

*“Of Asians and Indians in Germany: Some Thoughts on Racism and the Interdependencies of Power Inequalities”*

*“독일 안의 아시아인과 인도인: 인종주의에 관한 고찰과 권력 불평등의 상호 의존성”*

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#### An Introduction

German-language internet portals like <http://www.theinder.net/>, <http://www.asia-zone.de/> or <http://www.asia-power.com/> show that there are people, who communicate in German and link themselves in some way to Asia or a country in Asia.<sup>1</sup> *theinder.net* uses in its domain the German term for Indians (*Inder*) and claims to be “the portal on India for Germany”<sup>2</sup> as well as “Germany’s Premier NRI Portal”<sup>3</sup>. The other two portals include in their domain the English term Asia, one of them describes itself, furthermore, as a portal “for Asian issues”<sup>4</sup>.

But what exactly does this mean? What is India and Indian? What is Asia and what are Asian issues? The terms are far less straightforward than one might think. Does India refer to the Republic of India? Or to what used to be British India? Or to some

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<sup>1</sup> I conducted a research project on the internet portal *theinder.net*. For more information see <http://www.urmila.de/english/research/virtual/virtualindex.html> as well as Goel (2005 and 2008c). Two of my students analysed the internet portals *asia-zone* (Heft 2006) and *asia-power* (Kawai 2005).

<sup>2</sup> My own translation from <http://www.theinder.net/deu/> (07.07.08)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theinder.net/eng/> (07.07.08) NRI is the abbreviation for Non-Resident Indians.

<sup>4</sup> My own translation from <http://www.asia-power.com/index.php?wcontent=aboutus&> (07.07.08)

transnational Indian community? The logo used on the *theinder.net* is the flag of the Indian Republic, which suggests that that is the point of reference. But if one asks the founders of the portal they have a far wider notion of India.<sup>5</sup> It encompasses the whole of South Asia or in the case of one of the founders, who is very much influenced by Hindu nationalist thought, all of South Asia that is culturally India (whatever he exactly means by that). Among the users considering themselves as Indians I interviewed a young man, who was born in Sri Lanka and was adopted by 'white' parents from Germany, and a young woman, whose mother was brought up in Britain and whose father migrated from Pakistan to Germany.<sup>6</sup> India thus has a lot of different meanings on *theinder.net* and encompasses more than the Republic of India. In contrast to this the term Asian encompasses in Germany much less than the Asian continent. Contrary to the use of the term in Great Britain and similar to the usage in the USA it is used in German in particular to refer to people, who are thought to come from East and South East Asia. On the *asia-zone* most of the users seem to link themselves to Vietnam<sup>7</sup> and on *asia-power* to the Philippines, China and Vietnam<sup>8</sup>. In both cases the editors and users adopt the term Asians for themselves<sup>9</sup> and also restrict it to themselves. People from Central, South or West Asia are not considered to belong to the category.

The term Asian (*Asiaten*) in German evokes much less the image of a certain geographical region or a particular culture and much more the image of certain physiognomic attributes. An Asian in the German imagination is most of all a person with a certain form of the eyes, which is called derogatorily 'slit eyes' (*Schlitzaugen*) and is framed as a deviation from the norm constructed around the own eye form, which has no particular name. In East Germany this category of people is often labelled with the derogatory term *Fidschis*. As far as I know it was a term first used for the contract labourers from Vietnam and now is used for all who are considered Asian. The term probably is derived from the Fiji Islands and there seems no other obvious link to the

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Goel (2008a) for a discussion of the images of India on *theinder.net*.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Goel (2008b) for a discussion of claims and contestations of Indianness in Germany.

<sup>7</sup> Compare Heft (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Compare Kawai (2005).

<sup>9</sup> Kawai (2005), who was socialised in Japan, is irritated by this usage of the term Asian. In Japan she would never use it as a self-description.

contract labourers from Vietnam than that both the Fiji Islands and Vietnam are far away from East Germany and are thus interchangeable.

The focus on physiognomic attributes shows that the term is based on a belief in (biological) racial differences and their linkage to certain regions of the world. The norm eye form is the one dominant in Germany and anyone with an eye form deviating from it cannot belong to Germany. Similarly, Asia is constructed to be inhabited only by people with an eye form, which in Germany is considered Asian, anybody else cannot belong there. The eye form is, furthermore, not a value free marker. It marks the other as deviating from the norm and it is linked to further ascriptions about the other. The Asians are constructed in Germany in general as always smiling, introverted and passive, which makes them in the consequence also untrustworthy. They are caricatured not only with certain physiognomic attributes (eyes, hair, face form and hat) but also with a certain 'speech disorder', which again constructs the pronunciation in Germany as the norm and any other as an inferior deviation of it.

