of the contrasts between his own appearance and that of the Austrian man sitting across from him in public transit while the man made mocking gestures towards him. This man's actions were so ridiculous to Ahmet that he joked back to him, but he believes that association between him and the political imaginary of "the migrant" run so deep in the mind of this Austrian man that he was scared of Ahmet and abruptly left.

Interestingly, interviewee Kaan confirmed the same logic of thinking about physical characteristics in connection to the image of "the migrant." While he described himself as not feeling marginalized based on his own physical appearance, he specifically did so by discussing his own physical appearance in contrast to that of Ahmet:

If you look at Ahmet, for example, it's like, he looks way more Turkish than me, I would say. [...] He got a beard and stuff. [...] Also, maybe the tone of your skin, your skin color, I mean. He is, of course, white ethnically and color-wise, but still. If you look at Turkish people on average, they have tanned skin. Mine is closer to white, I would say.

Kaan described Ahmet as looking more stereotypically Turkish due to his skin color and having a dark beard. Kaan cites his whiter appearance as not excluding him on the same basis that is felt

by Ahmet and Başar. Interestingly, Kaan also could not provide any stories or examples of the same nature as the other male interviewees.

Turkish male interviewees reported perceiving a negative reception of their physical appearance and nationality in relation to the political imaginary of “the migrant,” which is perhaps the most politicized lived experience in comparison to that of all other interviewees. This group cited their physical appearance as most directly connecting them to the political imaginary of “the migrant” based on analysis of FPÖ and ÖVP materials that not only negatively influence their self-perceptions but also push them to diffract the expression of their outward characteristics by attempting to appear less like “the migrant.”

6.3.1.2 Female Turkish Interviewees

Female Turkish interviewees did not report negative reactions to their physical appearance, which they discussed as resulting from their efforts to modify in their outwardly expressed characteristics in advance to appear less similar to “the migrant.” This group thus also illustrates the influence of diffraction (M’charek 2010, 308) by changing their outward expression based on their knowledge of this political imaginary. Examples of such changes them not wearing clothing that identifies them as Muslim women, emphasizing their light skin color and their careful selection of outward behavior to avoid being associated with “the migrant.”

Eylül described her lack of experiencing hostile behavior towards her outward characteristics as attributed to her not wearing a headscarf and having a light complexion:

I’m not wearing a headscarf or maybe I’m not black or anything.

By not wearing a headscarf and having lighter skin, Eylül discusses herself as appearing neither Muslim nor outright Turkish, as she does not look a way that aligns with “the migrant.” Meryem, another female Turkish interviewee, cited her light skin, light hair and presentation of herself through how she dresses and behaves in public as factors for not feeling targeted negatively:

Yeah I have white skin. My look, the way I behave, the way I dress. I'm not trying to create any problem to anyone. I follow the rules. I think I look serious. That's why sometimes people tell me that's how they make me feel in a good way. [...] I also think that if I were someone that's, say, 155 cm, dark—there are also some Turkish people that are darker skin, totally dark, with lots of hair—a bit uglier, maybe it could have been different.

Meryem believes that her appearance in comparison to stereotypes about Turkish people with darker skin and hair leads her to have a more positive self-perception feeling of herself as a migrant in Vienna. This is the most blatant example of a Turkish interviewee linking a modification of their outward characteristics to a more positive self-perception.

Meryem's citation of her behavior raises an additional point: female interviewees explain modifying *both* their behavior and their physical appearance to avoid being associated with stereotypes of “the migrant”—this is similar to Başar and Ahmet changing the way they style their facial hair. Again, this emphasizes diffraction as conceptualized by M'charek (2010, 308). In terms of behavior, Eylül explained that she sometimes chooses to behave in certain ways to avoid being labeled as a Turkish and/or Muslim woman by her Austrian interlocutors:

My colleagues invited me to this work thing, like this dinner thing and I really didn't feel like drinking alcohol, but I felt like I had to because that would be the first time that they would see me in such a setting. And I felt like I would fulfill that image in their mind if I didn't drink that wine. [...] I also don't eat meat, so they would also probably assume that I'm avoiding because it's pork or non-halal food or anything. So I really didn't want to give them that satisfaction, if that makes sense.

Due to the stereotypes and negative assumptions she perceives are made about her nationality, Eylül sometimes tries to modify or diffract her behavior to avoid her colleagues associating her with the negative assumptions she perceives they have about Turkish people.

Beyond making careful wardrobe choices, both Meryem and Çiğdem described intentionally changing their hair color to appear less Turkish than with their dark hair. Meryem noticed more positive reception from those around her after dyeing her hair blonde:

But I think it really helps now that I'm blonde. I look like you. I used to have darker hair.

In comparison to when she had darker hair, Meryem highlighted that changing her physical appearance has benefitted her in navigating her everyday life more smoothly. Agreeing, Çiğdem also stated:

I really see the difference now that I have a light blonde hair. It's different than when I have dark hair. [...] I changed my hair color. And I also started to make sport because I think they are unfriendly to people with fat. [...] Not to be in a negative center of attention or to not really look foreigner.

She explains being received more positively since dying her hair blonde. Also, she has started regularly exercising to adhere to her perception of Austrian standards of physical fitness, which she believes detracts from being associated with the political imaginary of “the migrant.”

Female Turkish interviewees, like male Turkish interviewees, experience the effects of difference making by utilizing diffraction to modify their physical appearance and behavior. They do this to circumvent being associated with the political imaginary of “the migrant” and the negative associations they perceive this imaginary has to their nationality. Female Turkish interviewees report more positive self-perceptions than male Turkish interviewees by making these modifications in advance of interacting with Austrian peers to avoid receiving negative attention that they believe associations with “the migrant” would subject them to.

6.3.2 U.S. Interviewees

In contrast to Turkish interviewees, U.S. interviewees reported much more neutral receptions of their physical characteristics and behavior that mirrors the more neutral reception of their German language skills. A vast majority of U.S. interviewees are white individuals, which they often cite as contributing to this neutral perception of their outward appearance. This group of interviewees did not report negative encounters resulting from their appearance, as well

as did not report perceiving themselves as associated with the political imaginary of “the migrant” as analyzed in the FPÖ and ÖVP materials above.

6.3.2.1 Male U.S. Interviewees

U.S. male interviewees discussed their appearance as much less impacted by difference making and diffraction in contrast to Turkish male interviewees. Interviewee James reported his outward characteristics as soliciting little to no attention from his Viennese peers due to being a white male. While he notes that he must nonetheless go to the MA 35 due to having a non-EU nationality, it does not negatively impact how he sees himself:

Obviously, walking on the street no one knows that I go to the MA 35. I blend in pretty well here and realistically, it's only one day every year that I have to do it. [...] So as far as blending in goes, I don't really feel like I stand out any.

