

Forever Foreigners or Honorary White: Anti-Asian Racism and the Politics of Silence

Asian Voices Europe

asianvoiceseurope@gmail.com

Der Reformationstag or Halloween



Asian Voices Europe



- ★ Our initial actions were
 - to call for a centralized **hotline** at the national/EU level
 - to provide **community-building** and peer-to-peer **psycho-social support** during lockdown
- ★ Started in March 2020 with an *ad hoc* survey documenting hate crimes during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- included in the report of *Corona en discriminatiemeldingen in Nederland*
- ★ Our main goal is to facilitate communication and dialogue on the subject of anti-Asian racism (AAR) as well as to promote cultural diversity in Europe.

Debates on migration, racism, and integration

- ★ In recent years, conversations across Europe have grown increasingly unsettled from debates over racism and migration to diversity initiatives.

The growing *recognition of racism* as a critical societal problem *marks progress*, as evidenced by surveys showing that about 90% of the population believe racism is an issue in Germany. (*Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations und Migrationsforschung 2023*)

Chancellor Merz's controversial statement about "this problem" in the cityscape has sparked a heated debate. This problem, he claims, is migrants. Kanzler Merz hat mit seiner umstrittenen Aussage über „dieses Problem“ im

Stadtteil eine heftige Diskussion ausgelöst. Dieses Problem, das sollen Migrantinnen und Migranten sein.

Asian: Forever foreigners or honorary white?

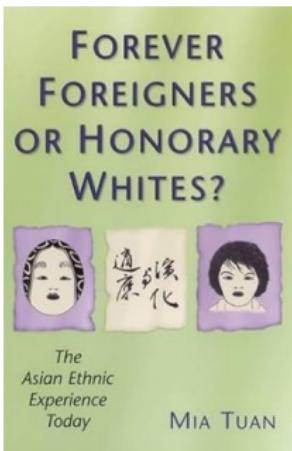


Figure 1: Mia Tuan, 1999

When I hear the phrase “*Asians are next in line to be White*,” I replace the word “White” with “disappear.” *Asians are next in line to disappear*. We are reputed to be so accomplished, and so law-abiding, we will disappear into this country’s amnesiac fog. We will not be the power but become absorbed by power, [...] we’re often listed as “*Other*” in polls and why we’re hard to find in racial breakdowns on reported rape or workplace discrimination or domestic abuse. (Hong 2021: 35)

Questions:

- ★ What are the forms and expressions of contemporary racism in Europe, particularly as experienced by Asian diaspora?
- ★ Why does the recognition of racism often meet resistance or denial in European public discourse?
- ★ What are the social and political consequences when individuals or communities challenge this silence?

The Roadmap

- 1 Overview
- 2 Anti-Racist EU?
- 3 Anti-Asian Racism in EU
- 4 Persistance of AAR
- 5 Counterframes

EU's National Action Plan against Racism

- ★ The National Action Plan against Racism (NAPAR) 2020–2025 was adopted in response to structural racism as [the first comprehensive action plan at the EU level](#).



Structural racism persists in our societies. Discrimination on the basis of race or ethnic origin – as well as religion or belief – remains widespread, as shown in numerous reports. [...] It is not enough to be against racism. We need to talk about racism. We have to be active against it. (European Commission 2020b: 1,16, 19)

Anti-Asian Racism (AAR) in NAPAR

- ★ AAR has had a long but largely undocumented history in Europe and was not even officially recognized as a distinct category of racism by the EU, either at the EU level until July 2022 (European Commission 2020a,b, Asian Voices Europe 2024).
- ★ No specific unit, coordinator or dedicated strategy framework for AAR at the EU level or national level as of now.
- ★ In Germany, the recent action plan against racism in 2024 has recognized the AAR:

Anti-Asian racism (AAR) existed in Germany before COVID-19; among the worst outbreaks of anti-Asian violence since 1945 have been the racist riots in Hoyerswerda in 1991 and in the Lichtenhagen district of Rostock in 1992. [...] A particular feature of AAR is that it also operates with the “model immigrant” myth who are often played off against other groups in racist discourse. [...] Little is known as yet about the extent to which Asian [diaspora] are subject to structural racism, as there are scarcely any relevant studies.