The term Indian (*Inder*) in German evokes also certain assumptions about physiognomic attributes, but no particular terms have been developed to name these. Indian more than Asian evokes orientalist images of a certain geographical region and culture. An Indian is generally constructed as based in traditions and often considered to be particularly spiritual. In any case in the dominant imagination somebody, who looks like an Indian, must have ancestors in India and belong there rather than to Germany. Thus, for example, my Indianness is established in Germany by my name, the fact that my father migrated from India to Germany and is supported by certain interpretations of my physiognomy and also speech<sup>10</sup>. These ascriptions are linked to further assumptions about me. Many people expect that I know much about India, that my relatives practice yoga, that my mother is suppressed by my father, that I can bear the heat and spices better than members of the dominance culture in Germany and that I am particularly good in mathematics due to my genes. I am thus relegated from Germany to India or rather an imaginary India. Doing so not only my citizenship, the place of my socialisation and residence are ignored, but also those of my ancestors who

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<sup>10</sup> In one case somebody told me that my pronunciation showed that I was not German. In most other cases people were surprised that I speak German so well. I would claim that I speak German like most other people socialised in Germany do, who have a similar educational background and social status.

have lived in what is called Germany for a long time. It is also ignored that when I am in India, on the basis of my general appearance I am considered a foreigner. There only my name is considered a marker of Indianness.

Indianness like Asianness and also Germanness are in Germany (like in many other parts of the world and certainly like in India) still primarily defined through ancestry, blood and genes. National, ethnic or cultural identities are in this understanding not something, which can be acquired through socialisation, but are something embodied since birth or rather since conception. Furthermore, these identities are constructed to be univocal. In the dominant understanding one cannot be Indian and German at the same time. This makes it particularly difficult to deal with those who have a multiple belongingness to several places. Their complex identities have to be reduced and an univocal belongingness constructed.

Racial differentiation is thus still an everyday practice in Germany, even though it is framed in terms of nation, ethnicity and culture. I assume that it is also an everyday practice in India and most other places in the world. The question is in how far the different racisms are the same and where they differ.<sup>11</sup>

In the following I will first introduce the academic discourses on race and racism in Germany and then will describe – after giving some background information on the category<sup>12</sup> Indians and Asians in Germany – experiences of racism in Germany. Following this I will provide a brief theoretical discussion of the interdependency of power inequalities and illustrate this by referring to the situation of those called Indians in Germany. I will conclude with some thoughts about multiple belongingness.

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<sup>11</sup> Talking about racism in Germany I am often told that other countries are racist as well, that racism is part of the human nature and thus there is no need to talk about racism in Germany. In some cases the caste system in India is referred to as a particularly racist system. I interpret this argument as an attempt to prevent a discussion about racism in Germany and the particular relevance of European racism for the whole world. But centering European racism as the most violent and powerful form of racism can also be another reproduction of Eurocentrism. Thus I am interested in discussing different forms of racism around the world and their respective impacts.

<sup>12</sup> I am talking of categories and not of groups or communities as these are analytical ascriptions, which do not necessarily imply that the people thus categorised experience a feeling of commonality. Compare Goel (2007).

## Race, Racism and Critical Racism Theory in Germany

In Germany the term race (*Rasse*) is not anymore used since it is associated with the racist ideology of fascist Germany. Anti-fascist policies and education since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany have created a taboo to talk about race and as a (potentially unintended) consequence also about racism.<sup>13</sup> The terms are reserved in (West) Germany to describe fascist Germany, which is framed to have committed unique and incomparable crimes against humanity. Accordingly, to use the term racism for exclusions committed today in Germany is generally considered an improper use of the term, which relativises the holocaust. This taboo makes it difficult for theories on racism from the USA and Great Britain to travel to and be adapted in Germany. The taboo to use the term race is, however, to some degree weakened at the moment. Via the regulations of the European Union against discrimination it has entered German regulations and news coverage about these. Slowly it also appears in other contexts again as if it was an unproblematic term.<sup>14</sup>

As the discussions of the terms Asian, *Fidschi* and Indian above, however, indicate the notion of race and racial thinking has never been absent in the Germanies. It has only been framed in different ways. In fact the institutions and discourses in both Germanies<sup>15</sup> are shaped at least partially by racist knowledge, which has been produced at least since the enlightenment to legitimise the forceful colonisation of the world by the Europeans.<sup>16</sup> This racist knowledge is inscribed in the structures of the

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<sup>13</sup> The German Democratic Republic (GDR) defined itself as an anti-fascist state, which condemned the racism not only of fascist Germany but also of colonialism and contemporary capitalist states (compare *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* 1985, 784-785). Racism was framed as a capitalist method of exploitation and not linked to the life in the GDR.