Interviewee Edward, also a white male, outlined having a similar experience by reporting that his outward characteristics alone do not draw attention to the fact that he is not Austrian, provided that he does signal he is a migrant by speaking English or speaking German with an accent. In his interview he stated:

I almost never feel othered when I keep my mouth shut because I think I blend into the Austrians fairly well. [...] So, I think no one in the street's ever going to think I'm a foreigner.

Here, Edward brings into discussion that his presence goes unquestioned by those around him because his physical appearance and behavior do not signal that he is not Austrian.

Karl, another white male, further emphasizes this pattern by contrasting the way he believes he versus others are treated by Austrian peers as a function of his physical appearance. He reports the following:

I'm a white guy. Some [Austrians] are actually kind of friendly and chatty to me. And the ones that aren't are to the point and maybe brusque, but they're not... They don't snap at me the way I've seen them snap at other people. [...] I always assumed that [this treatment] was a matter of race or ethnicity or being from a quote-unquote "good country," and that they could hear the Anglophone accent, that they could see that I was pale and had Eurocentric features.

In sharp contrast to the discussion of Başar's nationality, Karl also noted that he received neutral, if not slightly positive reactions to revealing his nationality:

People sometimes ask me where I'm from, but it's less of a malicious thing and less of a "go back to your country" and more of "Oh, what's that accent? Are you English?" It's like, "No, I'm American." "Oh, interesting."

Karl establishes distance between himself and the political imaginary of "the migrant" by underscoring his "Anglophone accent," white ethnicity and nationality as factors positively impacting his self-perception—sentiments that are echoed by both James and Edward.

As the three white male interviewees, commonalities between the remarks of Edward, James and Karl arise in their perspectives on the role that their outward characteristics play in how they are received by their Austrian peers. U.S. male interviewees *do* encounter difference making, but not in a way that prompts them to modify their characteristics via diffraction. They do not indicate seeing a connection between themselves and the political imaginary of "the migrant," instead discussing overall neutral experiences in connection to their physical appearance and behavior.

6.3.2.2 Female U.S. Interviewees

Female U.S. interviewees' remarks corroborate the perspectives of U.S. male interviewees. Bianca, a white female, cites that her Austrian peers commonly assume she is also Austrian due to her physical appearance and behavior. She discusses this in contrast to, for example, these peers' perception of Muslim women. She describes observing this contrast while

in public spaces including museums or restaurants, where Viennese locals, migrants and tourists alike occupy the same space:

I have no affiliation with Austria or Central Europe, even heritage-wise. However, it's happened multiple times where I'll be in a restaurant or somewhere waiting in line and the person in front of me sometimes—especially in a museum—was wearing a hijab and the worker started speaking to her in English. And the woman didn't speak English, but she spoke German. And then [the worker] got to me, and she started in German because I am white and don't wear hijab, and have no signifying marker of outward difference to her. Things like that where it's like, if I just keep my mouth shut, there's no marker of difference.

Bianca echoes Edward's notion that, aside from when she speaks English, her Austrian peers have no reason to believe that that she is a migrant based on her outwardly expressed characteristics. Bianca describes the influence of difference making on her self-perception in this anecdote not only through what happens to her, but by also observing what happens to a woman whose appearance contrasts with her own and then noting what it implies about herself. She identifies Austrian Muslim women who cover their hair as a counterexample to her own appearance, who Austrians—in her experience—more likely assume to be migrants and/or non-German speaking. While assumptions cannot be made of museum employees' political affiliations based on this example, a connection between museum employees' assumptions and the FPÖ and ÖVP's portrayal of whiteness as the norm for Viennese people is present.

Further on this topic, interviewee Maria also expressed her perspective that people do not assume she is a migrant based on her physical appearance, which she notes makes others unaware of how her lived experience is impacted by being a migrant:

I am marked, but I feel like I have to be vocal about it and I have to articulate it because I know I pass for Austrian or European or whatever.

While she says her outwardly expressed characteristics cause her to appear Austrian or European, Maria recognizes that she still experiences the effects of difference making in interacting with

state institutions. However, she says must speak up to draw attention to the impacts of difference making on her self-perception because those around her may not categorize her as a migrant.

Female U.S. interviewees' statements match those of U.S. male interviewees by indicating that difference making does influence their self-perceptions, but the impacts thereof are not accompanied by diffraction in expressing their physical characteristics and behavior as discussed by Turkish interviewees. Rather, female U.S. interviewees instead mentioned difference making on a less negative scale, perceiving it as not negatively affecting their self-perceptions.

6.3.3 Summary

Physical appearance and behavior carry meaning for interviewees' self-perceptions, as they draw parallels between sentiments analyzed in the ÖVP and FPÖ materials earlier in this chapter. Their experiences of difference making through interactions with their Austrian peers influence their perspectives on whether they see themselves as resembling the political imaginary of "the migrant." Turkish interviewees reference their physical appearance as tied to negative assumptions about "the migrant" which negatively impact their self-perceptions. Furthermore, both male and female Turkish interviewees make modifications to their physical appearance and behavior to circumvent such negative assumptions. U.S. interviewees express awareness of difference making involved with physical appearance and behavior, but do not perceive themselves as resembling the political imaginary of "the migrant." Rather, their encounters with difference making related to outwardly expressed characteristics has a much more neutral impact on their self-perceptions and they do not change their physical appearance or behavior via diffraction to mitigate their association with the political imaginary of "the migrant."

6.4 Conclusion: Contrasting Receptions, Diverging Self-Perceptions

This chapter analyzes migrants' self-perceptions in relation to broader anti-migration discourse in Austria. To illustrate the impacts of difference making on interviewees' self-perceptions, reception of their practice of German as a foreign language highlights the

interactional nature of difference making discussed by M'charek (2010, 308). Turkish and U.S. interviewees indicate that their Austrian peers' reception of imperfect or accented German is part of difference making that influences their self-perceptions, but in contrasting ways. Turkish interviewees discussed being singled out for speaking imperfect or accented German, producing a feeling of exclusion that discourages them from interacting with their Austrian peers to improve their German language skills. U.S. interviewees, on the other hand, noted that the difference making involved with speaking accented and imperfect German indeed impacts their self-perceptions, but in more neutral ways that they say do not seem discouraging or exclusionary.