Anti-Asian Racism in NAPAR

- ★ EU-level surveys or data collection on AAR are either nonexistent or scarce.
- ★ (e.g., European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Values Study (EVS), European Social Survey (ESS), Eurobarometer)
- ★ Engagement with civil society organizations is not adequately facilitated.

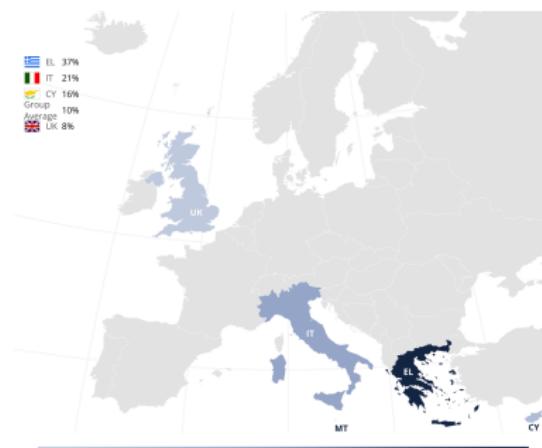
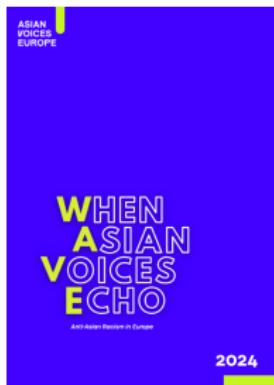


Figure 2: FRA's Survey on Minorities and Discrimination in EU - (East-, Southeast- South-)Asian Group

AVE Survey II - When Asian Voices Echo



(Asian Voices Europe 2024)

- ★ 855 out of 1,275 responses (consented and validated-all reside in Europe)
- ★ data collection: 14. June - 6. August 2021
- ★ via [online](#) survey in [10 different languages](#)
- ★ the [first Europe-wide survey of AAR](#)
- ★ to identify perception of racism, lived experiences of racial discrimination and impact of the pandemic of Asian living in Europe
- ★ on-probability convenience sampling/snowballing/double coder strategy

AVE Survey II - When Asian Voices Echo

★ The **demographic** of the respondents:

Gender	Frequency	Percent%
Women	689	80.6%
Men	139	16.3%
NBGD [†]	25	3.1%

† Non binary Gender Diverse

Country of residence	Frequency	Percent%
The Netherlands	259	30.3%
Germany	194	22.7%
France	122	14.3%
United Kingdom	113	13.2%
Others [‡]	167	19.5%

‡ scattered around Europe with lower response

Age	Frequency	Percent%
Under 19	33	3.9%
20-29	441	51.6%
30-39	261	30.5%
40-49	81	9.5%
50-59	26	3.0%
Over 60	12	1.4%

Racial Identity	Frequency	Percent%
East Asian	599	70.06%
South-East Asian	168	19.65%
Interracial & others	37	3.91%
Southern Asian	28	3.27%
Western/Central Asian/Others	23	3.12%

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora

The results reveal high rates of experiences in racial discrimination among Asians in their residence countries in Europe