<sup>14</sup> Like in the East German *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* (1985, 784-785) the construction of race as a biological fact is considered as independent from the racist degradation on basis of race.

<sup>15</sup> Like in the other European countries and those countries forcefully settled by people from Europe like the USA, Canada and Australia.

<sup>16</sup> The historical development of racist knowledge has been analysed in particular by black scholars. In the German context, for example, Eggert et al. (2005) gives an introduction to the topic.

states and is continuously reproduced through further knowledge production and institutional practices.

With this analysis, however, I belong to a minority of scholars in Germany. In general the existence of structural racism in Germany is denied. The small group of researchers, who have adapted critical racism theory to Germany, have a rather precarious status and are not part of by the dominant migration and ethnicity research. Nonetheless, there are a number of theorists, who have published in the field.<sup>17</sup> I am basing my research in particular on the work of Paul Mecheril, who has analysed the precarious belongingness of people with multiple points of reference.

According to critical racism theory the characteristics of racism can be described as follows<sup>18</sup>: Firstly, people are racialised, i.e. people are distinguished on the basis of certain physiognomic and social attributes and these are linked to assumptions about ancestry and national, ethnic and/or cultural belongingness. Secondly, these attributes are linked to certain assumptions about character, intelligence and temperament of a collective defined through them. Thirdly, the mentalities of the racialised are constructed as inferior to those who remain the unmarked norm. Finally, racism requires the power to establish these constructions of differences as the accepted norm and the basis for action in a society. Racism is thus not a question of individual attitudes but inscribed into a society. As long as people and institutions act according to the norms racism does not require intentional action to be effective.

Those benefiting from racism are those, who are constructed as the norm in a racist society. The racist knowledge and its implementation guarantee that they remain in the hegemonic position and reproduce their privileges. While critical racism theory focuses on those who are excluded in racism, critical whiteness studies look at those in

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I am referring to literature from Germany rather than from the USA or Great Britain in order to make the German debates on the topics visible, although much of it is only accessible for those who know German.

<sup>17</sup> Compare Oguntoye et al. (1992), Rommelspacher (1998) Mecheril (2003 and 2004), AntiDiskriminierungsBüro and cyberNomads (2004), Terkessidis (2004) or Scherschel (2006) as well as adaptations of postcolonial theory in Steyerl and Gutierrez Rodriguez (2003) or Ha et al (2007). Many (but not all) of these authors are racialised in Germany and thus have experienced racism themselves.

<sup>18</sup> The following description of the characteristics of racism are based on Mecheril (2004, 193-194).

the hegemonic position. Adapting the colour logic of (European) racism the privileged position is marked as 'white'. This marker should, however, be read less as a reference to a particular physiognomic attribute and more to the social position inhabited by those privileged. Critical whiteness studies have been adapted from the USA in particular via the gender studies to Germany<sup>19</sup> and shape also my work.

#### On 'Indians' and 'Asians' in Germany

I do research mainly about those, who were socialised in Germany and are marked in some way as Indians there. This category of people is most usually called Indians of the second generation – and I have used this phrase for a long time as well. But I have almost ceased to do so for several reasons. Firstly, I dislike that the people categorised thus are primarily ascribed as Indians. What does that mean? Why are they Indians, when they were socialised in Germany, when many of them have the German citizenship and most have never lived in India? The term Indian in my understanding links them too much and too exclusively to India and too little to other places to which they feel belongingness. Secondly, I dislike the notion of generations. It implies that one's belongingness is a biological fact passed on from one generation to the next. It assumes a heteronormative family<sup>20</sup>, in which the biological parents are also the social ones and that they socialise their children into their 'culture'.<sup>21</sup> It furthermore suggests that what the members of this category experience is mainly a question of being the children of migrants. In my analysis, however, the common experience of the people I interviewed is that they were socialised in Germany<sup>22</sup>, but are told that they do not really belong there and their home is India. This is an experience not only of the children of migrants, who were raised by the latter, but also of those adopted by 'white' parents or the grandchildren of migrants, who still are considered to look like

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<sup>19</sup> Compare Oguntoye et al. (1992), Eggers et al. (2005), Wollrad (2005) and Tißberger et al. (2006).