To assess the connections between interviewees' discussion of practicing German and broader anti-migration discourse in Austria, visual political materials from the ÖVP and FPÖ parties were analyzed. These two parties were chosen for analysis due to their most vocal criticism of and opposition to migrant presence and migration into Austria. Analysis of both parties' materials established common themes in anti-migration discourse to indicate which characteristics these parties associate with the political imaginary of "the migrant" in relation to the two groups of nationals interviewed. These themes include resistance to integrating into Vienna by lacking German proficiency, posing danger to Vienna via criminal activity, posing a danger to the Viennese culture and way of life, as well as Islamic extremism and opposing women's rights. Explicit connections were also made between Turkish nationals and these behaviors, while generalizing claims about the United States or U.S. nationals were not present. ÖVP and FPÖ portrayals of "the migrant" therefore draw upon the politics of fear (Wodak, 2020 162) and demographic panic (Wodak 2020, 173) by asserting that "the migrant" is an individual who both endangers public safety and threatens a Viennese way of life.

Interviewees connect ÖVP and FPÖ portrayals of the "the migrant" as a political imaginary to their outwardly expressed characteristics of physical appearance and behavior. Both interviewee groups experience difference making based on these characteristics, but in diverging ways that mirror the contrasts in how their German language skills were perceived by their Austrian peers. Turkish interviewees reported their outwardly expressed characteristics as negatively influencing their self-perceptions due to the associations made between Turkish nationals and "the migrant." To avoid being associated with this imaginary, male and female

Turkish interviewees make conscious choices to modify both their physical appearance and behavior because of diffraction (M'charek 2010, 308). Male Turkish interviewees changed their hair and beard length, while female Turkish interviewees avoided wearing religious Muslim clothing, changed their hair color and adjusted their social behavior to more closely resemble that of their Austrian peers. Therefore, Turkish interviewees perceive themselves as targeted by the political imaginary of “the migrant” based on characteristics emphasized by the ÖVP and FPÖ. U.S. interviewees reported their outwardly expressed characteristics as having a neutral influence on their self-perceptions. This group expressed awareness of the negative meanings associated with the political imaginary of “the migrant” and its impacts upon its intended targets but did not perceive their physical appearance or behavior as connecting them to this imaginary. Both male and female U.S. interviewees thus did not modify their outwardly expressed characteristics, as they do not perceive themselves as targeted by the political imaginary of “the migrant.”

Overall, a connection between German proficiency and negative associations with the political imaginary of “the migrant” influences the two nationality groups interviewed for this study in contrasting ways. Both nationality groups are aware of these negative implications, despite being impacted by it in differing ways. Given that the ÖVP and FPÖ parties contribute to anti-migration discourse by perpetuating the negative implications associated with “the migrant,” interviewee speculations in the conclusion of Chapter 5 that their interactions with the MA 35 are shaped by right-wing politics are contextualized by this chapter. This chapter ultimately underscores that interviewees connect the challenges they experience when interacting with the MA 35 to their understandings of broader anti-migration discourse in Austria by indicating that right-wing political parties’ anti-migration discourse and their negative statements about migrants are understood by migrants regardless of nationality. While some interviewees state that their self-perceptions is impacted more negatively by these portrayals than others, all discussed their awareness thereof as affecting both their perceptions of the MA 35 and of themselves.

7. Conclusion: What Makes the Difference?

The overall aim of this master's thesis is to conduct a comparative study on the commonalities and contrasts between Turkish and United States nationals' interactions with Austrian state institutions as migrants in Vienna, Austria. Through the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews about Turkish and U.S. internationals' interactions with the Viennese migration authorities (known as the MA 35), interviewees' lived experiences contribute to scientific literature by addressing the following overarching research question:

In which ways are Turkish and United States nationals' self-perceptions as migrants in Vienna, Austria impacted by their interactions with Austrian state institutions?

“Self-perceptions” are defined as individuals' assessments of their own sociopolitical standing in response to their interactions with the external sociopolitical dynamics present in their everyday lives. To address this research question, three main anthropological theories—difference making, the anthropology of bureaucracy and political imaginaries—were utilized to interpret the role of interviewees' institutional experiences in constructing their self-perceptions. The overall findings of this research are summarized below.

Chapter 5: Navigating the Viennese Migration System

Chapter 5: Navigating the Viennese Migration System first outlines the process of applying for a residence permit in Vienna through the MA 35, highlighting the importance of particularities in this process and the high amount of effort required to submit an application. Next, interviewee statements about the challenges of navigating the MA 35 are assessed in relation to their perception of publicly available information on government and government-affiliated websites about applying for a residence permit, as well as their interactions with MA 35 employees. The chapter concludes by discussing migrant speculation of their interactions with the MA 35 as influenced by right-wing anti-migration discourse in Austria. The research sub questions of this chapter are as follows:

Which systemic aspects of navigating the MA 35 do migrants in Vienna see as influencing their self-perceptions?

- **How do interviewees perceive publicly available information on government and government-affiliated websites as impacting their experiences of navigating the MA 35?**
- **Which connections do interviewees perceive between government and government-affiliated websites and the broader political context in Austria?**

The findings of this chapter show that both nationality groups face challenges in accessing accurate and correct information about applying for a residence permit and in interacting with MA 35 employees. Interviewees claim that they encounter informational discrepancies on government and government-affiliated websites when searching for information regarding which documents are needed to apply for a residence permit in Austria. These claims were determined to hold true after an analysis of government-affiliated websites was conducted and displayed in **Table 3**, where a list of documents and additional important information needed to apply for a student residence permit in Austria are listed. Discrepancies in the form of conflicting and incomplete information were found across all different websites. Without access to consistent and accurate information, migrants cannot adequately prepare all documents for a residence permit application, resulting in further challenges while interacting with MA 35 employees.

Interactions with MA 35 employees highlight the role that these informational issues play in the residence permit application process, as interviewees express uncertainty regarding which documents MA 35 employees may or may not request from them. Some indicate that they are asked to submit extra documents they were previously unaware of or that they face decisions made on their applications which they cannot find a reasonable explanation for. Requests for extra documents prolong an application's processing time, sometimes resulting in migrants having to leave the Schengen Area to avoid breaking the law. Incorrect decisions result in much more serious consequences such as wrongful deportation and/or having to sue the MA 35 in court to reinstate a rightful stay in Austria. Along with public perception of the MA 35 as a problematic institution as contextualized in Chapter 4, these issues are common knowledge among migrants. The interviewees of this study perceive a divide between

themselves and the MA 35 and thus have distrust in the institution which they connect to their understandings of the broader migration debate in Austria.