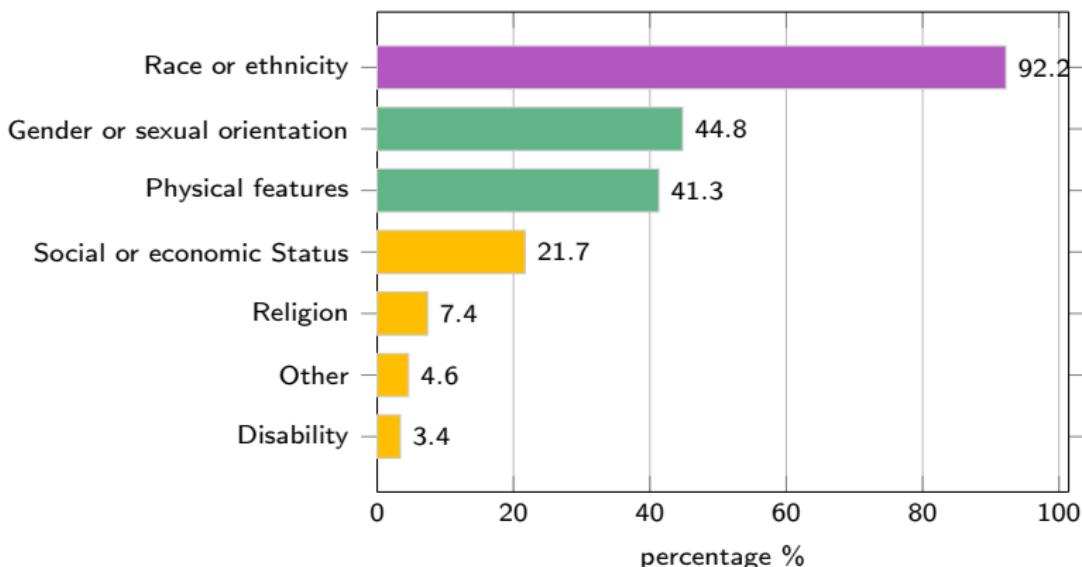
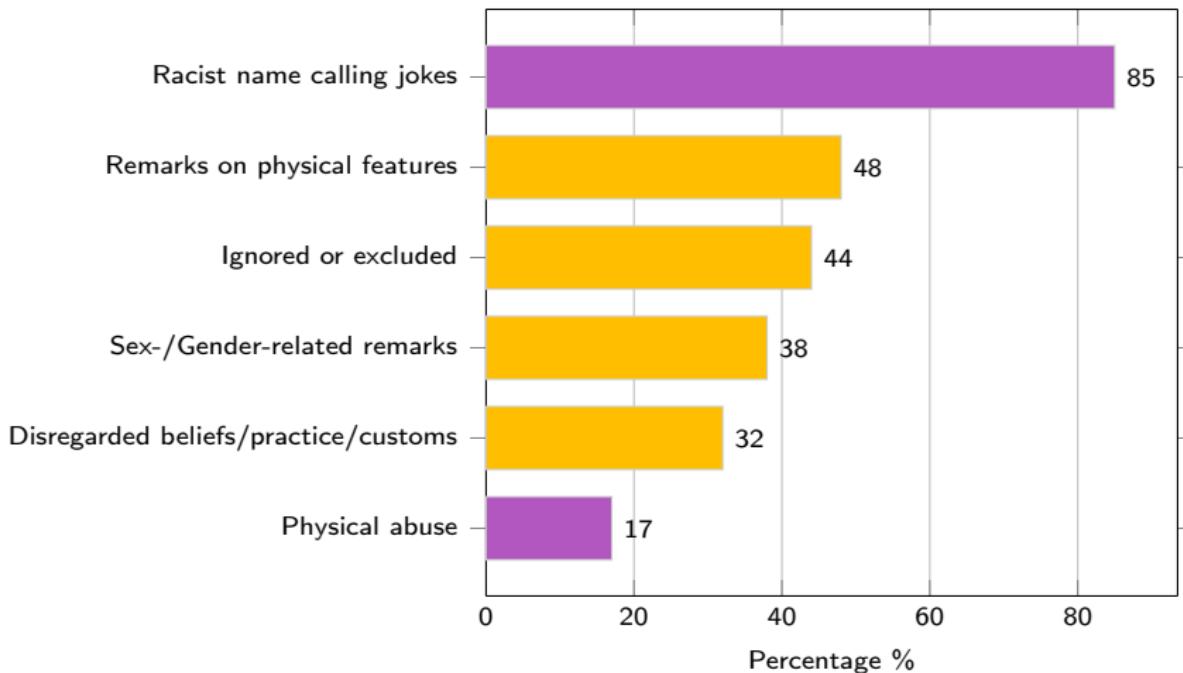


Figure 3: What type of discrimination have you ever been discriminated?

