

## The Indernet – A German Network in a Transnational Space

---

URMILA GOEL

### Communicating Across the World

It is an Indian portal also for foreign Indians, who can get an insight into the German scene. [...] Like I express myself in the world, thus the Indian community expresses itself in the world: We are there as well! Not only Canada, Great Britain and India, we are also there! We Indians in Germany also do something! We have a cultural scene and we also have our value, our pride, our commitment and our activity. That is the Indernet for me. That is what the Indernet incorporates for me.<sup>1</sup>

In these words Jay, a rap musician whose parents migrated from India to Germany, enthusiastically explains to me the importance of the internet portal <http://www.theinder.net>, called the *Indernet*. Later in the interview he comes back to this idea and concludes with “The Indernet unites! The world becomes smaller!”

Jay’s enthusiasm fits well with the observation that transnational media technologies, and in particular the internet, (cf. Karim 2003; Hannerz 1996; Glick Schiller et al. 1997: 126) are able to connect migrants scattered around the world (Döring 1999: 267; Mitra 1997; Mannur 2003) and give the marginalised a voice (Döring 1999: 148; Miller/Slater 2000: 3; 18; Mandaville 2003: 135). The internet contributes to making the world smaller as it enables everyday togetherness across national borders (Miller/Slater 2000: 55-84; Greschke in this volume) and

---

1 This is a quote from an interview I conducted in the course of the research project “The virtual second generation” (see <http://www.urmila.de/UDG/Forschung/forschungindex.html>). I conducted all interviews in German and have translated as well as anonymised the quotes for this article.

lets discourses and images travel quickly between different regions of the world (King 2003: 179). According to Jay the virtual space *Indernet* is connecting “*Indian communities*”<sup>2</sup> around the world. This is also the impression of the ‘white’<sup>3</sup> journalist Manuel: “Already the fact that there is an English version and a Hindi version makes it possible for Indians around the world to communicate. I think also the choice of topics, i.e. Indian films and music and so on, are encouraging this.”

However, both my observation of the *Indernet* and most of my interview partners do not support Jay’s and Manuel’s impressions. The virtual space the *Indernet* does not indicate any significant interaction with those marked as Indians beyond the German-speaking countries. It neither provides evidence for a worldwide representation of the German cultural scene nor do debates and discourses from other parts of the world seem to be received through it in Germany on a significant scale. In contrast the *Indernet* seems to be very much focused on the German context. In this it differs considerably from virtual spaces like the one analysed by Greschke in this volume, where interactions across borders are everyday practices. In this article I will discuss, in which ways the *Indernet* is nonetheless part of a transnational space and how Jay’s and Manuel’s impressions can be interpreted. I will do so from the perspective of racism theory<sup>4</sup> and as an outsider to the debates around transnationalism, hoping that this outsider perspective might add productive insights to this volume and the discussions about world society.

In the following I will first provide basic information about the *Indernet* and my research methods, then I will describe the internet portal’s localisation through the German language, before I finally return first to Manuel’s and then Jay’s impression of worldwide communication facilitated through the *Indernet*.

2 For a critical discussion of the imagination of an ‘Indian community’ in Germany see Goel (2007a).

3 I use the term ‘white’ to mark the normally unmarked social position of symbolic and practical privilege in the racist reality of contemporary Germany (Mecheril 2004: 199). It indicates that a person or a group of persons participates in the privileges of the racist system. While the privileged are hardly aware of their ‘white’ privileges, those who are racialised perceive and have to deal with them everyday. The power system and mechanisms of exclusion based on the construction of the ‘white’ and the racialised are analysed in the Critical Whiteness Studies (in Germany in particular Eggers et al. 2005; Tißberger et al. 2006), on which I base my analysis. I am aware that the term ‘white’ is prone to evoke essentialised notions about biological differences between persons. Nonetheless, I consider the term ‘white’ as the analytically most productive term in the German context at the moment to make the privileged position visible.

4 My approach is based on theorists like Mecheril (2003), Rommelspacher (1995) and Terkessidis (2004) as well as on the Critical Whiteness Studies and postcolonial theory (for example Steyerl/Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2003 or Broden/Mecheril 2007).

## The Indernet

The internet portal the *Indernet* was founded in the summer of the year 2000 by three young men, who were socialised in Germany and are marked as Indians there.<sup>5</sup> They had already created private websites and wanted to develop their skills through a meaningful project. The campaign '*Kinder statt Inder*'<sup>6</sup> provided them with a starting point for the latter. First they just collected some of the cartoons<sup>7</sup> online, but soon they decided to establish their own network of Indians, hoping to thus get into contact with others socialised like them in Germany and marked as Indians there. The English project description<sup>8</sup> introduced the internet portal as follows:

"We are a young Indian internet community and portal, founded in July 2000, named "the InderNet" ("Inder" is the German word for an Indian, so it becomes an "Indian Network"). [...] Our goal is to bring people via internet together, encourage communication among each other, promote and support projects and to provide you with information on India. [...] Our target group is primarily 2nd generation Indians living in Germany."

