

Hypervisibility and Invisibility: Anti-Asian Racism in Germany

Hyunjung Lee
Asian Voices Europe
asianvoiceseurope@gmail.com

Seminar Ausgewählte Schwerpunkte im Bereich Interkulturelle Psychologie
Universität Duisburg-Essen

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Asian Voices Europe

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, conversation in Germany 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**)*

*We've made great progress with migration. [...] but of course we still have **this problem in the cityscape**, and that's why the Federal Minister of the Interior is involved [...]* (**Tagesschau 2025**)

*Bei der Migration sind wir sehr weit.[...] aber wir haben natürlich immer „**im Stadtbild noch dieses Problem**“, und deswegen ist der Bundesinnenminister ja auch dabei, [...]*

Asian: Forever foreigners or honorary white?

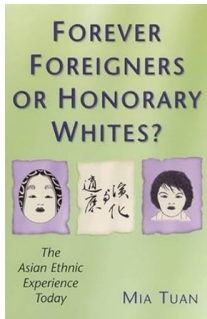


Figure 1: Mia Tuan, 1999

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 Germany, particularly as experienced by Asian diaspora?
- ★ How does the recognition of racism often meet resistance or denial in public discourse?
- ★ How can diasporic movement and their allies mobilize to combat racism and foster public awareness?

The Roadmap

- 1 Overview
- 2 AAR
- 3 Persistence of AAR
- 4 Anti-racist initiatives

A long (but less documented) history of anti-Asian racism in Germany

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.

(Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism 2023: 39)

- ★ AAR was not even officially recognized as a distinct category of racism by Germany until November 2023 (European Commission 2020a,b, Asian Voices Europe 2024, European Commission 2024, Suda and Köhler 2024).

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora

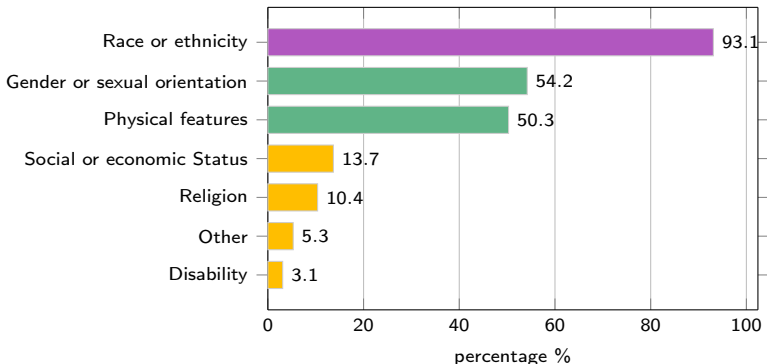


Figure 2: What type of discrimination have you ever been discriminated?

★ This figures (92.2%) surpasses figures from studies of Asian Americans, where 79.68% have reported personal experiences of discrimination based on their race or ethnicity in the context of the US (Borja and Gibson 2021), serving as a reference point.

Experience of Discrimination by Asian Diaspora

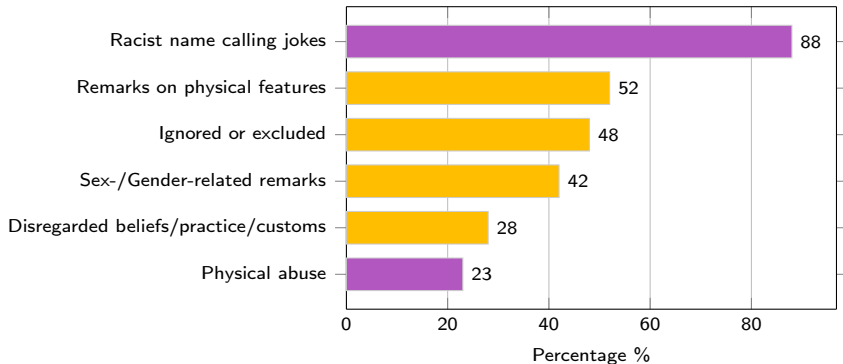


Figure 3: What kind of racial harassment have you experienced?

★ Reported AAR incidents most frequently occurred on the streets (71%), public transport (61%), but also in educational institutions (14%) and the work place (25%).

Physical assault



Figure 4: The photo shows a scene of the hate crime site, captured by a neighbor of the victim in Duisburg, Germany. A witness and one of the two men who assaulted the victim are shown in the photo.