Interviewees speculate that a lack of correct and accurate information about applying for a residence permit is connected to broader right-wing, anti-migration discourse in Austria, transitioning to the discussion thereof in Chapter 6. This chapter emphasizes Weber's (1979, 992) theory of institutional secrecy as producing lack of transparency and access to information for bureaucratic clients in connection to Lipsky's (2010, 3, 66) explanation of street-level bureaucrats' decisions as "instance[s] of political delivery" which bureaucratic clients view as connected to broader political discourse. This master's thesis makes unique contributions to the field of anthropology of bureaucracy by combining these theories and applying them specifically to migrant experiences with the MA 35, an institution which remains critically understudied in the field of anthropology of bureaucracy.

Chapter 6: Impacts of Learning German, Right-Wing Political Imaginaries and Outward Appearance's on Migrant Self-Perceptions

Chapter 6: Impacts of Learning German, Right-Wing Political Imaginaries and Outward Appearance on Migrant Self-Perceptions begins by presenting interviewees' narration of how their use of German as a foreign language is perceived by their Austrian peers, as well as how interviewees connect this reception to their self-perceptions. After their speculation in the conclusion of Chapter 5 that their interactions with the MA 35 as a state institution are influenced by Austrian right-wing politics, Chapter 6 proceeds by analyzing visual political materials from the right-wing ÖVP and FPÖ parties to assess which associations these parties attach to the political imaginary of "the migrant." These two parties were selected for exhibiting the most vocal opposition to migrants and migration into Austria. Finally, interviewees' reflections on their own physical appearance and behavior are assessed in relation to the ÖVP and FPÖ's associations with "the migrant" to indicate which impacts these associations have on interviewees' self-perceptions. The research sub questions are as follows:

To which extent do migrants in Vienna see their self-perceptions as shaped by anti-migration discourse?

- **To which extent do the two groups of interviewees perceive reception of their use of German as a foreign language as connected to anti-migration discourse?**
- **How do images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP parties of “the migrant” play a role in influencing the two groups’ self-perceptions?**
- **In which ways do interviewees discuss their appearance through physical characteristics and behavior as influencing their self-perceptions considering images perpetuated by the FPÖ and ÖVP of “the migrant”?**

“Anti-migration discourse” is defined as sociopolitical discourse which negatively criticizes and/or stands in opposition to migrants and migration. Furthermore, “the migrant” represents the political imaginary of migrants disseminated through anti-migration discourse.

This chapter’s findings create connections between migrants’ practice of German as a foreign language, tropes associated with the political imaginary of “the migrant” as portrayed by the right-wing FPÖ and ÖVP parties and outwardly expressed characteristics—physical appearance and behavior—that impact the two nationality groups interviewed for this study in diverging ways. The interactional nature of difference making, as defined by M’charek (2010, 308), is highlighted in this chapter through the interactional nature of language practice. Turkish interviewees report their German language skills as negatively perceived by their Austrian peers because of accented or imperfect German, which produces a sense of exclusion and discourages them from practicing their language skills further. Thus, this reception illustrates that difference making has negative consequences on Turkish interviewees’ self-perceptions. In contrast, U.S. interviewees report much more neutral receptions of speaking German imperfectly or with an accent that does not produce feelings of social exclusion or discouragement from utilizing German as a foreign language. U.S. interviewees therefore undergo difference making in relation to their German proficiency as a neutral experience that neutrally impacts their self-perceptions.

Interviewees speculated in the conclusion of Chapter 5 that Austrian right-wing political parties—the FPÖ and ÖVP—shape their interactions with the MA 35 due to their vocal opposition to and criticism of migration and migrants in Vienna. Chapter 6 analyzes political visual materials from FPÖ and ÖVP election campaigns in Vienna in connection to

common associations with migrants in anti-migration discourse, which are tied to a right-wing political imaginary of “the migrant.” These associations include a lack of German proficiency, dangerous and criminal activity, Turkish people, and religion as contextualized in Chapter 4 and the theoretical chapter of this study. Overall, three ÖVP posters and seven posters in relation to the two nationality groups were found and used for analysis. The ÖVP evokes the politics of fear (Wodak 2020, 173) by emphasizing that “the migrant” poses a threat to Vienna by lacking German proficiency, resisting integration into Vienna, lacking intelligence and exhibiting dangerous, criminal activity. The FPÖ draws on not only the politics of fear, but also demographic panic (Wodak 2020, 173) by emphasizing the ÖVP’s points and adding that “the migrant” exhibits undesirable behavior—corruption, disorderly behavior, disregard for women’s rights and Islamic extremism—that jeopardizes a Viennese way of life. A vast majority of these campaign posters targeted Turkish people and migrants from majority Muslim countries in connection to these factors, while only one poster criticized Chicago in the 1990s, but not in a manner that was negatively generalized to all U.S. migrants in Vienna.

Finally, interviewees related the right-wing political imaginary of “the migrant” to their physical appearance and behavior as impacting their self-perceptions in parallel to receptions of them practicing German as a foreign language. Male Turkish interviewees shared anecdotes about negative receptions of their outwardly expressed characteristics that associate them with the political imaginary of “the migrant,” establishing this aspect of difference making as negatively impacting their self-perceptions. Negative reactions of Austrian peers to these characteristics prompts them to change their outward appearance, illustrating that M’charek’s (2010, 308) concept of diffraction plays a role in their encounters with difference making. These individuals do so in changing how they wear their hair and facial hair. In a similar way, female Turkish interviewees are impacted by diffraction but instead change their outwardly expressed characteristics in advance of interactions with Austrian peers to circumvent being associated with the political imaginary of “the migrant” and experiencing negative implications of difference making on their self-perceptions. Female Turkish interviewees do so by avoiding Muslim religious clothing, changing their hair color and behaving in ways more closely resembling their Austrian peers in social settings. Turkish interviewees report negative impacts on their self-perceptions due to associations with “the migrant” and perceive themselves as targeted by anti-migration discourse, while U.S. interviewees again report neutral impacts of difference making on their self-perceptions. U.S. interviewees expressed awareness of how negative associations with the political imaginary of “the migrant” negatively impact the self-perceptions of those associated with it, but do not

view themselves as the targets of this discourse. Instead, their experiences with difference making in relation to their outwardly expressed characteristics has a neutral impact on their self-perceptions and they do not exhibit diffraction because they do not change their physical appearance or behavior in response to interacting with their Austrian peers.

Connections between German proficiency and negative associations with outwardly expressed characteristics associated with the political imaginary of “the migrant” influence both nationality groups’ self-perceptions in diverging ways. However, both are aware of these associations whether they perceive themselves as targeted by the associations or not. Overall, awareness thereof highlights that migrants in Vienna connect their understandings of anti-migration discourse in Austria back to their interactions with the MA 35 as they speculate in the conclusion of Chapter 5. The unique contribution of this master’s thesis to literature on difference making (M’charek 2010, 308) and political imaginaries is that it establishes a deeply interconnected relationship between the two theories specifically in the context of migrant self-perception.