- 
- 5 Most of the editors and users of the Indernet are categorised most commonly as Indians (of the second generation). Many identify themselves as such, some identify as Germans, Indo-Germans, German Indians, Asians, Desis, foreigners, Kanaken, etc. Many have relatives in India, some in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or some other country of the former British empire. Others do not know of any relatives outside of Germany. What is common to them is on the one hand that they were socialised primarily in Germany, live in Germany and plan to live in Germany. On the other hand they share the experience of being considered Indians by others in Germany. As my analysis takes the approach of racism theory (cf. Mecheril 2004: 176-200) I will not use a term referring to an ascribed origin outside Germany to categorise these editors and users of the Indernet but will rather refer to the process of racialisation they experience in Germany. Thus, I will talk of people socialised in Germany and marked (by numerous physiognomic and social attributes) as Indians in Germany. For a discussion of how social and physiognomic attributes play a central role in whether people are considered to belong to a particular natio-ethno-cultural context or not see Mecheril (2003: 211-212). For a discussion of claims and contestations of 'Indianness' in Germany see Goel (2008).
  - 6 In the summer of 2000 the German IT industry was experiencing a lack of skilled professionals. The German government thus announced the introduction of a 'Green Card' scheme to attract foreign IT experts and in particular referred to Indians. The conservative opposition started a campaign against it, which was soon known as '*Kinder statt Inder*' (which translates to children instead of Indians). This was the first time that people marked as Indians were at the centre of a racist campaign in Germany.
  - 7 The public debate about the 'GreenCard' scheme was accompanied by a plethora of cartoons, many of them using the image of a 'Computer Indian' or working with the German play of words Indernet, which joins the term internet with Inder (which is German for Indian).
  - 8 <http://www.theinder.net/presentation/presentation-eng.htm>, September 30, 2001

Through skilful networking and luck the founders were able to make the project known among others active in organising events and spaces for those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there. The *Indernet* thus gained not only a wider audience, but also more content and new editors. The internet portal grew fast in users, editors and content and by the time I conducted my interviews in the year 2004 it was established as a space of the second generation (Heft/Goel 2006), known not only to young people marked as Indians and socialised in Germany but also to migrants from South Asia and ‘white’ Germans interested in India. In the summer of the year 2007, at which point I am (re)writing this article,<sup>9</sup> the *Indernet* seems to have passed its zenith.

I got to know the founders of the *Indernet* and thus the internet portal at a networking seminar, which I organised together with others for the German-Indian Society, in November 2000. Since at this point I was already collecting material and writing about people marked (like me and my father) as Indians in Germany, I started to observe the virtual space shortly afterwards. I applied for research funds some time later and began a full-time research project on the *Indernet* in spring 2004. Since then I have been surfing the virtual spaces with few exceptions at least once every day, have occasionally participated in forum discussions, contributed articles to the editorial section, been on few occasions in the *Indernet* chat, have exchanged personal messages and emails with other users and attended offline events. My participation was, however, mainly one of a distanced lurker,<sup>10</sup> staying most of the time an observer and hardly considering myself part of the *Indernet*. Starting in 2004 I conducted more than 80 open interviews about the *Indernet* with the founders, editors and users as well as with observers and people, who know of the internet portal but do not use it. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face with me travelling to meet my interview partners. When this was not possible, either because the interview partner wanted to stay anonymous or I did not have the resources to meet her or him, I also conducted online interviews. For contacting interview partners I used my own networks among people socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there, contacted *Indernet* editors and users and followed other interesting traces found on the internet portal. In doing so I was guided by the principles of grounded theory, adapting my approach, methods and analysis in accordance with the empirical material and my theoretical deliberations.

---

9 This is a total reformulation of a paper presented at the conference “The Making of ‘World Society’” at Bielefeld in November 2005. I thank Eva Gerharz for her critical comments, which induced me to rethink my arguments fundamentally.

10 A lurker uses a virtual space, but does not post herself and thus is hardly visible to the other users.

## A Space in German

The project description of the Indernet refers to Indians and India, the domain name includes the German term for Indians, the logo is a stylised Indian flag. The main reference point of the Indernet quite clearly is India. The English project description refers to “a global information and communication platform”<sup>11</sup> and the internet portal starts in three languages (German, English and Hindi), thus supporting Jay’s and Manuel’s impression of the Indernet being a part of a worldwide Indian network. But a closer look questions this impression. In the interactive parts German is the clearly dominant language, there are almost no posts in English and very seldom any in another Indian language. The English version of the Indernet has little and the Hindi version hardly any content.<sup>12</sup> Deepak, one of the three founders, comments this as follows:

“At the beginning the portal was really trilingual. All news were translated into all three languages. But then we stopped because it was too much work and in fact only two people or so per day were interested in the Hindi version, so we left the navigation in Hindi and [...] took the English home page for the Hindi version as well. [...] In the meantime I think there are always about eight people per day, who enter the Hindi version. And one does not know, whether they want to read Hindi or whether they are just interested to see, what Hindi looks like. I do not think that it is a serious content transferring medium [...]”

It is also a lot of work to translate all the articles into English, thus the update of the English version is always a bit behind. Thus everything is only available 100% on the German version.

