The Virtual Second Generation — An Own Space on the Internet

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Globalisation is the buzzword of the last decade. The internet is considered as the technology fostering it. Migration is believed a consequence. 'Cultural' assimilation is feared as a result. The increasing transnational networks are seen to erode the 'national'.

Internet portals, which are ethnically defined and cater for the needs of transnational migrants or their children, are observed from this perspective. In the research project "The virtual second generation", funded by the Volkswagen-Stiftung, I am analysing the functions fulfilled by the internet portal theinder.net, also called the Indernet, merging the German word for Indians, "Inder", with internet and thus creating the network of Indians. The analysis shows that in reaction to the transnationality inherent in migration, the Indernet is localised in 'Germany' and can best be understood from this perspective.

THE *INDERNET*

The Indernet was founded in the summer of 2000 by three young students from Northern Germany. They had been experimenting with web design before, had build their own personal websites and, following the discussions about the introduction of 'Green Cards' for foreign IT experts and the conservative counter campaign "Kinder statt Inder" which can be best translated as 'children instead of Indians', decided to establish a virtual network of 'Indians'. In the wake of this first racist campaign against migrants from 'India', the founders,

who all have parents from the subcontinent and who knew each other from 'Indian' functions, wanted to get in contact with others like themselves and provide them with information about their ascribed country of origin 'India'. In the first half year of its existence, the Indernet developed rapidly, expanding not only its technical features and content, but also enlarging the editorial team and gaining new users at a fast pace. Once the Indernet had established itself, it steadily grew further, survived major technical crises, gained much publicity also in the media and by now is a well-known institution of second generation 'Indians' in Germany.

The term 'Indians' of the second generation is used by me to describe those 'Germans' who have at least one parent from South Asia. Following Paul Mecheril, I define 'Germans' independent of citizenship or ancestry as those who have lived, live and will live in Germany. This is a purposeful move away from the unreflected common sense definitions of 'national' identities, which on the surface are based on legal affiliation, i.e. citizenship, and at their roots are founded in racist ideas of biological commonness, i.e. 'blood'. Since this common sense determines the understanding of what a 'German' is, Mecheril establishes the analytical category of 'Other Germans' (in German: "Andere Deutsche") which takes account of the othering experiences. 'Other Germans' are considered to deviate from the ideal type of the 'standard German' and this deviation is ascribed to assumed 'non-German' ancestors. Rather than being accepted as 'Germans', the children of people from South Asia are believed to be 'Indians', often modified with the phrase 'second generation'. This term also is ambivalent, as while it acknowledges that the members of the second generation did not migrate themselves, at the same time it asserts that their 'identity' is determined through migration. Given that in Germany in the general public the knowledge about South Asia is rather limited and not much differentiation is made between the different South Asian countries, the term 'Indian' is often also used for those whose parent(s) come from a South Asian country other than the Republic of India. Furthermore, since the most powerful markers for otherness in

racist discourses are visually, also 'Germans' who have no contact to South Asia, but are believed to look as if they did, are defined as 'Indians'. Such an experience is made especially by 'Germans' who were adopted by 'White Germans' from South Asia.

MIGRATION FROM SOUTH ASIA TO 'GERMANY'

Already in the first half of the 20th century, migrants from British India came to what was then 'Germany'. Historians like Joachim Oesterheld, Lothar Günther and Hans-Joachim Rehmer have described how there were two main motivations for this. On the one hand, young men wanted to study at the well-reputed 'German' universities, on the other activists for 'India's' independence from colonial 'Britain' chose 'Germany' as a place for agitation. After the Second World War, however, hardly any of these young men still lived in the new 'Germanies'.

Soon, the migration of young men and women from the Republic of India as well as from other South Asian countries who wanted to study, to work and to explore the world, started again. Some went to the German Democratic Republic ('East Germany'), most to the Federal Republic of Germany ('West Germany'). Most came individually, had organised the trip to the 'Germanies' with the help of their families and planned to return to their place of origin. Often, however, the studies took longer than planned, because 'German' institutions did not accept 'Indian' certificates. Attractive job offers and/or relationships with 'German' spouses prolonged the stay. As a consequence, migrants from South Asia settled dispersed in various parts of the 'Germanies' and founded families. Due to their dispersion and small numbers, most had only little contact with other migrants from South Asia. The parents of the founders of the Indernet belong to this group of migrants.