Beyond the Thesis

Beyond this master’s thesis, these research outcomes indicate that bureaucratic and political elements play key roles in influencing migrants’ self-perceptions. The interaction of these two dynamics in the lived experiences of the Turkish and U.S. nationals interviewed for this thesis presents opportunities for similar analysis in additional countries utilizing the anthropological lenses of difference making, the anthropology of bureaucracy and political imaginaries. Framework is also provided for further analysis by nationality of additional migrants in Vienna, Austria. The stories and perspectives of migrants such as this work’s interviewees greatly matter, as understanding their experiences provides valuable insights into migrants’ relations to state institutions and the impacts thereof on their self-perceptions.

Appendix A: Figures

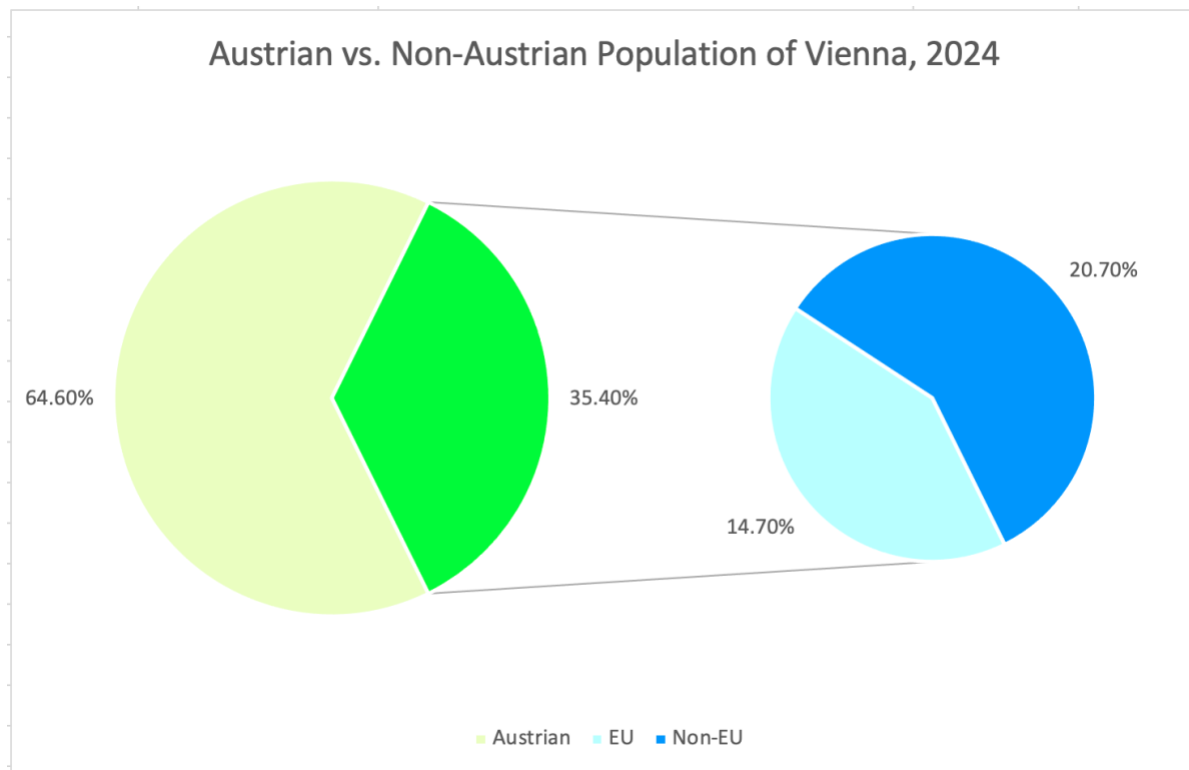


Figure 1: Proportions of Vienna's population with either Austrian or non-Austrian nationality, including the proportion of non-Austrian nationals with EU or non-EU nationality (Stadt Wien 2025a).

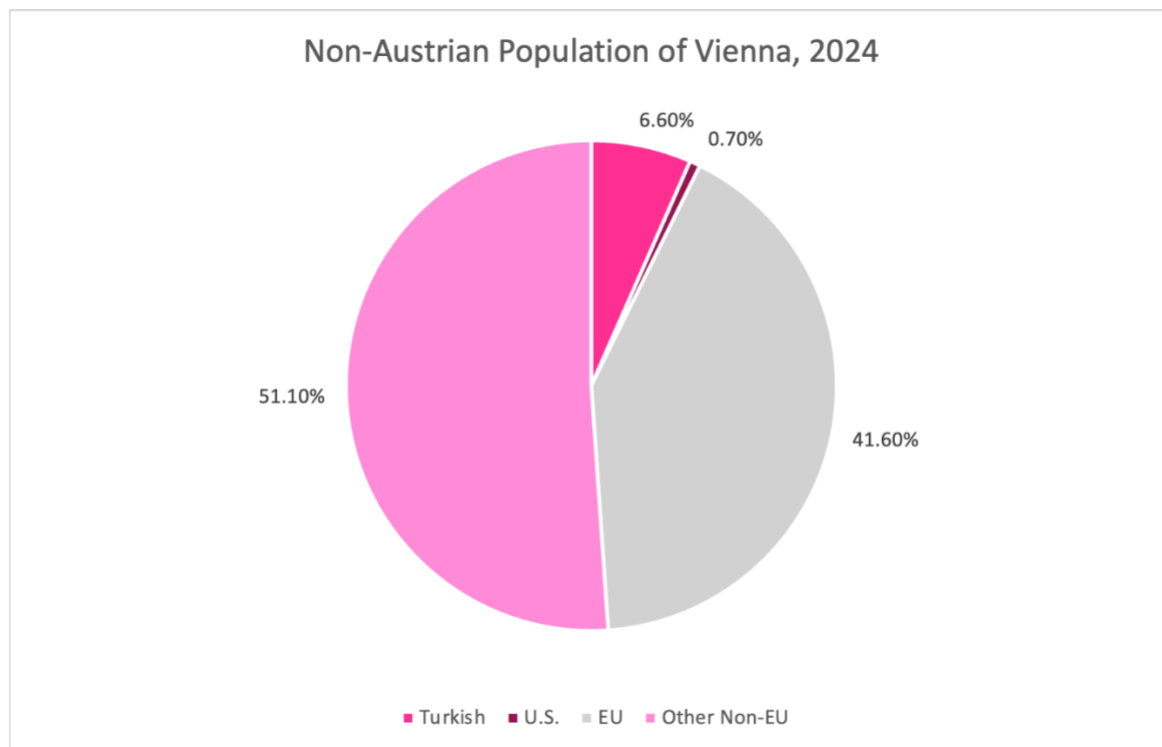


Figure 2: Proportions of non-Austrian residents in Vienna with EU nationalities, as well as those with Turkish and U.S. nationalities and other non-EU nationalities (Stadt Wien 2025a).