<sup>20</sup> In Germany the ideal norm family (although not necessarily the most usual one) is that of a man and a woman, who are married and raise together their biological children.

<sup>21</sup> This ignores the fact that one can be marked through physiognomic markers as Indian although one has no contact with South Asia at all. Most obvious is this for persons, who were adopted as small children from South Asia by 'white' parents in Germany (compare Goel 2008b). It is also the case for those people, who have a biological father from South Asia, but never had contact with him.

<sup>22</sup> It is in particular the place of socialisation, which makes their experiences different from those of the migrants.

Indians. It is the members of this broad category, whom I have observed at 'Indian' spaces for young people in Germany like the internet portal *theinder.net*.<sup>23</sup> When I talk of people, who were socialised in Germany and are marked as Indians there, I am focussing on the processes, in which one is made what one becomes, rather than referring to essentialising notions of an embodied identity. Included in the category are both those who consider themselves Indians and those, who do not, but are ascribed as such by others. I am aware that this way of categorising differs not only from the self-identifications of the people I categorise, but also is rather unusual and thus not necessarily easy to understand. I use it nonetheless, because it seems to me at the moment the best way to make the process of racialisation visible and to irritate the notion of essentialised identities.

So far I have done my research among rather privileged people. The majority of the persons I interviewed are well established in the German middle class. Most of them (or their parents) came between the 1950s and 1970s either as a student, a professional or a nurse to West Germany.<sup>24</sup> They came at a time when their skills were in demand on the labour market and they thus rather easily obtained a residence and work permit. On this basis they and their children could achieve a comparatively secure legal and economic status in West Germany.

But not all migrants from South Asia are in this privileged position. All those, who applied for asylum in West Germany<sup>25</sup>, live in a much more insecure and more marginalised position. Only few of them were granted asylum, many have a very insecure residence status and can receive their deportation notice any time. Some stay as undocumented migrants without any rights. Many of the former asylum seekers as well as migrants without higher education were able to enter the job market only in the unskilled, badly paid and/ or insecure sector. For these migrants and their children social and economic mobility upwards is much more difficult than for those, who were welcomed as skilled labourers.

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<sup>23</sup> Compare Goel (2005) and Goel (2008c).

<sup>24</sup> Compare Goel (2006) for an overview of the history of migration from India to Germany and Goel (2008d) for a description of the nurse migration from Kerala. See also <http://www.urmila.de/english/englishindex.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Among the asylum seekers were in particular Tamils from Sri Lanka, Ahmadiyas from Pakistan, migrants from Afghanistan and Sikhs from India.



The main reason why I interviewed mainly privileged migrants and their children is my own positioning in Germany. My father came as a student from India to West Germany in the 1960s, he got a good job offer and through marriage a secure residence status. His friends have a similar background and the associations he is involved in cater for the needs of the privileged migrants from South Asia. Thus my own biographical knowledge and networks are also mainly within this category. Only through my research did I learn about the heterogeneity among the migrants from South Asia. But as the less privileged are outside my direct sight it requires an active effort to include them in my analysis.

Similarly I have to remind myself constantly of another of my privileged positions in Germany, i.e. that I was socialised in West Germany. Like other people from West Germany I am prone to equate Germany with West Germany and thus ignore the own history of East Germany. In the case of my research field, I often ignore the fact that there were also migrants from South Asia in East Germany. Most of them seem to have been students, few of which settled down. There do not seem to be a sizable number of refugees<sup>26</sup> or workers, who came from South Asia to East Germany. There were, however, large groups of contract workers from Vietnam. They came on the basis of bilateral state agreements, where allowed to stay only a few years, were much controlled by East German and Vietnamese authorities and lived rather isolated in hostels. After unification it was difficult for them to acquire a residence permit. Those who were able to stay work mostly in precarious self-employed businesses. Some help other migrants from Vietnam to come to Germany, often in the form of undocumented migration. Their status is more precarious than that of the migrants who came from Vietnam to West Germany. The latter were mainly refugees, who fled from communism and were welcomed thus in West Germany. Accordingly talking of Vietnamese in the West and the East evokes different images.

West Germany, furthermore, not only recruited skilled labour from South Asia but also from other regions in Asia. Among these were (female) nurses from Korea<sup>27</sup> and the

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<sup>26</sup> East Germany offered refuge in particular to people who fled anti-communist or anti-socialist state action. There was, however, no general right of asylum.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Hong (2007), Berner and Choi (2007) as well as Cho-Ruwwe et al. (2007).