In the 1960s and 70s, another phase of migration from the South Indian state of Kerala followed. Due to the economic growth in 'West Germany', there was a shortage of nurses in hospitals and homes for the elderly. Those institutions which

were run by the Catholic Church used their transnational networks to recruit young women from countries such as the Philippines and India. Thus, many young Christian women from Kerala came either as trained or as trainee nurses. Many migrated in small groups and were provided with a basic religious and 'ethnic' infrastructure in 'West Germany'. Most of those who were permitted to stay had in the 1970s arranged marriages in Kerala and brought their husbands to live with them. This accelerated the foundation of an own 'Malayalee' infrastructure in 'West Germany' which included 'Indian' masses in church, Malayalam schools for the second generation and numerous associations. The children of the nurses are by now at least teenagers and form a large part of the users of the Indernet.

Slowly, also the children of the less privileged migrants of the 1970s onwards enter the Indernet. Most of their parents were faced with much stricter immigration controls than the earlier migrants, many had to apply for asylum and could only enter the unskilled labour market. In this respect, they live in similar conditions as the 'Ahmadiyas' from Pakistan and the 'Tamils' from Sri Lanka, who both fled persecution in their countries of origin and obtained more or less refuge in 'West Germany'.

The newest phase of migration is that of IT experts. They are as old as the members of the second generation but have very different interests. Rather than using the Indernet, they have established their own virtual spaces which cater more specifically for their needs.

FUNCTIONS OF THE *INDERNET*

Although the trilingual home page of the Indernet suggests that one has entered a transnational internet portal, a closer look shows its rootedness in 'Germany'. The English section has only very little content, the Hindi one hardly any, the German section is the most comprehensive and German is the major language in the interactive elements. The editorial team

would like to cater for the needs of the IT experts as well and installed an own section in the forum for them. But they offer hardly any practical advice about everyday (working) life in 'Germany' which forms the main interest of this group. Only the calendar for 'Indian' events in Germany is used both by the new first as well as the second generation. The articles on 'India' do not satisfy the need for up to date news from the country of origin new migrants look for, but rather give basic information for those who know little about 'India' as most of the second generation do. Thus, when the editorial team states that the aim of the Indernet is to provide information about 'India' and a space for communication, while this can be used both by new migrants and 'White Germans' interested in 'India', it is actually meant for the second generation.

The 'Indians' of the second generation are doubly different. They differ from the new migrants, as most of them have never lived in 'India' and know that county, if at all, just from visits to their relatives. The country they are most familiar with is 'Germany', there they know the institutions, the rules and there they experience othering. In contrast to 'White Germans', their belongingness to 'Germany' is, however, not accepted without questioning. Continually, they are told explicitly or implicitly that they belong to 'India' and not to 'Germany'. Much of this othering is experienced, as Santina Battaglia has shown, through questions. Seemingly innocent inquiries like "Where do you come from?", the refusal to accept the answer "Karlsruhe" and the insistence on the answer "India" show that the multiple belongingness 'Other Germans' feel to more than one 'national' context is not accepted. While their belongingness to 'Germany' is contested, that to 'India' is fixed. 'Indians' of the second generation also continually experience that what they do and how they act is attributed to their ascribed 'Indianness'. If they are good in school, this is considered typical for 'Indians'. If they like spicy food, this proves their coming from 'India'. If, however, they contradict expectations by, for example, not being able to speak 'Indian' or to be a 'Hindu', they are pitied for this loss of 'culture'. The 'Other Germans' by the supposed 'nature' of their ancestry are

furthermore considered to be experts on 'India'. They are asked about the caste system, the 'holy' cow and the bindhi. Having gone to the same schools and consumed the same media as those who ask this ascribed status as an expert and the inability to fulfil it satisfactorily can be humiliating for those asked. Some have no 'Indian' parent they can ask, most have parents who can supply only anecdotal information from their particular background. This is in most cases not enough to stand one's ground as an expert in discussions about 'India'.

The Indernet offers a space to deal with these othering questions. On the one hand, it is a refuge where the questions are not asked. In this virtual space the 'Other Germans' are the norm. Multiple belongingness as well as the experiences of othering are common to most of the users and editors. This commonness creates an atmosphere of relief, even without discussing the issues explicitly. On the other hand, the aim of the Indernet is to provide information about 'India'. This can be adopted to fulfil the ascribed role of an expert on 'India' offline. In the articles and the forum discussions, 'Indians' of the second generation find interpretations of 'India' which they can positively identify with, which they can add to their knowledge about 'India', adjust to their needs and use in discussions with others.

The Indernet thus provides 'Other Germans' who experience othering due to their multiple 'national' belongingness with a space in which they can negotiate what Stuart Hall has called a new ethnic identity. The transnational technology internet thus supports those who, as a result of transnational migration, threaten the notions of 'national' unambigueness to survive in a 'nationally' organised world.

LITERATURE

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A detailed bibliography and further information can be found on http://www.urmila.de.