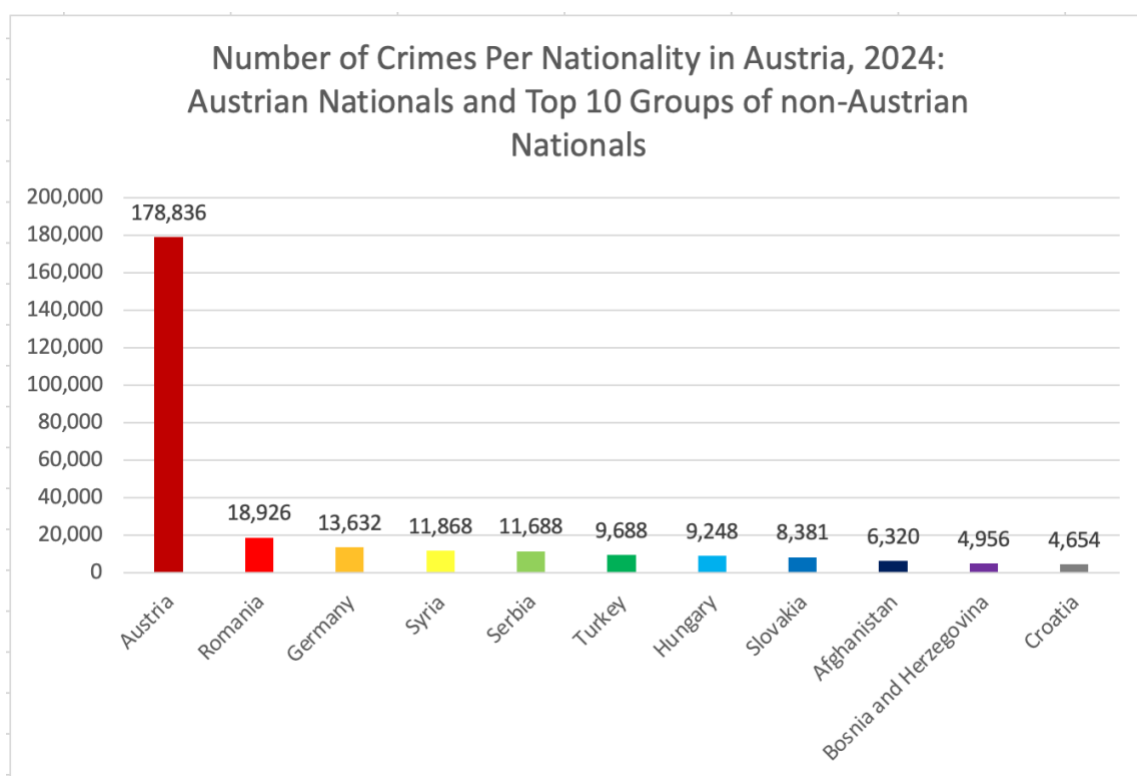


Figure 3: The number of crimes committed in Austria in 2024 by Austrian nationals and the top 10 groups of non-Austrian nationals who committed crimes in 2024 (Bundeskriminalamt 2025).

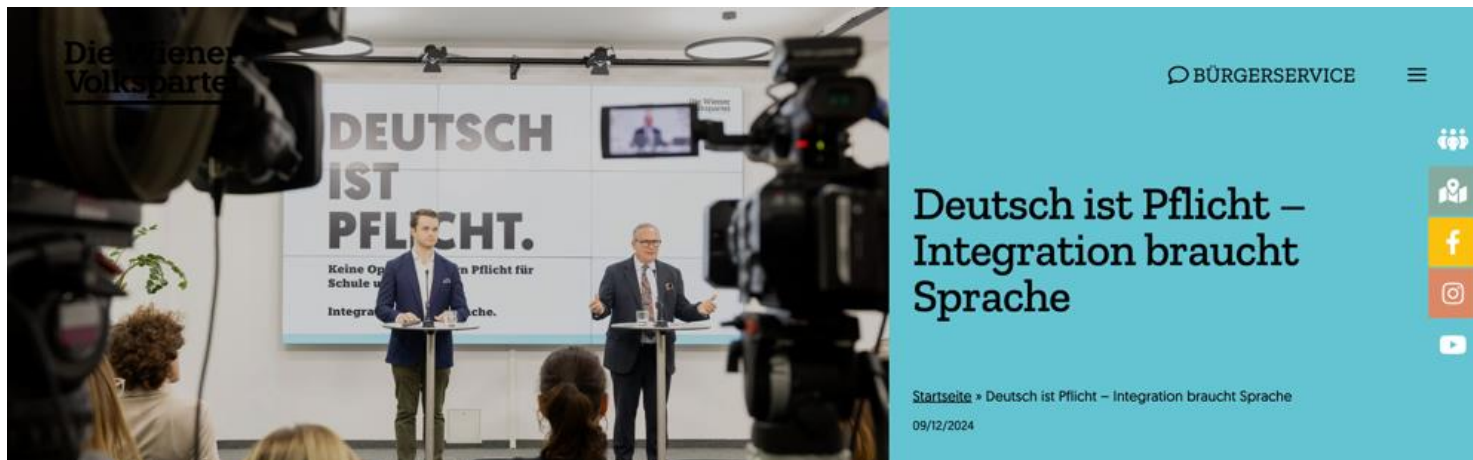


Figure 4: Website banner from the ÖVP’s Vienna branch website from their 2025 campaign in Vienna. Text in turquoise translated: “German is compulsory—Integration needs language” (Die Wiener Volkspartei 2025).



Figure 5: 2025 Campaign poster for the ÖVP Vienna branch. Translated: “German is compulsory, Habibi. Make Vienna smart again” (oe24.at 2025, March 17).