* This figure (92.2%) surpasses figures from studies of Asian Americans, where 79.68% have

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora



Frequency of Racial Discrimination and Harassment

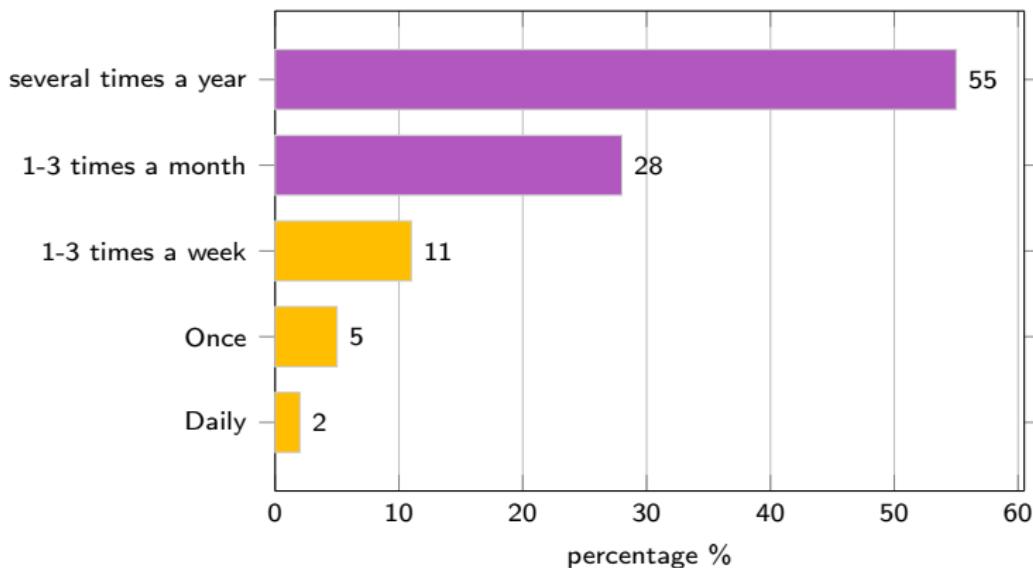


Figure 5: How many times/often have you been harassed?

Frequency of Racial Discrimination and Harassment



#ImNotAVirus

COVID-19 anti-Asian racism
#stopasianhate #StopAAPIhate

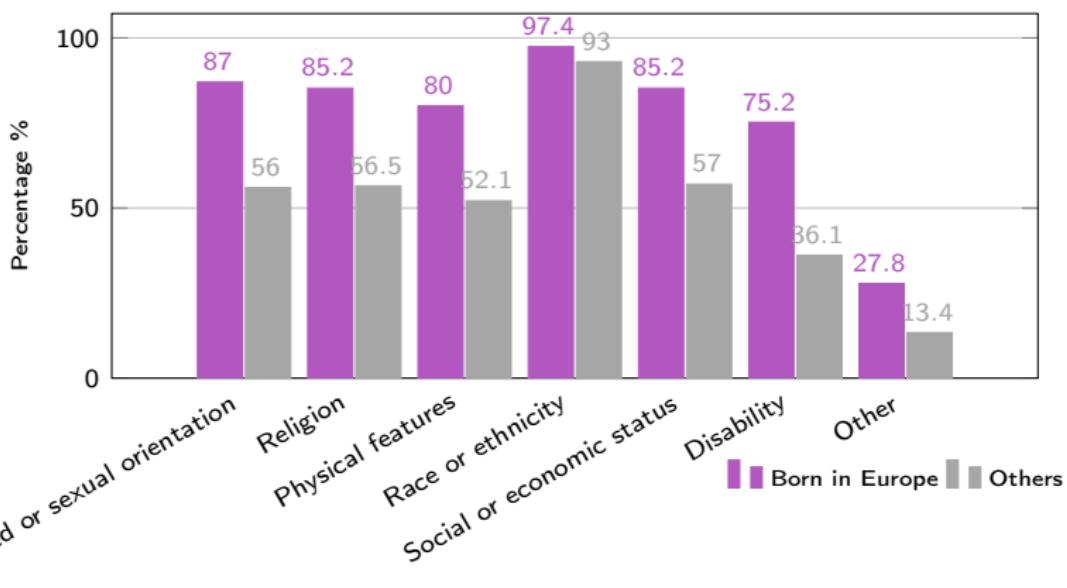
+ Report a suspected hate crime to the FBI at 1-800-225-5324

