

Educational Systems as Racialized Structures: Narratives of Exclusion and Resistance Among Immigrant-Background Youth in Germany

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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)

Questions:

- ★ What racialized experiences does Asian diaspora in DE encounter in schools?
- ★ How can we challenge this dominant discourses?

The cost of silencing racism

- ★ Superficial measures in educational institutions, often masked as diversity or tolerance, may entrench dominant narratives and suppress anti-racist critique.

Methodology



Bin ich süßauer?

- ★ interviewed Queer Asian individuals in Europe (mostly Germany) by [Sung Un Gang](#)
- ★ sharing lived experiences and bringing visibility
- ★ Dec. 18, 2021 – Sep. 23, 2023
- ★ ~ 60 min/ep., 23 ep. in total
- ★ <https://binichsuesssauer.podigee.io/>

Analytic process

- ★ transcribed audio to text
- ★ translated German → English
- ★ thematic coding w/ double coder strategy
([Braun and Clarke 2006](#))
- ★ analyzed based on the Asian critical theory
([Museus and Iftikar 2013](#), [Iftikar and Museus 2018](#))

“Go back home”: racialized disciplines

- (1) And I also know that I was once caught in a brawl in the schoolyard by a teacher. I don't remember who started it, me or the other child, but the teacher came to me and said, watch what you do, because otherwise you have to go back home. [...] And in retrospect I understood what it was all about, that okay, everyone fights, but I am singled out and I am threatened with not being allowed to live in Germany anymore, although I actually already had the German passport at that time.

- 30s, NBGD, Germany

(Gang 2023)

- ★ ‘Migrant’ is a social construct shaped not only by law, but by cultural imagination, racialization, and mainstream narratives of belonging (Brubaker 2002, Mecheril 2018)
- ★ Racialized experiences from teachers convey an existential threat, signaling that belonging is conditional and reinforcing exclusion and marginalization in school.(Cheruvu et al. 2015)

“Not German enough?": internalized racism

- (2) [A]s the child of Vietnamese guest workers, [...] I wasn't even conscious of it, or of how I had **internalized racism** [...] I always **avoided (asian) community events** and any contact with Asian-looking people to **deny my origins and blend in with White people**. I even longed for a German name and resented my parents for not being German. [It was a result of] what I learned from my surroundings and society - this **persistent desire to fit in the White society**. [...] When I realized early that I looked different from my peers, I was frustrated [...] You had to prove your worth [...] The confirmation that my value is solely tied to my productivity has always **forced me to justify my existence**, especially under such princely guilt.
- 30s, NBGD, Germany (Gang 2023)

- ★ Youth internalize societal deficit narratives due to constant challenges of marginalization (Moffitt et al. 2019, Scholaske 2024).

Racilized belonging

- ★ In Germany, discussions of **race and racism** remain **highly taboo** due to the country's historical legacy (**Juang et al. 2021**). As a result, educational policy has long preferred euphemisms (e.g. cultural diversity, inclusion or everyday racism), replacing racial discourse with a **depoliticized language**.
- ★ **Color evasive** ideologies serve to **mask** unequal conditions and deflect criticism **under a veneer of equality**. This **silence of racial discourses** makes racism harder to name and address in educational institutions.
- ★ Despite developing educational paradigms, the focus remained on **adjusting the 'Other'**, and it **fails to interrogate the normative whiteness** of the curriculum and pedagogy (**Wischmann 2018**).

Counter-narrative mediums

*There is also **very little representation in the media** in general [...] [Hope that] there are also younger generations who will now grow up with a completely different self-confidence because we have **set this in place [to] show we are here.***
(*Gang 2023*)

- ★ **Counter-storytelling** allows marginalized communities to share experiences that **disrupt 'majoritarian' perspectives** (Love 2004, Solórzano and Yosso 2002, Ladson-Billings 2009).
- ★ Digital storytelling medium can be a valuable tool for initiating conversations: students represented themselves through stories that **countered normalized discourses** about racism (Rolón-Dow 2011).

Key Takeaway

- ★ **Anti-racist** transformation in education requires **centering those affected**: listening to, learning from, and co-developing pedagogy with racialized communities who are already generating **counter-narratives** and forms of resistance (**Pham and Philip 2021**).