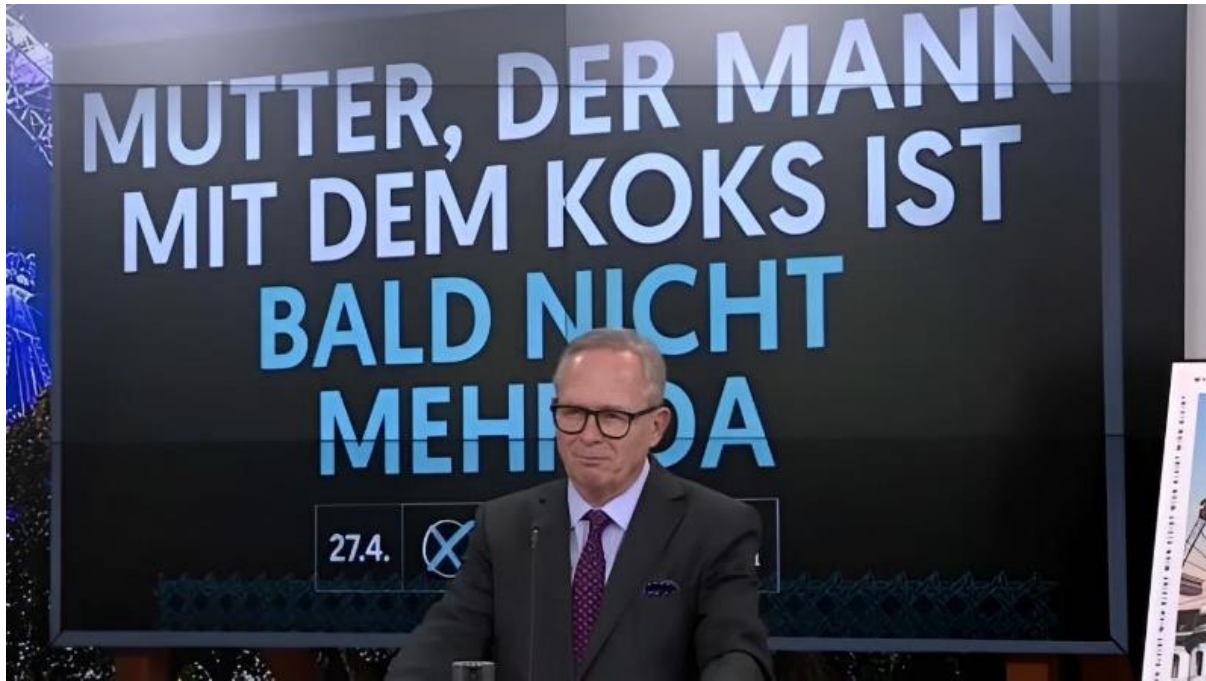


Figure 6: 2025 campaign poster for the ÖVP Vienna branch. Translated: “Mother, the man with the cocaine will soon be gone” (PULS 24 2025, March 17).



Figure 7: 2005 campaign poster for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Translated: “Vienna may not become Istanbul! He says What Vienna thinks” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025b).



Figure 8: 2005 campaign poster for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Translated: “No tax money for the Turkish tent, Mr. Mayor Häupl! SPÖ, ÖVP and Green Party provoke the Viennese general public with a sea of Turkish flags for €40,000 in tax money. FPÖ-HC Strache: Vienna may not become Istanbul! He says what Vienna thinks” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025b).



Figure 9: 2010 campaign poster for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Translated: “WE protect women’s rights. The SPÖ protects forced headscarf. For US, it’s about the VIENNESE.” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025c)



Figure 10: 2020 campaign post for the FPÖ Vienna branch. Left side translated: “SPÖ Michael Ludwig: HIS VIENNA!” Right side translated: “Dominik Nepp: OUR VIENNA!” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025d)



Figure 11: 2020 Facebook post of the Vienna FPÖ branch. Translated: “The radicalization of Turks living in Vienna by the Islamic dictator Erdogan is a massive risk to homeland security—this has been clearly demonstrated by the riots in the last few days! Erdogan uses his compatriots as remote-controlled weapons against western democracy. The FPÖ very clearly says: Vienna may not become Istanbul! Therefore, at the Vienna election on October 11th, vote FPÖ!” (FPÖ 2020, June 28)



Figure 12: 2020 campaign poster of the Vienna FPÖ branch. Left side translated: “SPÖ (social democrats), ÖVP (Austrian People’s Party) & Green Party: Radical Islam”. Right side translated: “Dominik Nepp: Our home!” (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut 2025d)



Figure 13: 1996 campaign poster of the Vienna FPÖ branch. Translated: “We stand by it: “Vienna may not become Chicago!” Dr. Rainer Pawkowicz. He says what he thinks. And he loves Vienna.”

Appendix B: Tables

Nationality	Percentage of Total Population	Number of People
Austrian	64.6%	1,295,341
EU	14.7%	295,597
Non-EU	20.7%	414,822
		2,005,760 Total

Table 1: Proportions and numbers of Vienna's overall population, consisting of Austrian nationals, EU nationals and non-EU nationals (Stadt Wien 2025a).

Nationality	Percentage of Non-Austrian Population	Number of People
Turkish	6.6%	46,730
U.S.	0.7%	4,987
EU	41.6%	295,597
Other Non-EU	51.1%	363,105
		710,419 Total

Table 2: Proportions and numbers of Vienna's non-Austrian residents including EU nationals, U.S. nationals, Turkish nationals and other non-EU nationals (Stadt Wien 2025a).

5.2.1.3 Table 3

	oesterreich.gv.at¹	bmi.gv.at	migration.gv.at²	Stadt Wien	OeAD (ÖAD)³
# of Webpages	1	7	1	4	1
Length of Permit Validity	1 year			1 year ⁴	1 year “if all requirements are met”
How to Submit?	In-person (mandatory)			In-person (mandatory) ⁴	
Length of Approval	Authorities must decide on application within 90 days	“The authority must decide within 90 days” ⁵			Within 90 days “if all necessary documents have been submitted”
Form of ID	Valid passport	Valid passport ^{6, 7}	“Passport, identity card or proof of citizenship in combination with an official identification with photo”	Valid passport, a copy of all pages is needed for the first application ⁴	“Valid passport,” a copy of all pages is needed for the first application
Passport Photo	Passport photo 45 x 35 mm, no older than 6 months	“Photo of yourself” or “passport photo” 35 x 45 mm ^{6, 7}		Passport photo not older than six months ⁴	3.5 x 4.5 cm color picture “not older than 6 months”
Health Insurance	“Proof of health insurance that covers all	“Proof about sufficient health insurance in Austria” such as ÖGK	Self-insurance for students and the requirements to apply	“Proof of health insurance that pays benefits in Austria and	“Proof of health insurance covering all