+ Reporting to Community Organizations
<https://stopasianhate.org/>

#2020notok
<http://leh-hwang.com/>

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora

This suggests that those who have lived in Europe for a longer period of time are more likely to be exposed to situations of racism and discrimination.



Microaggression



Figure 8: Poster by Leh Hwang

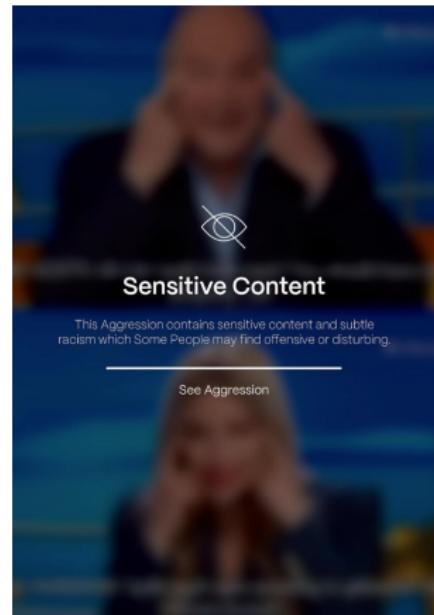


Figure 9: Poster by Leh Hwang

Microaggression - invalidaiton



Figure 10: Poster by Leh Hwang

Microaggression - invalidaiton



Figure 11: Poster by Leh Hwang

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

The AAR trends have intersectional faces: Women & Non-binary and gender diverse (NBGD) groups more often, severely experience racism and discrimination.

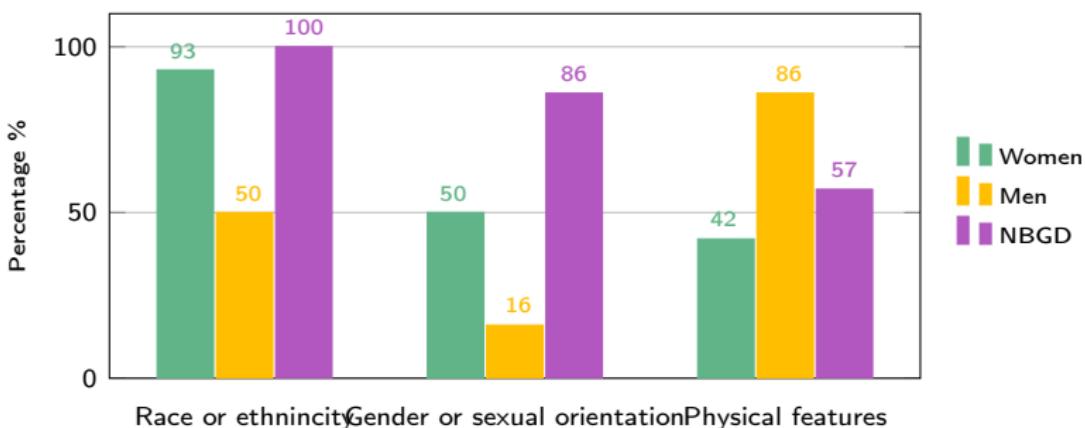


Figure 12: How do individuals across gender groups experience the top 3 forms of discrimination?

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

Sexual and gender-based violence experienced by Asians also exhibits gendered patterns in four European countries.