Philippines. There is also a smaller presence of migrants who have come from Japan<sup>28</sup> and China<sup>29</sup>. In general, however, in West Germany migrants from Asia form only a small part of the migrants and are thus not much talked about.<sup>30</sup>

#### Experiences of Racism in Germany

In the current German discourses East Germany is constructed as the no go area for racialised people. There have been several reported incidents of racist attacks on racialised persons - some of them falling within the categories of Indians or *Fidschis* - in East Germany. A few months back the media reported about a young racialised woman<sup>31</sup>, who had lived a few years in East Germany and migrated back to the West to avoid (mostly verbal) racist attacks on her children and herself. She complained also about the denial of the existence of racism by acquaintances and institutions. On the basis of these reported incidences many people like me, who are from the West and are racialised, are careful about where they travel in the East.

The relegation of racist attacks to East Germany in the current discourses in (West) Germany, however, seems to be at least in part an attempt to ignore the existence of racism also in the West. While there might be a higher likelihood of a physical attack in the East, explicit and in particular implicit racist exclusions are also a characteristic of the West. In my interviews with people marked as Indians in (West) Germany I was told many experiences of racism and racist exclusion on different levels from everyday interactions to the state level. On the latter it is in particular the implementation of the citizenship and aliens laws, which continually show those, who do not have the German citizenship, that they are mistrusted and not wanted in (West) Germany.<sup>32</sup> Political debates against, for example, dual citizenship or the introduction of a 'Green

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<sup>28</sup> Many of them seem to be professionals who are settled in the area of Düsseldorf. At least this is a common rumour.

<sup>29</sup> Compare Leung (2007).

<sup>30</sup> Currently the focus of debate is on the migrants from Turkey and their children.

<sup>31</sup> Her mother had migrated from India to West Germany.

<sup>32</sup> Compare the description of a naturalisation case of a migrant from India in Goel (1998a) and the discussion of the importance of citizenship for those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there in Goel (1998 b).

Card' scheme for foreign IT professionals<sup>33</sup> support this impression and illustrate the dislike of the major political actors of racialised people in Germany.

Everyday interactions show that also neighbours, friends and colleagues believe that racialised persons do not really belong to Germany. Most of these racist exclusions are not intentional and occur in subtle forms. An example for this is the only seemingly innocent question about where one is from. This question is only put to those who due to some physiognomic or social attributes are not considered to be German and the answer Germany is mostly not accepted.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless those marked as Indian and established in the middle class experience racism much less openly than those termed *Fidschis* or those considered to be Turkish. The orientalist image of India in Germany evokes not only notions of civilisational inferiority but also a longing for spirituality and adherence to tradition. It is thus possible for those excluded to interpret such othering as a positive interest rather than a racist depreciation.

In fact, although all my interview partners told me stories, which on the basis of critical racism theory, I can decode as experiences of racism only very few called them such. Most denied experiencing racism.<sup>35</sup> This denial seems to be one effective way of dealing with the experiences and preventing further individual injury. In it the experiences of racism are not framed as an outcome of racist structures in Germany but rather as either a positive interest in the other or the stupidity of uneducated individuals. Thus Germany can be imagined as a place, where belongingness is attainable, and the person experiencing othering is not reduced to the position of a victim. This strategy is individually effective, but it prevents resistance against the racist structures and thus contributes in stabilising them.

But there were also some among those I interviewed, who framed their experiences explicitly as racist. One told me that his father was physically attacked in a tram in West Germany and that his brothers were repeatedly

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<sup>33</sup> In the summer of 2000 a 'Green Card' scheme for foreign IT professionals was introduced. The counter campaign of the conservative party was soon known as 'children instead of Indians' (*Kinder statt Inder*) and was thus the first openly racist campaign against Indians.

<sup>34</sup> Compare Battaglia (1995) and Ferreira (2003) for a discussion of the racist content of this question.

<sup>35</sup> Compare the story of Binod in Paske (2006).

singled out to clean the school courtyard. Another told me that she repeatedly was denied access to discotheques when she came in a group with other racialised friends. A Turban wearing Sikh told me that he experienced exclusion on the basis of his Turban<sup>36</sup>. Some of my interview partners told me that the racist attacks against people marked as Turkish and against asylum seekers in the early 1990s made them aware of their own vulnerability as racialised persons.<sup>37</sup> Some of them took counter actions by creating spaces for racialised persons in Germany, others by taking a clear standpoint against racist exclusion in their everyday interactions and their own political positioning in Germany.