Physical assault

- (1) It was Christmas Eve in 2022, around 13:00 in the afternoon. I was walking my dog in a residential area in Duisburg. Suddenly, two men approached me. They looked straight at me and started shouting, calling me a **disgusting Chinese** and saying they would **kill every Chinese**. Before I could react, one of them **punched me in the face**. I stumbled, trying to protect my dog. My head and left eye were injured. I screamed for help, and some people nearby called the police. The two men ran away before the police arrived. They were never caught.
- 20s, man*
(News 2022)

Physical assault

- (2) When I told my daughter's kindergarten about racist remarks other children made toward her, they suggested we [find another school where there are more Asians](#). [...] On the street, people sometimes shout [Hey Corona](#) or [Ching chong](#) at us. My daughter doesn't yet understand what those words mean, but I worry for the day she does.
30s, women, Germany ([Asian Voices Europe 2024](#))

Media representation



Figure 5: 06.03.2020: ZDF Heute Show,
“Ching Chang Chong Leer ist der Karton”

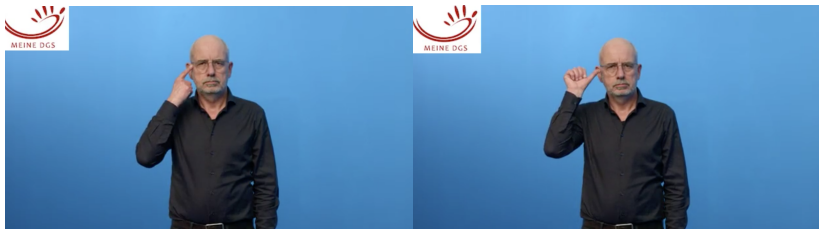
A kindergarden material with racist remarks



Figure 6: Three Chinese Men with a Double Bass. Kamishibai Picture Card Set

- ★ The chant relies on a [pseudo-Chinese gibberish](#), mocks languages spoken in Asia and Asian's appearance, teach children racialized stereotypes as humor, and reproduce a [colonial gaze on Asianness](#).

Sign languages



Asiat, Asiatin, 'Asia(n)' in German Sign Language (deutsche Gebärdensprache)
Löffler et al. (2020)

Microaggression; invalidaiton

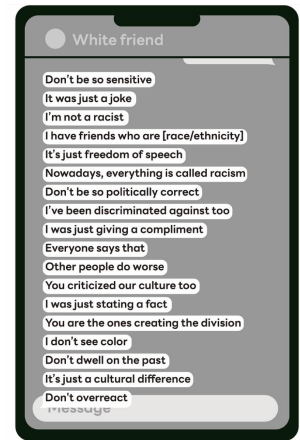


Figure 7: Poster by [Leh Hwang](#)

Frequency of Racial Discrimination and Harassment

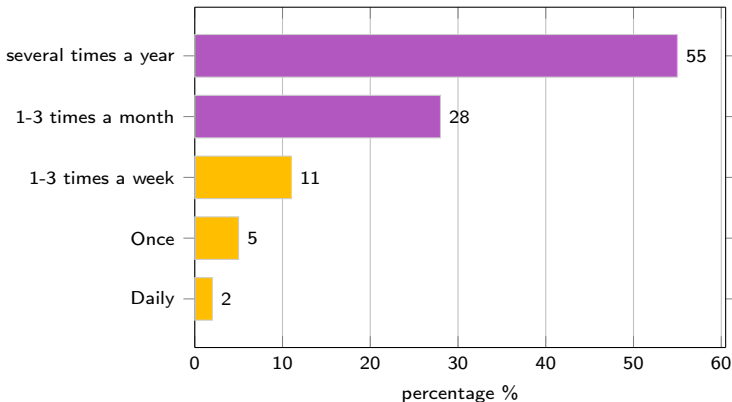


Figure 8: How many times/often have you been harassed?