At the time of the interviews the impression of trilinguality was preserved by the entrance page giving one the choice of the three languages. For users, who entered only the German version like Manuel,<sup>13</sup> it appeared that there were alternative offers in the other languages. Today this impression should be weaker since, some time in the year 2006, the entrance page disappeared and the user now enters directly the German version.<sup>14</sup>

My interviews show that the choice of German as the dominant language is decisive for the success of the Indernet. The most common answer I got, when I

11 <http://www.theinder.net/presentation/presentation-eng.htm>, September 30, 2001

12 The Indernet is not the only ethnically defined internet portal in Germany, which uses German as the main language. Androutsopolous (2006: 9-12) mentions also <http://iran-now.de>, <http://www.greex.net>, <http://www.asia-zone.de> and <http://www.dimadima.de>.

13 Manuel admitted his ignorance about the Hindi and English version in the interview: “I know in particular, I have to admit, the German version. There is also the English and the Hindi version. But I do not know these, I have at least failed to check.”

14 From which the user, however, can still change to the English and Hindi version.

asked what was special about this particular internet portal, was that it is a German-language virtual space. German is the language that those socialised in Germany, are most comfortable with. It is the language, which they read with the least effort and in which they can express themselves best as Deepak among others explained to me:

“There is the medium German language. The people, we want to reach, they know German. [...] Naturally one does not know a foreign language as well as one’s own mother tongue. And I want to express myself in my mother tongue, when I am writing an article, it should be rhetorically interesting and not only providing facts, and thus I prefer German.”

No other language could be used to the same effect. English is for most of the editors and users of the Indernet a foreign language, which they have learned in school and use seldom in their everyday lives, and there is no Indian language they could use alternatively as Martin, one of the early editors, explains:

“The special thing is that it is an online community, which because it is in German, reaches all Indians. Because India is a country, in which there are so many languages. If the Indernet was only in Hindi, then I think not so many people would come. Because the people, the generation, which grows up here, they grow up with German and many do know a little bit of Malayalam or a bit of Hindi or some other language, but the language, which they learn here, in the school, is German. And the Indernet uses German in order that everybody understands it. Also, an Indian from the North does not understand the languages from the South or from the West or East.”

What Martin does not say explicitly here is that many of the editors and users (like himself) do not know any Indian language at all. He was adopted from India as a small child and has been brought up with German, Vietnamese and French. I myself grew up with German and English. Only at university did I start to study the basics of Hindi, which is the mother tongue of my father. Thus, German is really the only language which is understood by all those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there.

The choice of this language shapes the nature of this virtual space and makes it different from other virtual spaces marked as Indian across the world (eg. Mitra 1997 or Gajjala 2004) and others in Germany. The latter include the mailing group GINDS: Indians in Germany,<sup>15</sup> which is used mainly by IT professionals, the internet portal <http://www.indianfootball.com>, which was founded by a young man socialised in Germany and marked as an Indian there, or the matrimonial service <http://www.shaadi.com>, on which many young people socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there are registered. All of the latter use English as their main language, a language which is spoken in India and connects people

---

15 <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GINDS/>, September 11, 2007

marked as Indians across the world.<sup>16</sup> These virtual spaces thus enable worldwide interaction and can reach people, the Indernet fails to cater for as Deepak is aware:

“In the editorial team it was always a discussion in how far we will include the Computer Indians and especially how we will do that. We would, for example, have needed to promote the English version. For which we did not have the resources. [...] and due to the language barrier the Computer Indians are already excluded somewhat.”

Whoever is uncomfortable with German can read only few articles in English on the Indernet and can access information about India much better on other websites. In the forum and the chatroom one can interact in English (or another Indian language), but there will only be few other users, who will interact readily in these languages, and the majority of the discussions will not be accessible. One can contribute articles in English<sup>17</sup>, but this will be a unidirectional involvement in the virtual space. In my observation there are few users, who do not know German and try to interact on the Indernet. I have observed none, who became a regular user actively interacting with others. In my interviews I was, however, told that some of my interview partners contacted Indian migrants on the Indernet chat. Others met migrants, at events marked as Indian in Germany, who found out about these events on the Indernet.

## Connecting (with) Germany

The English project description<sup>18</sup> (despite the language barrier) claims to have a global audience: “We do also have [...] members from India, UK, USA or Switzerland.” This is supported by the membership list of the Indernet in early 2004.<sup>19</sup> While most of the 442 members were based in Germany, eight had indicated a residence in India and even fewer in other non-German speaking countries. Manish, who went for his postgraduate studies from Germany to the US is one of them:

“When I registered as a member, I was one of the very few abroad. The others were naturally Germans. I used to look at the list occasionally. There were some from the

16 Like Spanish connects people marked as Paraguayans across the world in the virtual space, as analysed by Greschke in this volume.

17 There was a regular column in English called Usha’s corner (for example [http://culture.indian-network.de/ushascorner/usha\\_indianidentity.htm](http://culture.indian-network.de/ushascorner/usha_indianidentity.htm), September 12, 2007). As there is no further information available about the author Usha, I do not know where she is based and how she made contact with the Indernet. At the time of writing this article the Indernet is looking for a new columnist.

18 <http://www.theinder.net/presentation/presentation-eng.htm>, September 30, 2001

19 On <http://www.indien-netzwerk.de/logo/mitglieder/mitglieder.htm>, March 27, 2004 there used to be a list of people who had filled in a membership form.

neighbouring countries like Switzerland, but one could count them with one hand. And at some stage, I still remember it, there were also Indians there, Indians from India. And a few from North America, I think [...] I did not want to lose my connections with the Indian community in Germany. And through the Indernet I was always up to date about what was happening among the Indians in Germany.”