#### Interdependency of power inequalities

Racism is a violent form of differentiating people, but is not the only power dimension, which positions people unequally in Germany (and other societies). Power inequalities can be found also in other fields such as those based on the constructions of class, gender, sexuality, ability, age and many more<sup>38</sup>. So far, however, most research and also social activism tends to address only one of these power dimensions at a time. Only slowly discussions about the interdependence of different power inequalities enter both research and social activism<sup>39</sup> and question this partial perspective. Especially researchers and social activists, who experience themselves several marginalisations at a time, have shown the shortcomings of addressing only one power dimension. Thus, for example, black women have argued that both in the women's movement and the black movement they are marginalised as the one ignores the marginalisations of black people and the other that of women. In the USA Kimberle Crenshaw (1995) has coined the term intersectionality to capture this combination of several marginalisations. The term and the debates around it have reached also

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<sup>36</sup> Nijhawan (2006) describes how Turban wearing Sikhs are mistaken as Muslims and thus are confronted with hostile islamophobia.

<sup>37</sup> Compare the story of Lara in Paske (2006).

<sup>38</sup> The often used phrase 'and many more' or etc. in this context illustrates that some power inequalities are more visible than others.

<sup>39</sup> I was introduced into the topic by queer activists in India, who understood that they could not focus only sexuality but had to include in their analysis and activism also gender, class, communalism, etc. Compare Sharma and Nath (2005) and Sharma (2006).

Germany. In particular scholars in gender studies have included the analysis of 'race, class, gender' in their analysis and several critical analyses have been published.<sup>40</sup>

On the basis of these debates I prefer to talk of the interdependency of power dimensions rather than of intersectionality. The term intersectionality suggests that basically unconnected categories coexist, which meet at certain intersections but are independent otherwise. To talk of interdependent power dimensions in contrast to this emphasises that power inequalities do not exist independent of each other, that they are interwoven and operate together. For example, one feature of orientalism is to construct the oriental man as feminine. Here clearly racism and heteronormativity<sup>41</sup> come together. Not only is the oriental constructed as inferior to the West and the woman to the man, but these two hierarchical structures are interwoven to emphasise each other and assign particular social positionings to the marginalised (and the privileged). The interwovenness, however, makes it impossible to distinguish what is heteronormative and what is racist in this case. This makes it difficult for us to think it, as we are trained to reduce complexity by distinguishing different features.

Also for me a complete interdependent approach seems impossible, thus I have started dealing with the interwovenness by looking in particular at the interdependency of racism and heteronormativity. This specific choice of focus is again linked to my own biography. Both in terms of racism and heteronormativity I experience marginalisations. Accordingly I notice that I am excluded from certain privileges and can thus see the power inequality. In those instances, where I am in the privileged position, it is much more difficult to notice that. It is thus no surprise that I have much more difficulties to address questions of class, ability or the inequalities between East and West Germans than racism and heteronormativity. Researchers and social activists need to be careful not to focus only on marginalisations but to be also aware of own privileges and to question these.

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<sup>40</sup> Compare Oguntoye et al. (1992), Rommelspacher (1998), Erel et al. (2007), Haritaworn (2007) and Walgenbach et al. (2007).

<sup>41</sup> Heteronormativity is the normative system, which is based on the construction of two unambiguous genders, specific social roles attached to these genders and the assumption of heterosexual desire. Judith Butler (1990) is one of the main theorists, who describes this power system. For a German discussion see Hartmann et al. (2007).

## Complex positioning of 'Indians' and 'Asians' in Germany

Not only heteronormativity and racism are interwoven, but also class and racism. Those who are excluded by racism in most cases also have less access to economic and social resources. Those who are economically privileged have a better standing in the racist hierarchy. Furthermore, those who experience racist exclusion can be as classist as those privileged by racism. This interwovenness (among others) is used in the (implicit) strategy of divide and rule<sup>42</sup> to prevent solidarity between those experiencing racist exclusion and to create competition among them for resources and acceptance by those in the hegemonic position. The consequences of this one can see among those migrants from Asia, who are securely established in Germany's middle class. Many of my interview partners, who are marked as Indians, emphasised their good education as well as their contribution to Germany's economy and society. They did so both to support their claim to acceptance in Germany and to distinguish themselves from other groups of racialised persons, who are below them in the class and also racist hierarchy. Thus, repeatedly I was told that 'Indians' are different from 'Turks', that they are more studious and diligent and can thus integrate better. A distinction was also often made towards those migrants from South Asia with a refugee status or of a working background. My interview partners did not want to be put into the same category as those more marginalised than them.