Frequency of Racial Discrimination and Harassment



#ImNotAVirus

COVID-19 anti-Asian racism
#stopasianhate #StopAAPHate

+ Report a suspected hate crime to the FBI at 1-800-225-5324
 + Reporting to Community Organizations
<https://stopaaphate.org/>

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

Dismissal of the case by the public prosecutor's office

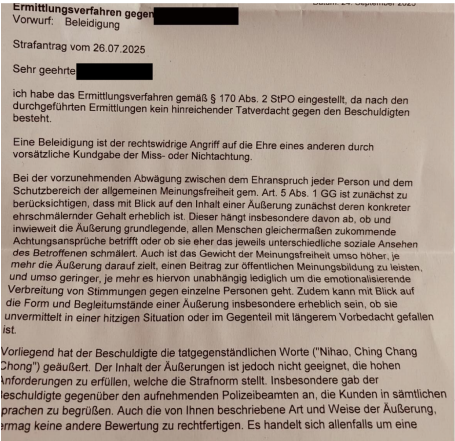


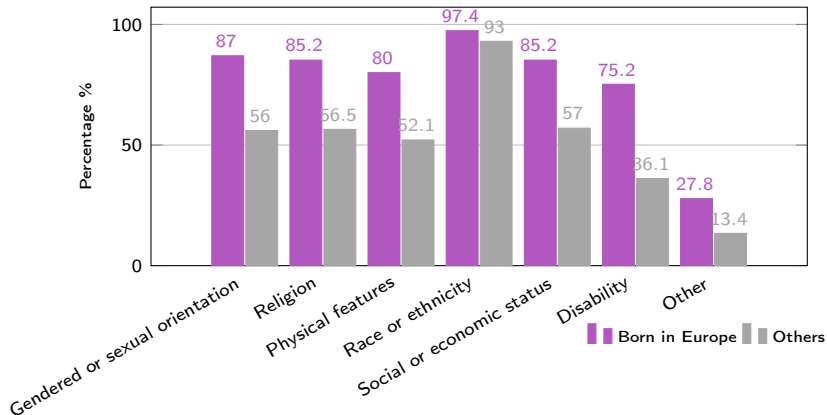
Figure 10: Criminal complaint by @2020notok



Figure 11: Poster by Leh Hwang

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.



Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

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

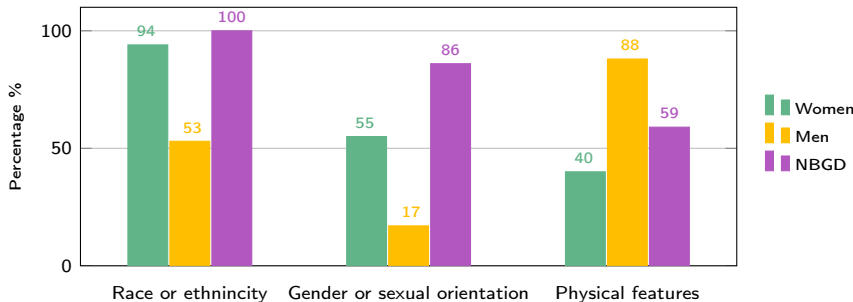


Figure 13: How do individuals across gender groups experience the top 3 forms of discrimination?

Gendered Discriminatory Experiences

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

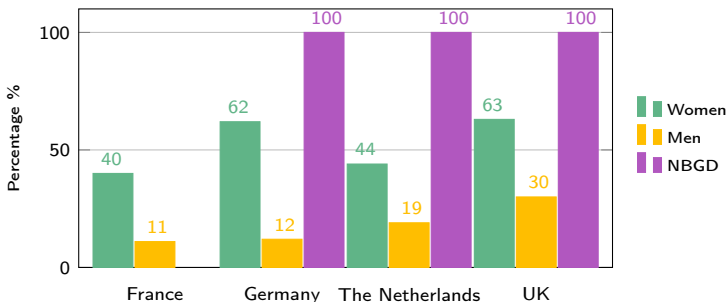


Figure 14: SGBV experienced by gender in four European countries

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 15: Comparison of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Index

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

Gendered racialized advertisement



Figure 16: Advertisement by Hornbach

- ★ Hornbach presented an advertisement showing an Asian woman becoming aroused after smelling dirty laundry worn by white men, ending with a slogan saying: *That's how the spring smells.*
- ★ A [Petition](#) asked for apology for a public apology and the removal of the ad with the hashtag #ich_wurde_geHORNB2ACHt; 42.404 co-signatories.
- ★ The German Advertising Standard Committee (Deutscher Werberat) objected to the ad,
- ★ See [here](#) for full infographic of the movement against the advertisement.

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 predated 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. White does not refer to a biological characteristic, but rather a **social and political construct within a racially structured society**. Whiteness is associated with white privilege, and members of this group are considered the unmarked **norm**.