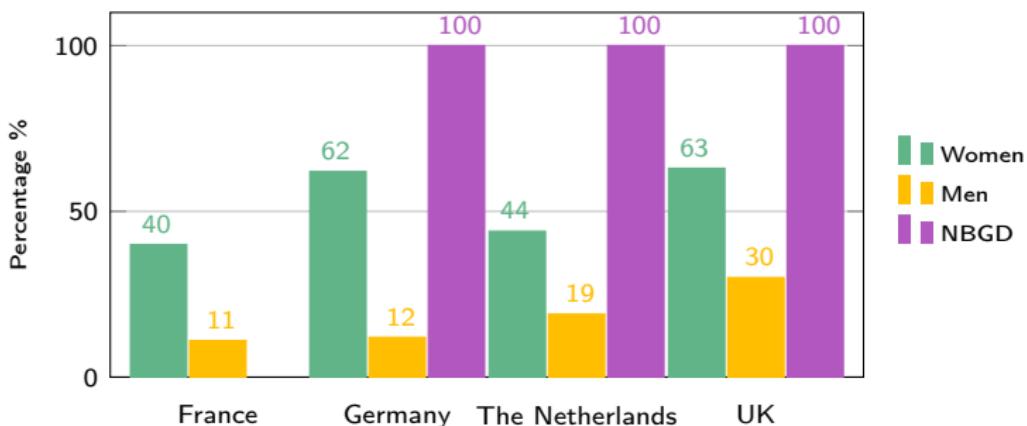


Figure 13: SGBV experienced by gender in four European countries

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

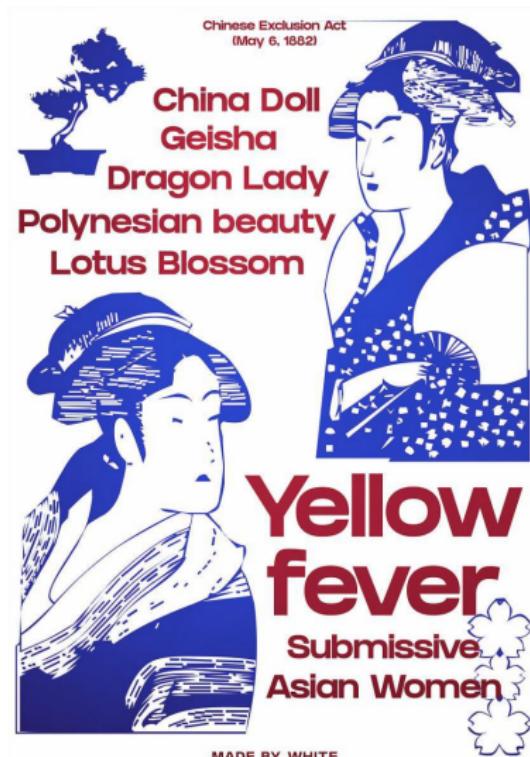
Country	EU Survey (2017) [†]	AVE Survey II (2021)
The Netherlands	44.9%	44%
France	44%	40%
United Kingdom	43.9%	62%
Germany	35.1%	63%
EU average	33%	50%

[†] Violence; Gender Equality Index, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2017)

Figure 14: Comparison of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Index

cf. See [Aldemir \(2024\)](#) for sexism and racism in NL

Gendered Racism



Racialized Queerness

Queer spaces in Europe are created predominantly White circles, which were deeply ingrained in **systematic racial biases** and the subsequent **exclusion of racial minorities** from queer communities have enforced discriminatory practices against people of color (Monro 2020, Knoll and Hiery 1983, Ghaziani 2021, Walcott 2007).

(1) I've thought for a long time why I was never active in queer groups in Europe. There are plenty of youth groups and clubs for queers, but I realized that they are predominantly whites, and I didn't feel like I belonged as I often received **racial slurs** there [...] I've come to understand that it means a lot to me to identify as non-White individuals in a White society, especially in terms of our queerness. - 20s, NBGD, in Germany (Gang 2023)

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- ★ While AAR has become more visible to Whites* since the Covid-19 pandemic, colonial biases and stereotypical portraits of Asian diasporas living in Europe have predicated a long ago

(Yeh 2020, Roberto et al. 2020, Chen and Wu 2021, Köhler and Suda 2023, Mai 2020, Suda et al. 2020)

* See Painter (2020, 2011) for the capitalized use of White.