Nikhil, another user from Germany told me that he particularly enjoyed using the Indernet, while he was doing a practical training in India:

“It was in the time, when I was in India, when I started to appreciate the internet as such. Because of the distance. Because I had an email address and could email people. And I could chat with them on msn and so on. The value of the internet was more apparent, because I was so far away and could keep the contacts nonetheless. Thus, while I was in India, I also went on the Indernet often in order to know what was happening in the Indian community. [...] And also to write in the guestbook. It was funny to leave messages there and to enter as a location Bangalore. Or to write how I like it there and what I have done today or whatever could be of interest to Indians.”

This was echoed by Ishvar, a very active user, who was brought up in Germany and pursued his studies in Great Britain. Like the other two he used the Indernet to keep up to date about what happened among those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there. As he wrote me in the email interview: “I consider Germany my home.<sup>20</sup> There I grew up and maybe I will settle there for work (let’s wait and see).”

The editors of the Indernet observe who is using the internet portal and take pride in the international participation, as the interview with the editor Ranjan illustrates:

“The community spirit is that everyone can be together, that everyone can communicate with one another. That there are no boundaries anymore. That it crosses borders. [...] There are people, who come from England, there are people who come from ... I don’t know. Do you know Ishvar? He comes from Britain and I asked him how he came to know the Indernet. He is Indian, born in Germany and went to England to work there.”

But it is not only the crossing of international borders which is important for Ranjan. In the quote above I have omitted the following passage:

“One, for example, knows that there are many Indians in Cologne or in Frankfurt or in urban areas and one knows, if one goes on the Indernet, for example in the forum, one meets people from all over Germany.”

---

20 He uses the German term *Heimat*, which has a much stronger sense of belongingness than the English term *home*.

Only after stressing the fact that the Indernet connects those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there within the country does Ranjan look across the national border. In this emphasis on networking in Germany he is joined by most of my interview partners. The user Maya, for example, told me:

“The Indernet is unique in being a link between Indians of the second generation, which is at the same time modern and German inspired, as it also does not deny the Indian roots. [...] It provides a German perspective on India.”

Important for Maya, and for most others, is that the Indernet links Germany and India, in a way she likes to identify with. The interesting point is that Maya has never lived in Germany, that she has been socialised and lives in Switzerland. Puzzled by her reference to a German perspective I asked her whether she considered herself part of this. She answered:

“There is no Swiss perspective on Indian things. .. In Switzerland everything differs from district to district. The Indians in the district Aargau are so different from those in Basel or Zürich. They are worlds apart. And the French and the Italian Switzerland cannot be compared anyway. There is no Swiss perspective. I think the German Swiss perspective is very similar to the German. [...] The German Swiss can be compared more with the Germans than to the rest of Switzerland. [...] Everything cool comes from Germany. Germany is the big brother and everything that happens, happens first in Germany. [...] Switzerland is always a subchapter of Germany.”

In fact, there are several very active users as well as registered members of the Indernet, who were socialised in either Switzerland or Austria and are marked as Indians there. In discussions they sometimes point out to other users that the latter’s assumptions that everyone is based in Germany is wrong and that, for example, if a question like “Do you prefer to live in Germany or India?” is posted, then Austria and/or Switzerland should be included as well. Sometimes they also stress their regional identity by writing their posts in Swiss or Austrian German. In general, however, the German language – as well as the absence of a comparable internet portal in Switzerland or Austria – seems sufficient to make them part of the Indernet.

## The Topics of the *Indernet*

The Indernet offers two kinds of information: first, information about India and secondly, information about things marked as Indian in Germany.<sup>21</sup> The latter is what Manish, Nikhil and Ishvar mentioned as being particularly important to

21 There is hardly ever any information provided about issues directly connected to Austria or Switzerland.

them while they were away from Germany. It is also what many of those based in the German-speaking countries consider as the most important aspect of the Indernet.<sup>22</sup> The internet portal allows its users to learn more about which things marked as Indian happen in Germany through an events calendar, reports about events and the discussions in the forum. Thus they get to know both what is being discussed and where they can participate offline themselves. This information is sought not only to actively interact, but also to just get to know more about what can be considered Indian in Germany. The Swiss user Maya, for example, told me:

“The great thing was in the beginning: Until that time I only knew the British Indian community. It was very interesting for me to see, how the German community differs from the British. Because the British community is very much closed towards the British. I saw that among my relatives, who are much more traditional [...] While the German Indians out of necessity, because there are not so many Indians, are more open towards the German culture. I found that interesting. That there is such a blend.”

Maya, like some of the other users, has relatives in the UK and other countries around the world. When she visits them, she observes how they define and cultivate their Indianness, which differs considerably from her positioning in Switzerland. She thus seeks a further comparison and uses the Indernet to get to know more about others, who are marked as Indians in German-speaking countries. She, like others, emphasises the differences she sees among those marked as Indians in Germany and in countries with a larger presence of people thus categorised. It seems that her feeling of belongingness to those marked as Indians in Britain is considerably less than to those in Germany. Ishvar, who is using the Indernet to keep in contact with those marked as Indian in Germany and who lives in a British university town tells me: “There are masses of Indians here. One is no exception anymore. There are certainly also communities here, but I do not have contact with them.” It does not seem important for him, to get into contact with the local networks. His point of reference remains Germany.