Doing so they claim the right to define what Indian is for themselves.<sup>43</sup> In my observation they adjust the image of the Indian to those orientalist images of the dominant society, which can be interpreted as positive. Thus one can see much reference to the old civilisation and culture of India as well as the spiritual texts and practices. The images of the beautiful women and the clever men are fostered. A willingness to assimilate in the economic and public sphere is proclaimed together with the conservation of traditions at home.<sup>44</sup> Thus the image of the 'good' migrant, who deserves privileges, is created and reproduced. While the 'bad' migrant, who deserves the marginalisation and exclusion, is constructed as a counter point.

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<sup>42</sup> Compare Ha (2007) for an analysis of the strategy of divide and rule among racialised people in Germany.

<sup>43</sup> Similar attempts can be found on *asia-zone* and *asia-power* (compare Kawai 2005 and Heft 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Compare Goel (2008d) for a discussion of the impossibility of assimilation and thus the necessary failure of this strategy.

The main 'bad' migrants constructed at the moment are those considered Muslims and in particular those marked as Turkish<sup>45</sup>. The dominant form of racism at the moment is islamophobia and many of the non-Muslim migrants from South Asia and their children share this with the dominant culture. In particular a considerable number of migrants from India and some of their children sympathise with Hindu nationalist thought and consider Muslims as a danger to both India and Germany. But joining the dominant culture in the islamophobia can only be partially successful in gaining privileges in Germany. The Muslim other in Germany is constructed mainly on the basis of physiognomic and social attributes and less on the observation of religious practices. Whether one is seen as a Muslim thus does not depend so much on one's religion but much more on how one looks and what name one has. In this context also many non-Muslim migrants from South Asia and their children are seen as (potential) Muslims and are thus exposed to islamophobic exclusion. This is in particular the case for Turban wearing Sikhs.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, most of the exclusionary laws and regulations, which are based on islamophobia, apply also to those marked as Indian in Germany, who are not Muslims. Thus, even if the latter join in the islamophobia, they are also marginalised by it. Islamophobia does not operate independently of other forms of racism.

Another normative framework, which is common to many migrants from South Asia and the dominance culture in Germany, is heteronormativity. In both South Asia and Germany the existence of two unambiguous genders as well as heterosexual desire is the unquestioned norm. Different gender roles are seen as natural even if some attempts to promote gender equality are pursued in both spaces. While the structural marginalisation of women and queer people is common to both Germany and South Asia, within the racist logic in Germany the German heteronormativity is considered as superior. This superiority is claimed by constructing 'love marriages' as superior to 'arranged marriages' as well as by locating sexism and homophobia among the others rather than in the own society. This interwovenness of heteronormativity and racism makes resistance to either of them even more difficult. Young people socialised in

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<sup>45</sup> Migrants from Turkey form the major category of recruited workers in West Germany. Most of them were unskilled or semi-skilled and are today part of Germany's lower class.

<sup>46</sup> Compare Nijhawan (2006).

Germany and marked as Indian there cannot just oppose to 'arranged marriages' because they dislike the heteronormative norm, they always have to be aware of how this opposition of them will be framed by the dominance culture as a prove of the inferiority of the norms in South Asia.

An example: migrating nurses and changing gender roles

I want to end these impressions about the complex positioning of 'Indians' in Germany with a more detailed discussion of one example: In the 1960s hospitals and homes for the elderly in West Germany recruited female nurses from Asia, among them many Christians from Kerala in South India.<sup>47</sup> The nurses were either already trained in India or got a training in Germany. They worked in the German health system, learned the language and norms and could establish themselves economically and legally well. As single woman, who had migrated over a large distance and supported their families financially, they conformed neither to the German nor the Indian ideal type of the dependent and passive woman. After some years working in Germany their worth on the marriage market in Kerala had risen considerably and many of them had arranged marriages with highly qualified men. These men knew that they were marrying economically independent women, who had built their own existence in a place far away. For many of them the marriage was part of a decision to migrate themselves and to benefit from the first steps their wives had already taken. This also does not conform to normative view of a heterosexual marriage, where the husband earns the family income and decides, while the wife has to follow his decisions. Many of the husbands did join their wives in Germany and due to the heteronormative and racist legal regulations were not eligible for a work permit in the first years. Thus while the nurses continued to work and earn the family income, their husbands stayed at home, raised the children and did (some) housework. When they finally were granted a work permit after several years in most cases their qualification was degraded and many could only attain jobs with a social and economic status below that of their wives. Thus, in this migration context many gender roles have de facto been changed and heteronormative norms have been contradicted. The nurses in most cases were in fact much more independent than women in most West German families, where mothers were still restricted to the position as housewives.