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- ★ The term 'Yellow Peril', since the 1890s, depicted Asians as villains or as undesirable members of society, who may pose existential threats (Keeyak 2011).



„Völker Europas, wahret eure heiligsten Güter!“

“Peoples of Europe, preserve your most sacred goods!”

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- ★ Asians continue to be assigned to the ‘model minority myth’, which is used to stereotype Asians, who are considered to be financially successful, hard working and socially well-assimilated in White culture.

(Toupin and Son 1991, Daniels and Kitano 1988, Hsia 1988, Takagi 1992, Wei 2010, Hartlep and Bui 2020).



The children of immigrants from Vietnam stand out with their brilliant school grades. Their success refutes clichés in the integration debate (Spiewak 2009).

A Long But Undocumented History of AAR in Europe

- ★ This dual portrayal, encompassing both the 'Yellow Peril' and 'model minority' myths, draws from **orientalist narratives** deeply rooted in Europe's (post-)colonial history
(Cho 2021, Hasunuma 2020, Kawai 2005, Shim 1998, Li and Nicholson Jr 2021).
- ★ These narratives, acting as instruments of **hegemony**, reinforce simplistic stereotypes and overlook varied experiences of Asians in Europe (De Cook and Yoon 2021, Yeh 2014, De Leon 2020).

Normalization of embodied racism



Figure 16: Poster by Leh Hwang

Normalization of embodied racism



Figure 17: Poster by Leh Hwang

Microaggressions are not abstract offenses but embodied racialized experiences that influence how individuals repeatedly perceive themselves and navigate their identities (Lee et al. nd).

Neo-Racism

- ★ The persistence of racial discrimination reinforces new form of racism and social dominance.

"[R]ather, racialized identities embedded in other salient social categories such as migration status, religion, or cultural heritage" (Juang et al. 2021: 186).
- ★ The systematic denial of AAR disrupts inclusive societal structures by positioning Asian individuals as outsiders to the discourse on racism. They are not recognized as equal participants in this social dialogue, and their voices are often dismissed or minimized.
- ★ Scholars of racism have highlighted the ambivalences of antiracism, arguing that it can sometimes serve as a strategy to immunize racism from criticism, thereby contributing to its perpetuation (Kim and Steinhilper 2025).
- ★ It may turn out as a *neo-racism* where traditional racial hierarchies are recast as narratives of incompatibility, maintaining the same exclusionary racial ideologies while escaping direct references to the discredited idea of

Social Movements: Counterframes

- ★ Despite facing racism, discrimination and homophobia, many individuals of Asian diaspora are **empowered** and actively contribute positively to society through their **activism and advocacy efforts**, thereby facilitating a **counterframe** *** (Suda and Köhler 2023).

*** See also Blum (2007) for 'pluralistic solidarity'; Wang and Li (2023) for 'networked solidarity'; or Gould (2007) for 'overlapping solidaristic networks'.

Social Movements: Counterframes



Figure 18: Korientation Demo 28.03.2021, photo credit by Victoria Kure-Wu

- ★ E.g., AVE successfully lobbied the EC to take its first steps in officially recognizing AAR as a standalone category of racial discrimination to be documented and addressed.
- ★ See [Asian Voices Europe \(2024: 56\)](#) for the list of organizations which works on AAR.

Anti-Racist Initiatives

- ★ One of the adverse consequences of anti-racist mainstreaming is that **policies are decontextualized from the lived experience of racialized peoples** and promotes a 'universalized vision of equality' (Lentin 2004: 439).
- ★ Crenshaw emphasizes that if anti-racist initiatives only articulate racism along particular dimensions, anti-racist efforts employ '**strategic silence**' (Crenshaw 1991: 1253), alerting that such interventions frequently perpetuate these silences.
- ★ The superficial antiracist actions can unintentionally reinforce racism when they **coexist with denial**. In other words, saying '*I'm not racist*' without acknowledging structural racism helps immunize racism against critique. That's a dissonance we see often: *antiracist opinions without antiracist accountability*.