The focus on Germany can be noticed also in the information provided on the Indernet about India. Hardly ever is there an article, which was written by somebody based (at least temporarily) in India<sup>23</sup> and only seldom are sources based in India quoted. There is hardly any news about Indian domestic issues and in contrast, for example, to the mailing list GINDS hardly ever issues, which are currently debated in India, are taken up on the Indernet. Much of the information provided is very general, giving basic facts about India<sup>24</sup> or Hinduism<sup>25</sup> or provid-

---

22 This is true also for several of the ‘white’ observers (like the journalist Manuel) I interviewed. They told me that they were using the Indernet mainly to get to know more about people marked as Indians in Germany.

23 The Indernet claims to have an India office since 2006, but so far I have noticed only one article written there.

ing a list with Indian names and their meanings.<sup>26</sup> Many reports are taken from German media and thus mirror the latter's interests. In general the selection of topics seems rather haphazard depending on the interests and skills of the editors.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while many of my interview partners told me that they appreciate the information provided by the Indernet, all those with a more detailed interest in India said that they rather prefer to refer to other sources such as Indian newspapers online.

Some are also users of the German-language internet portal <http://www.suedasien.info>, which is an official cooperation partner of the Indernet<sup>28</sup> and was founded shortly before the Indernet by students whose studies have in some way to do with South Asia. The aim of this internet portal is to provide well researched and critically edited information in German about the South Asian countries. Most of the editors are 'white', several travel regularly to South Asia and some have lived there. One of the 'white' editor, I interviewed, had originally volunteered as an editor for the Indernet and then changed to [suedasien.info](http://www.suedasien.info). She not only preferred the academic approach of [suedasien.info](http://www.suedasien.info) but also feared that as a 'white' person, she did not fit into the Indernet team. This contrasts with the perspective of Jule, a 'white' user of the Indernet I interviewed, who feels very much accepted in that virtual space:

"Yes, I know [suedasien.info](http://www.suedasien.info). I have printed lots of their articles. [...] I think it is great, a lot of knowledge is communicated, but on the interpersonal level [...] it is better on the Indernet. [...] There I have the impression, these are people who participate, who listen to me. [...] [suedasien.info](http://www.suedasien.info) [...] is somehow dead [...] more like a book and the Indernet is more open. There one can communicate with people."

While thus the Indernet is able to bind some 'white' users,<sup>29</sup> it has failed despite several attempts<sup>30</sup> to attract young Indian migrants, who are IT professionals, on a significant scale. Observing the mailing list GINDS shows that this is not only an issue of language but also of topics. On GINDS the contributions are predominantly about the practicalities of migration to and life in Germany. The topics in-

24 For example <http://www.indien-netzwerk.de/navigation/landleute/bharat-ki-khoj/bharat-ki-khoj.htm>, September 12, 2007.

25 For example <http://culture.indian-network.de/religion/artikel/hinduismus2.htm>, September 12, 2007.

26 For example <http://culture.indian-network.de/gesellschaft/artikel/maennl-namen-deu.htm>, September 12, 2007.

27 The Indernet is organised fully on a voluntary basis. All the editors work full-time or are students with limited time available for their editorial work. Most of them have neither a training in journalism nor any formal education on Indian issues.

28 The cooperation so far seems restricted mainly to linking each other and very seldomly exchanging articles.

29 In fact, among the most active users in the forum there are several 'white' users.

30 For example, by providing an own section "New in Germany" (<http://forum.indian-network.de/viewforum.php?f=18>, September 12, 2007).

clude where there are job opportunities, how to apply for a residence permit, what to do about insurance, how to find accommodation and also offers to sell furniture or other household equipment, all of which are absent on the Indernet. From time to time debates from India, for example about a controversial Muslim painter, are also discussed in GINDS. Although there are common users it only rarely happens that issues travel from GINDS to the Indernet or the other way round.

## A Space for Those Socialised in Germany

Among the different virtual spaces marked as Indian in Germany, the special thing about the Indernet is that it is a space of those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there for those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there as I was told in many of the interviews. As I have argued elsewhere (Goel 2005, 2007b, 2007c; Heft/Goel 2006) the Indernet is an own space in a society perceived as being racist, which is helpful in dealing with experiences of racist exclusion.<sup>31</sup> The user Fatima illustrates this as follows:

“I also went through phases, when I was almost depressive, because I thought: ‘Oh no, where do I belong?’ A conflict of identity, when one does not know, where ... what am I? You look into the mirror and you see somebody with black hair. You go outside, talk to people and when you listen to yourself, you think: ‘Yes, naturally. For myself, I am German.’ When I listen to myself thus, but as soon as, I don’t know ... there are small things said by others, by friends, small remarks like ‘How is it done at your place?’ Then it is again: ‘Oh no, I am different after all.’ And then I found other people with this conflict of identity on [...] the Indernet. There one can talk with each other, exchange experiences. A bit of survival training: how does one deal with this?’<sup>32</sup>

Fatima thus highlights the importance of meeting others with the same experiences of exclusion on the Indernet and being able to discuss with them. The Indernet facilitates this as racist othering is virtually absent there and a sense of natio-ethno-cultural familiarity<sup>33</sup> exists. Mary, an early editor, describes the latter as follows: “There are small examples, in which one can see the familiarity that ex-

31 For an analysis of experiences of racism by people socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there see for example Mecheril (2003), Goel (2006) or Paske (2006). The experiences are mostly those of banal racism (Terkessidis 2004). They are encountered in everyday interactions (Battaglia 1995; Ferreira 2003) as well as in legislation, institutions and public discourses (Mecheril 2003).