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Thank you!

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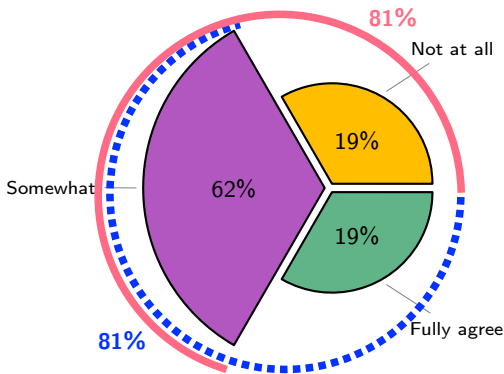
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Appendix A: Impact of Pandemic

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.
(Asian Voices Europe 2024: 49-50)



Appendix B: Pedagogical developments in Germany



Appendix C: Assimilation rebranded: masking of exclusion

- ★ **Foreigner pedagogy (Ausländerpädagogik)** dominated until 1990s: it aimed to lead children of migrants **assimilate** without changing the system itself.
- ★ It was **deficit-oriented**, focusing on language gaps or cultural difference as **student shortcomings** (Hoff 1995: 828).

Intercultural competence [...] does not only mean engaging with other languages and cultures. [...] a school of diversity is needed, one that is free from both overt and hidden discrimination [...].

(Kultusministerkonferenz (1996: 2) translated from German)

- ★ However, intercultural education lacked an anti-racist lens and **did not address power inequalities** in the German educational system (Auernheimer 1990, Gogolin and Nauck 2013).
- ★ Hoff (1995) argues that cross-cultural education **replaced notions of nationalism with Eurocentrism** and masked an exclusionary intent rooted in preserving a White, Christian norm.

Appendix D: Diversity-sensitive education that muted racism

- ★ Belonging in a migration society is not passively granted; it is actively claimed and contested ([Auernheimer 2005](#), [Mecheril 2012](#)).

So-called [minorities](#) actively influence the discourses that subject them, and in the struggle for belonging, they [create new forms of subjectivity as well as spaces in which 'otherness'](#); can be lived. [Migrant self-organizations](#) play a particularly important role in a migration society, as they offer opportunities to [reflect](#) on self-designation and self-perception, and to participate in public debates. ([Mecheril 2012: 20](#))

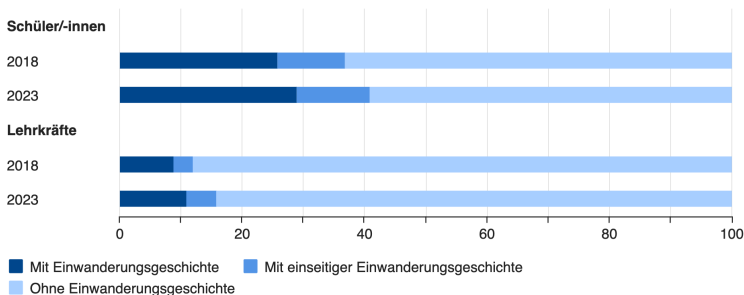
- ★ 'Migrant' is a social construct shaped not only by law, but by [cultural imagination, racialization, and dominant narratives of belonging](#) ([Brubaker 2002](#), [Mecheril 2018](#)).
- ★ “[R]ather, racialized identities [embedded in other salient social categories](#) such as migration status, religion, or cultural heritage” ([Juang et al. 2021: 186](#)).

Appendix E: Distinctions of 'migrants' vs. 'non-migrants'

- ★ The term **post-migrant** emphasises that in a society where at least **1/3 of the population** is affected by migration, conceptual distinctions of 'migrants' vs. 'non-migrants' are **no longer defensible** (Foroutan 2016).

Personen nach Einwanderungsgeschichte an allgemeinbildenden Schulen

Anteil in %



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Appendix F: The model minority myth

- ★ The 'model minority myth' 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).

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Integration

Das vietnamesische Wunder

Die Kinder von Einwanderern aus Vietnam fallen durch glänzende Schulnoten auf. Ihr Erfolg straft Klischees der Integrationsdebatte Lügen

Von Martin Spiewak

22. Januar 2009 Quelle: DIE ZEIT, 22.01.2009 Nr. 05



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