Racialized hegemony

- ★ 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

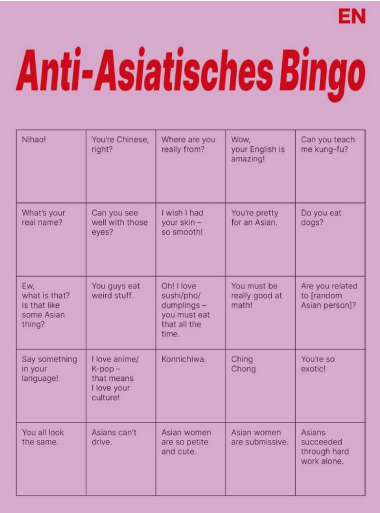


Figure 17: Poster by [Leh Hwang](#)

Normalization of embodied racism

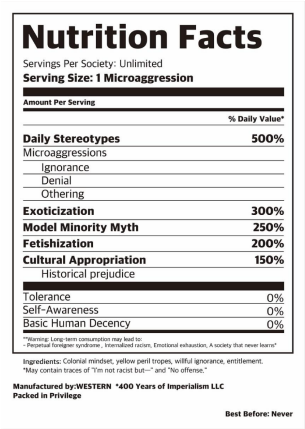


Figure 18: Poster by [Leh Hwang](#)

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

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

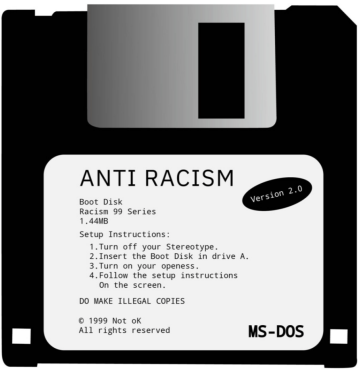


Figure 19: Poster by [Leh Hwang](#)

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



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**.

AVE club

Together, we are stronger. We need you.



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Appendix B: Racism Denial Statements

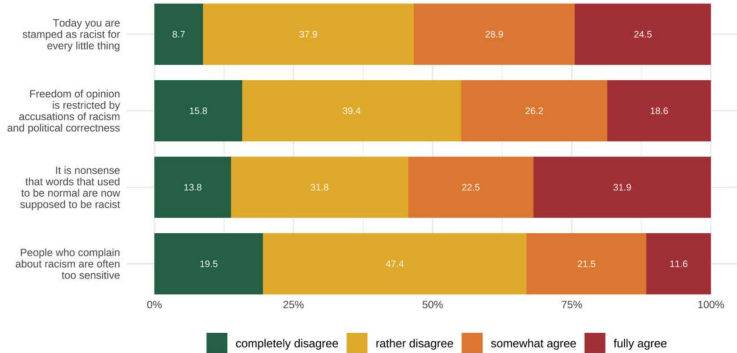


Figure 21: (Dis-)agreement with racism denial statements in Germany (N = 4.906–4.968).

★ 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.

Appendix C: 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)

Appendix D: Verbal Abuse/Microaggression

- (4) a. Some people shouted at me “Nihao,” “Ching Chang Chong,” and other [derogatory] comments at me [in a] mocking [way]. - 20s, woman, in Germany (Asian Voices Europe 2024)
- b. It's so routine to hear the words “Hey Chin[ese] or Nihao” in a mocking [tone] countless times [...] Sometimes I was walking down the street and people shouted [at] me “Konichiwa!” or “Foreigner!” - 40s, woman, in the Netherlands (Asian Voices Europe 2024)
- c. Irrespective of the pandemic, [even] before the pandemic, it was very annoying to be ridiculed in France for the gestures by [slanting] eyes or making [fun of] by people [who used to] be good friends. -30s, woman, in France (Asian Voices Europe 2024)

Appendix E: 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.

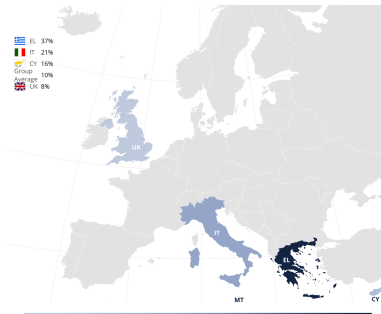


Figure 22: FRA's Survey on Minorities and Discrimination in EU - (South-)Asian Group

Appendix F: Glasfäden, an interactive comic app

GLASFÄDEN

Aus dem Osten in den Osten



Figure 23: Glasfäden: an interactive comic about Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR

You can download app here: <https://glasfaeden.de>