32 A detailed analysis of the interview with Fatima can be found in Goel (2005).

33 Mecheril (2003) coins the term natio-ethno-cultural to refer to notions of nation, ethnicity and culture, which are used to categorise people in and define their belongingness to Germany. The Indernet users share similar experiences concerning this categorisation, while with respect to others such as gender, sexuality or class they might lack commonality.

ists among Indians without having to explain what it is to be Indian". She later returns to this, when she explains what she considers special about the internet portal: "It is a platform for young people to get to know each other, for young people from Germany to get to know Indians, who are born and brought up like them, and to get to know each other without a need to explain."<sup>34</sup>

The Internet is a space, where the (multiple) natio-ethno-cultural belongingness (Mecheril 2003) of those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there is the norm. It allows the (imaginary) movement between different contexts of belongingness and thus constitutes – as Mecheril (2004: 73) in an adaptation of Ludger Pries' work argues – a transnational space. Here the logic of univocal belongingness, which constitutes the basis both of nation states and of racism (Mecheril 2003), is circumvented. Here the users can feel, express and negotiate a simultaneous belongingness to India and Germany (and more natio-ethno-cultural contexts<sup>35</sup>) at the same time, and can expect to be understood and accepted in this without many questions. Here they experience being valued as and can develop pride in being socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there (as Jay wants the world to notice). Here the national borders can be crossed discursively, while staying localised in Germany and without necessarily having to interact with people based in other regions of the world. Those, who are longing for the latter, use other (virtual) spaces like shaadi.com, indianfootball.com or international networks of relatives and friends as well (or exclusively).

## The Difficulty to Think Multiple Belongingness

But this (multiple) natio-ethno-cultural belongingness is difficult to think for those, who are socialised with the belief in univocal belongingness to only one natio-ethno-cultural context. The 'white' journalist Manuel is obviously puzzled by what he observes on the Internet when he talks about an online discussion about the Indian elections:

"One can see that the political development in India is observed [...] it shows that the second and third generation voluntarily occupies itself with political discussions in their original home country<sup>36</sup> [...] This shows clearly that there is a bond. [...] It is important to recognise this need to discuss, which is actually also surprising. If one considers that many Indians were probably born and brought up in Germany, and thus political

34 Battaglia (1995) and Ferreira (2003) show how racialised people have to explain themselves in every-day interactions and how this constitutes experiences of racism.

35 This is the case, for example, for the users based in Austria and Switzerland, and also for users like Fatima, who feels a belongingness also to Pakistan and Great Britain (Goel 2005).

36 Manuel uses throughout the interview the German terms Heimatland and Heimat, which express a much stronger natio-ethno-cultural belongingness than the English terms home country or home.

discussions in Germany should be more important to them, because their education and development takes place in Germany. And also political decisions in Germany are more fundamental and important, influencing the people more. But one sees in the discussions, as if they still affect them as much. This shows how strong the roots and the identification with the original home are.”

This quote shows that Manuel is aware that, for those who were born and socialised in Germany, this geographical space and the political decisions there are important. He emphasises the point that the latter will influence the lives of those living in Germany fundamentally. He also sees that those marked as Indians in Germany (and called Indians by him throughout the interview) also have a bond to India. But this double bind surprises him (“which is actually also surprising”), he does not seem to consider it a natural outcome of the (multiple) natio-ethno-cultural belongingness. From one discussion about an Indian election he infers a strong identification with what he calls their original home. Doing so Manuel ignores, that discussions about Indian politics form only a small part of the forum debates on the Indernet as well as that there are also numerous discussions about German politics (and probably many more in other spaces). It seems as if he considers it possible to identify with only one natio-ethno-cultural context fully, when he continues this line of thought later in the interview: “The high degree of identification with the original home shows in the reverse that obviously the integration in the new home is not 100%.” If one is considered as Indian by Manuel, then being interested in India seems to show that one does not fully belong to Germany.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the interview he keeps referring to the users of the Indernet as Indians, who have their roots and original home in India, who form a community across the world, who prefer partners from these communities,<sup>38</sup> who have identity problems in Germany<sup>39</sup> and about whose skill in German he is surprised.<sup>40</sup> He is thus continuously reproducing the racist dichotomy of ‘us’ (the Germans) and the ‘other’ (the Indians) as mutually exclusive and in doing so refers to those, whom he considers to be Indians despite their birth, socialisation and residence in Germany, to India.

Against this discursive backdrop it is not surprising that he takes the seeming trilinguality of the Indernet and the discussions about Indian films and music<sup>41</sup> as

37 While Manuel probably does not see his own belongingness to and integration in Germany diminished by his interest in Indian politics.

38 For example: “I can imagine well, one always hears this, that families, Indian families like it and support it, when their own children choose a partner who suits them, who has the same background.”

39 For example: “The distancing [to Germany, ug] indicates a problem, which obviously occurs for many people of this population group, i.e. that they have difficulties with their identity.”

