

‘Indians’ in ‘Germany’ The imagination of a community



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Armidale, 7th November 2006

Structure

1. The ‚Indian Online Community‘
2. ‚Indians‘ in ‚Germany‘
3. Imagined community or imagination of a community?
4. Functions of imagining

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The ,Indian Online Community‘



- internet portal: <http://www.theinder.net>
- established in summer 2000
- by and for ,Indians of the second generation‘
- for the ,community‘
- own space of the ,second generation‘
- with reference to the assumed common ,origin‘ in ,India‘

‘Indians’ in ‘Germany’

- about 45,000 Indian citizens in Germany
- about 17,500 PIO card holders
- added to this those without ‘Indian’ documents
- question of definition
- mostly in ‘Western Germany’
- scattered over the country
- hardly any geographical concentrations

History of migration

- some categories:
- students and ‚freedom fighters‘ up to 1945
- students and interns in 1950s and 60s
- ‚Malayalee‘ nurses in 1960s and 70s
- ‚Sikh‘ asylum seekers in 1980s
- IT specialists since 2000
- ‚second generation‘

Some attempts to mobilise an ,Indian community‘

- socialist freedom fighters
 - international networks, institutions
- Subhas Chandra Bose
 - Radio and magazine ,Azad Hind‘
 - ,Indian Army‘ in the SS
- ,Indian‘ associations
 - seminars, events, magazines
 - education for children
 - attempts to establish umbrella associations
- Indian embassy
- ,Indian nationalists‘
 - in particular ,Hindu nationalists‘

Ascription of ‚Indianness‘

- German official institutions
 - through citizenship and foreigners‘ law
- German public
 - media
 - social organisations and institutions
 - everyday interaction

Experiences of ‚second generation‘

- refused belongingness to ‚Germany‘
- ascribed belongingness to ‚India‘
- importance given to ‚origin‘
- experiences of othering
- offer of an imagined ‚Indian community‘
- experience of acceptance and understanding in own spaces
- imagined ‚Indianness‘

What is a community?

- imagined collectively
- belief in shared commonalities
- norm defining belonging and not belonging
- definition of and border to others
- collective practice

Rogers Brubaker's criticism of groupism

- assumption of bounded entity
- and collective practice
- considers it rather as a claim
- by ,ethnic'/ ,diasporal' entrepreneurs
- for political aims
- argues ,ethnicity' exists without groups
- understands ,diaspora' as a claim
- need to consider whether it is a useful analytical category

My concerns about concept of ,ethnic communities‘

- tendency to essentialise
 - focus on ,origin‘
- tendency to homogenise
 - assumption of commonness
 - and common interests
 - ignoring for example intersectionality
- tendency to establish as other
 - ignores constructions and mechanisms of exclusion

„Indians“ in „Germany“

- are vague in definition
- and heterogenous
 - regional ‚ethnicity‘
 - language
 - religion and caste
 - legal, economic, social status
 - political positioning
 - practice of ‚traditions‘
 - gender
 - ...
- there is no encompassing collective practice
- and no joint development of collective identity

Commonness among ‚Indians‘ in ‚Germany‘

- experience of migration
 - at least as part of the memory
 - leaving the familiar and living with the unfamiliar
 - transnational connections
- experiencing othering and exclusion
 - through German state
 - in everyday life

Functions of imagining a community

- imagining familiarity
- refuge from othering
- context of positive identification
- mobilising political and economic resources

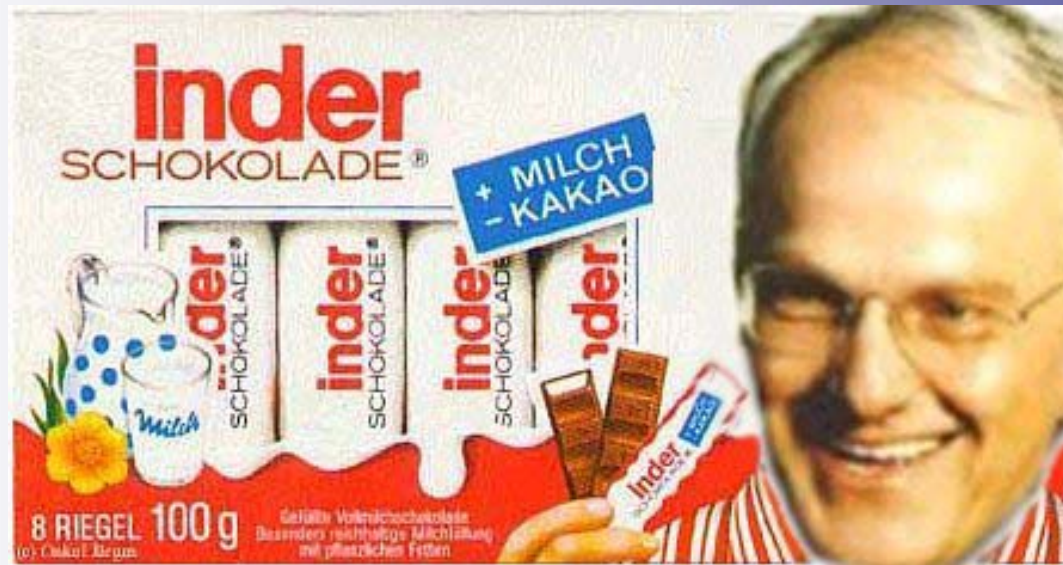
Functions for ‚second generation‘

- ‚India‘, ‚Indianness‘ and the ‚Indian community‘
- function as a symbol
 - for accepted belongingness
 - link to the ‚ancestors‘
- refuge from experiences of othering
- localised and imagined in ‚Germany‘

Some consequences for research

- not assume communities
 - but analyse their imagination
- not focus on ‚origin‘
 - but analyse how it attains importance
 - and the mechanisms of exclusion and othering
 - at the place of residence

Thank you!



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