¹ oesterreich.gv.at 2024b, May 15² migration.gv.at, 2025³ OeAD, Agency for Education and Internationalisation 2025⁴ Stadt Wien 2024d, December 31⁵ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2024c⁶ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2023b, September⁷ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2024b

	risks” (translated from German)	“self-insurance for students” or “private insurance” ⁶ ; “insurance policy (covering all risks),” ⁷ ; one page lacks any information ⁸		covers all risks, such as ÖGK or private insurance” (translated from German) ⁴	risks” such as private or ÖGK student insurance
Proof of sufficient funds for a year of studies	Pay/wage slips, pension, employment contract, investment capital, a liability declaration or “sufficient own assets.” The amount needed is not specified.	Pay/wage slips, pension, ^{6, 7} employment contract, property ownership, ⁶ investment capital or “own assets in sufficient amount.” ⁷ The amount needed is not specified.		Pay/salary slips, employment contract, or a savings account for which the origin of funds is explained ⁴ . The amount needed is not specified.	Savings account with “applicant’s name” that is “accessible from Austria” and a declaration of regular expenses. Authorities may/may not ask for the origin of funds. Amount of funds is specified, with extra funds needed for insurance and housing if applicable.
Additional Documents?	“If necessary, further evidence” (translated from German)	“If required by the authorities, you must also present additional documents” ⁷		“You may be required to provide additional documents” (translated from German). ⁴	“The residence authorities may require the submission of further documents and confirmations”
University Acceptance (Initial Application)	Confirmation of admission to program of studies	Letter of acceptance or enrollment confirmation to program of studies ⁶		Enrollment confirmation for picking up residence permit ⁴	Confirmation of admission for initial application if applying outside of Austria, proof

⁸ Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2025

					of enrollment when applying in Austria.
Apostilles, Certifications, Translations	Certified translations and apostilles may be necessary for foreign documents. Specific information not provided.	Certified translation for documents not already in German “if requested by the authorities.” “Most authorities will accept documents in English.” ⁷ Specific information not provided.		Certified translation for documents not in German or English. Some may need apostilles. ⁴ Countries requiring these are specified in a separate webpage. ⁹	Certified German translation recommended for all documents. “Documents in English language are also accepted in some cases.” Some documents require apostilles—specific information not provided.
Information about Application Fees?	Includes application fees			Includes application fees and fees for travel documents or other certificates that may or may not be charged ⁴	Includes application fees and fees for travel documents or other certificates that may or may not be charged
Criminal Background Check		“Only for initial application“ ⁶		From country of origin, no more than 3 months old ⁴	From “country of residence,” no more than 3 months old, “legalised and afterwards translated”

⁹ Stadt Wien 2024a, January 10

Housing Documents		Proof of cost of living, as well as a housing agreement or rental contract. ⁶ Secured housing is not required to submit the application. ^{7, 8}		Proof of cost of living in a bank statement or rental contract ⁴	At least 3 months of housing must be secured. Proof of rental contract or housing agreement. Registration of residence must be shown to collect the permit
Continuation of Studies (Extension Application)		“Confirmation, of being allowed to continue your studies”, “proof of successful studies in the last academic year” ⁶ , “a successful continuation of studies in the previous academic year” ¹⁰		Completion of at least 16 credits in the last academic year, confirmation of studies and study sheet ⁴	“Proof of academic success,” “confirmation of your continuing university enrolment” and at least 16 credits completed in the last academic year
Credit Report				A current credit report from the Austrian KSV ⁴	“Current extract from the files of an officially recognised credit reference agency”
Fingerprints				For an extension, the MA 35 will scan fingerprints ⁴	
Copy or Original Documents?		“The documents must always be submitted in original and in copy” ⁷		All documents are requested in original ⁴	

Table 3: Websites analyzed for information regarding applying for an Austrian student residence permit. Sources are cited in footnotes. Missing information is indicated by boxes filled in with gray. Significant discrepancies in information are indicated by boxes filled in with orange.

¹⁰ Bundesministerium für Inneres 2024d

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Zusammenfassung (Deutsch)

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die folgende Forschungsfrage: Inwiefern werden die Selbstwahrnehmungen türkischer und US-amerikanischer Staatsangehöriger als Migrant:innen in Wien, Österreich, durch ihre Interaktionen mit staatlichen Institutionen beeinflusst? Zur Beantwortung dieser Frage werden die gelebten Erfahrungen türkischer und US-amerikanischer Staatsangehöriger mit Wohnsitz in Wien vergleichend analysiert, wobei der Fokus auf ihren Begegnungen mit der Wiener Migrationsbehörde (Magistratsabteilung 35, kurz MA 35) und migrationskritischen soziopolitischen Diskursen.

Die Forschungsergebnisse zeigen gemeinsame und divergierende Muster. Beide Gruppen berichten von ähnlichen bürokratischen Erfahrungen mit der MA 35 und Begegnungen mit migrationskritischem Diskurs in Österreich. Unterschiede zeigen sich jedoch darin, wie diese Erfahrungen ihre Selbstwahrnehmung prägen. Besonders die Reaktionen auf ihren Gebrauch von Deutsch als Fremdsprache—die sie häufig mit äußerem Erscheinungsbild und dem breiteren politischen Kontext Österreichs verknüpfen—dienen als Ausgangspunkt für die Erklärung der Konstruktion ihrer Selbstwahrnehmung. Türkische Staatsangehörige deuteten institutionelle Interaktionen häufiger als Teil migrationskritischer Narrative, während US-amerikanische Staatsangehörige sie eher als Ausdruck bürokratischer Abläufe, denn als gezielte Ausgrenzung verstanden.

Drei zentrale anthropologische Theorien unterstützen diese Arbeit: Difference Making, die Anthropologie der Bürokratie und politische Imaginationen. Untersucht wird, wie staatliche Institutionen und öffentliche Diskurse Bilder von „den Migrant:innen“ konstruieren und verfestigen und wie Individuen diese Konstruktionen interpretieren und in der Formung ihrer Selbstwahrnehmung aushandeln. Die qualitative, vergleichende Analyse basiert sich auf dreizehn leitfadengestützten Interviews mit sechs US-amerikanischen und sieben türkischen Staatsangehörigen und wird durch eine kontextuelle Analyse einschlägiger Quellen ergänzt.

Diese Masterarbeit leitet durch die vergleichende Analyse migrantischer Erfahrungen nach Staatsangehörigkeit in Wien einen Beitrag zu einem bislang wenig erforschten Bereich. Sie erweitert das Verständnis der Rolle staatlicher Institutionen und soziopolitischer Migrationsnarrative bei der aktiven Mitgestaltung migrantischer Selbstverständnisse und ihrer Selbstwahrnehmungen in Wien, Österreich.