40 For example: “The way they formulate it is very good. It is perfect German, if one knows that this page is made by migrants.”

41 In fact, discussions about Bollywood films and music constitute a large part of the Indernet and can be interpreted as an important point of reference and identification

an indication of worldwide communication in an Indian community. This seems to arise much more from his imagination of those marked as Indians than from what can be observed on the Indernet, and fits the general political atmosphere at the moment, which Karim (2003: 15) describes as:

“[...] the loyalty of minority ethnic groups living in Western countries is becoming suspect and their transnational connections and relationships are coming under scrutiny. The multiple and hybrid identities of diasporic members are under renewed pressure to conform to the mythic notion of a monolithic populace of the traditional nation state.”

### The *Indernet* and the World

But it is not only the ‘white’ observer Manuel, who considers the Indernet to enable worldwide communication. The same notion is also found in the English project description and is prominent in Jay’s enthusiastic praise of the Indernet. Why do the editors claim this although they know that the actual interaction is rather insignificant? And why does the musician Jay consider this one of the major achievements of the internet portal?

On the one hand, it is part of the joint imagination of the internet portal. The internet gives those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there a new possibility to position themselves in the global context.<sup>42</sup> The Indernet does so by linking Germany and India. Located in Germany it assumes a shared natio-ethno-cultural belongingness to a place called India.<sup>43</sup> This not only links its users to the people in India but also to others across the world, who are marked as Indians, and are thus seen both by nationalist and racist ideology<sup>44</sup> to share this belongingness. In its English version the editors position the Indernet in this transnational network centring on India with the slogan “Germany’s Premier NRI Portal”<sup>45</sup>, thus defining their users as Non-Resident Indians (NRI). The seeming trilinguali-

---

for those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there, in particular since in recent years Bollywood films and music have become increasingly popular in Germany and are now valued more than they used to be. However, by now it, seems that the discussions on the Indernet about film and music are dominated by ‘white’ fans, who want to share their passion with others.

42 Miller/Slater (2000: 18-21) analyse this as part of the dynamics of positioning.

43 Clifford (1994: 311-312) argues that diaspora consciousness is developed negatively through experiences of exclusion and positively through an identification with an imagined community.

44 See van der Veer (1995) for a discussion of the forms of belongingness of people marked as Indians abroad to India and Glick Schiller et al. (1997: 126-127) for the Greek policy of binding all people marked abroad as Greek to Greece.

45 On <http://www.theinder.net/eng/> September 14, 2007. The German slogan is different and translates as “India portal for Germany” (<http://www.theinder.net/deu/> September 14, 2007).

ty of the internet portal opens this space symbolically to all NRIs and illustrates that the editors consider it part of a transnational space.

On the other hand the Indernet is more than a virtual space. For those actively involved in it, it opens up new possibilities. The editors of the Indernet can, as journalists, approach people they would not otherwise contact. Those, who had been looking to the British Asian music scene for identification<sup>46</sup> can through the Indernet, come closer to their idols. Already in 2001 Bobby, who was at this time an Indernet editor, interviewed the British musician Apache Indian. Other interviews with international artists marked as Indians followed from time to time. While the frequency of such articles was too low to make the Indernet a prime source for this information, it still showed that the internet portal was able to approach international stars and that these considered the German audience important enough to give an interview. They, at least for the time of the interview, took notice of those marked as Indians in Germany and this makes Jay say: "They gave interviews. They know there is a scene in Germany. They think this is great. We are heard and that is amazing." Even more importantly it provided the Indernet editors with contacts to artists marked as Indians abroad. Bobby used these when he left the Indernet and founded his own event agency, which to all appearances successfully promotes international artists marked as Indians in Germany and organises dance parties marked as Indian. Jay considers Bobby's activities important beyond Germany (and traces them back to the Indernet):

"The British slowly respect the German scene. After all the English scene has grown through Germany. [...] We are proud that we have boosted the Desi<sup>47</sup> scene. It was us! Punjabi MC grew through Germany. He played in Hamburg [...] and then Bobby invited him to Germany. [...] Bobby did all the translations for Punjabi MC, all the promotion in Germany. That is interesting. We Indians here, we boost everything there. [...] They [the British artists] have all their own radio shows. And everything through Germany and all report about Germany, but more about Bobby's parties, but they report about German. [...] all through the Indernet. Bobby was interviewing as an editor of the Indernet."

Jay is thus able not only to assert a worldwide audience for the German music scene, of which he is a part, he is also able to claim that those socialised in Germany and marked as Indians there gave a boost to the British scene<sup>48</sup>, thus locat-

46 In the interview Jay, for example, told me about the British musician Apache Indian: "He was the first, who spoke about Indians, who live in the West and the East ... He was the first Indian, whom I heard, who did that. I have always been an Indian rap musician, but I did not know Indian rap musicians and then I got to know Apache Indian and his music. He has given me a lot."

47 Desi is a term used to describe those, who are marked as Indians and live abroad.

48 Jay is my only source claiming that the British Asian scene was boosted through the Indernet and Bobby. Bobby himself did not make such a rather doubtful claim in his interview with me.

ing himself actively in the transnational music scene, discursively proving his value and legitimising his pride.