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<sup>47</sup> Compare Goel (2008d) for a more detailed analysis of the migration of nurses from Kerala to West Germany.



I have, however, so far not once heard a discussion of the nurse migration as a case of women's emancipation, which could be interpreted as a good example also for members of the dominant culture. The gender role changes, which have taken place, are not considered as conscious ones, they are always framed as forced. Furthermore, since the Indian society is seen in Germany as particularly oppressive for women the forced gender roles are interpreted as a particular strain for the men from India. Domestic violence and alcoholism are discussed, but the question whether the fathers could develop a closer relationship to their children is not pursued. In this form of framing the nurse migration as a disturbance to heteronormativity those marked as Indians join members of the dominant culture. In fact, the families of the nurses are often described as putting a particular heteronormative pressure on their children, doing all to secure that they conform to their ascribed roles. My observation does support this description to some degree, but rather than taking this as a prove of the conservatism of the nurses and their husbands, I would rather want to analyse how the de facto change of gender roles and the discursive and disciplinary adherence to heteronormativity are linked to each other, how the latter might be a reaction to the former and what role racist exclusion in Germany plays in this.

#### Multiple belongingness

What is common to all those marked as Indians or Asians in Germany is that they feel to some extent a belongingness to several places. Mecheril (2003) calls this (multiple) natio-ethno-cultural belongingness. He considers Germany as the main context of belongingness, because the migrants and their children have lived there, still live there and many want to live there also in the future. Accordingly, the country and what happens there is of direct importance to their lives and they are bound to it through their experiences. This is independent of the fact that their belongingness in Germany is often questioned and many have learned not to consider themselves Germans. For Mecheril the belongingness to the ascribed origin is in some sense secondary (and thus the brackets around multiple), because that place and what happens there tend to have much less relevance on the lives in Germany. In fact there are people, who have no direct contact to their ascribed country of origin, who have never travelled there, who do not know anybody there and are not aware of the debates pursued there. But even

they are ascribed a belongingness to the ascribed place of origin and thus to some degree develop one.<sup>48</sup>

The ascription of a place of origin and the definition through it is a feature of racism. Mecheril argues that it is based on the assumption that every person must have and can have only one belongingness. Those, who belong to several natio-ethno-cultural contexts at the same time disturb this idea of racial purity and thus have to be eliminated at least discursively. Accordingly their multiple belongingness is not accepted and they are ascribed a unique belongingness somewhere else. This happens independent of the individual feelings of belongingness and the actual contacts with this other space. From the perspective of critical racism theory it is thus necessary to deconstruct this relegation from Germany and to highlight the belongingness of the excluded to Germany. This, however, conflicts with diaspora theories, which emphasise the link to a common origin<sup>49</sup>, and forms a tension with transnationalism theories, which focus in particular on the transnational interactions<sup>50</sup>.

If one wants to analyse the connections of those marked as Asians or Indians outside of Asia or India to the ascribed country of origin, one has to look closely at what connections can be observed. In how far is there an interaction with people who are living in the ascribed countries of origin? In how far is there an engagement with ideas and debates in the ascribed countries of origin? How often, how long and in what position do travels to the ascribed countries of origin take place? A close observation of these (and related) questions will show that the category of those marked as Asians or Indians in Germany (or another place) is made up of very different people with vastly differing forms of relationship to the ascribed countries of origin. Some will be very much based both in Germany and their ascribed country of origin. Others will be linked to the ascribed country of origin only through images created in Germany.

This diversity can be seen also on the internet portals *theinder.net*, *asia-zone* and *asia-power*. The proclaimed point of reference is India or Asia. The use of the

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<sup>48</sup> There might be further contexts of belongingness for individual persons, if they for example have lived in other geographical spaces as well or have ancestors in several places.

<sup>49</sup> Compare the discussion about the concept of Indian community in Goel (2007).

<sup>50</sup> For an attempt to work productively with this tension compare Goel (2008e).

language German and also many discussions, however, show the localisation in German-speaking Europe. Some of the editors and users are in close contact with India or another Asian country; others have only very vague images of anything Asian. What is common to all of them is that they are racialised in Germany. Beyond that any attempt at homogenising their experiences and endeavours ignores their complex positionings.

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