Key Takeaway



Figure 19: Poster by Leh Hwang

Thank you!

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all of the respondents for sharing their opinions and experiences with us, to all volunteers for their amazing works and to AVE supports for their support and solidarity.

asianvoiceseurope@gmail.com



AVE club

Together, we are stronger. We need you.



Your support helps us cover **small but essential costs** like mailbox, monthly maintenance for banking accounts, domain hosting, so we can stay **independent, sustainable, and community-driven**.

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Appendix A: Impact of Pandemic

Our findings suggest that while the pandemic may have acted as a trigger and exacerbated AAR, it is not the sole or ultimate cause of racism against Asians in Europe.

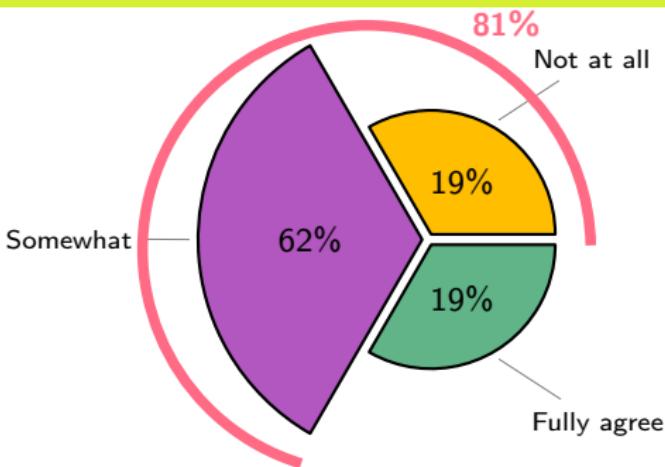


Figure 20: To what extent do you believe the racism you experienced in the last 12 months was the result of the pandemic?

Appendix B: Racism Denial Statements

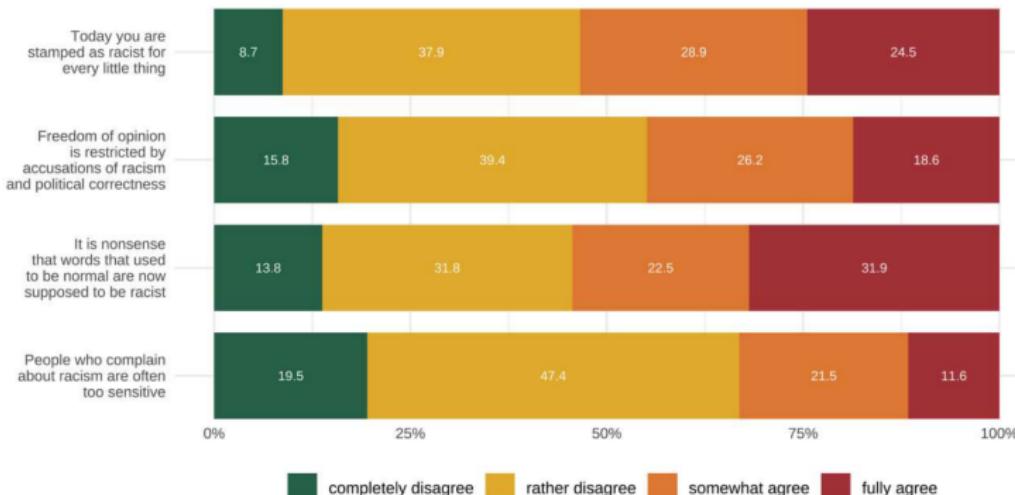


Figure 21: (Dis-)agreement with racism denial statements in Germany (N = 4.906–4.968).

- ★ Kim and Steinhilper's (2025) racism denial index revealed that 67% of respondents expressed agreement, which underlines that the majority of the population continues to harbour **defensive or dismissive attitudes** towards the existence of racism.