To what extent there is interaction among the artists across national borders, to what degree artists marked as Indian and placed outside Germany are really observing the German scene and which role the Indernet plays in this, I cannot tell from my observation of the internet portal. For the users the interaction remains rather marginal, but for those actively involved like Bobby or one of the editors of the Indernet, who in the summer of 2007 acted as official press representative for the German tour of a famous Indian singer, it might well be of major importance. For some the Indernet actually seems to have facilitated communication in the transnational space referring to India.

## References

- Androutsopolous, Jannis (2006) "Mehrsprachigkeit im deutschen Internet: Sprachwahl und Sprachwechsel in Ethno-Portalen." In: Peter Schlobinski (ed.) *Sprache und neue Medien*, Mannheim: Dudenverlag, pp. 172-196.
- Battaglia, Santina (1995) "Interaktive Konstruktion von Fremdheit. Alltagskommunikation von Menschen binationaler Abstammung." *Journal für Psychologie* 3/3, pp. 16-23.
- Brodén, Anne/Mecheril, Paul (eds.) (2007) *Re-Präsentationen: Dynamiken der Migrationsgesellschaft*, Düsseldorf: ida.
- Clifford, James (1994) "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9/3, pp. 302-338.
- Döring, Nicola (1999) *Sozialpsychologie des Internet. Die Bedeutung des Internet für Kommunikationsprozesse, Identitäten, soziale Beziehungen und Gruppen*, Göttingen: Hogrefe.
- Eggers, Maureen Maisha/ Kilomba, Grada/Piesche, Peggy/Arndt, Susan (eds.) (2005) *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte – Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*, Münster: Unrast Verlag.
- Ferreira, Grada (2003) "Die Kolonisierung des Selbst – der Platz des Schwarzen." In: Hito Steyerl/Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (eds.) *Spricht die Subalterne deutsch? Migration und postkoloniale Kritik*, Münster: Unrast, pp. 146-165.
- Gajjala, Radhika (2004) *Cyber Selves – Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*, Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.
- Glick Schiller, Nina/Basch, Linda/Szanton Blanc, Cristina (1997) "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration." In: Ludger Pries (ed.) *Transnationale Migration*, Baden Baden: Nomos, pp. 121-140.
- Goel, Urmila (2005) "Fatima and the inder.net – A Refuge in Virtual Space." In: Angelika Fitz et al. (ed.) *Import Export – Cultural Transfer – India, Germany, Austria*, Berlin: Parhas, pp. 201-207.

- Goel, Urmila (2006) "Ausgrenzung und Zugehörigkeit – Zur Rolle von Staatsbürgerschaft und Einbürgerung." In: Christiane Brosius/Urmila Goel (eds.) *masala.de – Menschen aus Südasien in Deutschland*, Heidelberg: Draupadi, pp. 123-160.
- Goel, Urmila (2007a) *Indians in Germany' – The Imagination of a Community*, The University of New England, Asia Centre (UNEAC): Asia Papers 20, September 15, 2007 ([http://www.une.edu.au/asiacenter/UNEAC\\_Asia\\_Papers\\_20.html](http://www.une.edu.au/asiacenter/UNEAC_Asia_Papers_20.html)).
- Goel, Urmila (2007b) "'Kinder statt Inder' – Normen, Grenzen und das Indernet." In: Christine Riegel/Thomas Geisen (eds.) *Jugend, Zugehörigkeit und Migration*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, pp.163-181.
- Goel, Urmila (2007c) "(Frei)Räume der zweiten Generation – Wege und Formen von Repräsentation." In: Anne Broden/Paul Mecheril (eds.) *Re-Präsentationen: Dynamiken der Migrationsgesellschaft*, Düsseldorf: ida, pp. 203-227.
- Goel, Urmila (2008), "'Half Indians', Adopted 'Germans' and 'Afghan Indians' – On Claims of 'Indianness' and Their Contestations in Germany." *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3/1 (<http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC>).
- Hannerz, Ulf (1996) *Transnational Connections*, London: Routledge.
- Heft, Kathleen/Goel, Urmila /2006) *Räume der zweiten Generation – Dokumentation eines Workshops*, Frankfurt/Oder: Viadrina, September 15, 2007 ([http://www.urmila.de/UDG/Biblio/Raeume\\_der\\_zweiten\\_Generation.pdf](http://www.urmila.de/UDG/Biblio/Raeume_der_zweiten_Generation.pdf)).
- Karim, Karim (ed.) (2003) *The Media of Diaspora*, London: Routledge.
- King, Tony (2003) "Rhodesians in Hyperspace: The Maintenance of a National and Cultural Identity." In: Karim Karim (ed.) *The Media of Diaspora*, London: Routledge, pp. 177-188.
- Mandaville, Peter (2003) "Communication and Diaspora Islam: a Virtual Ummah?" In: Karim Karim (ed.) *The Media of Diaspora*, London: Routledge, pp. 135-147.
- Mannur, Anita (2003) "PostScript: Cyberspaces and the Interfacing of Diasporas." In: Jana Evans Braziel/Anita Mannur (eds.) *Theorizing Diaspora*, Malden: Blackwell, pp. 283-291.
- Mecheril, Paul (2003) *Prekäre Verhältnisse. Über natio-ethno-kulturelle (Mehrfach-) Zugehörigkeiten*, Münster: Waxmann.
- Mecheril, Paul (2004) *Einführung in die Migrationspädagogik*, Weinheim: Beltz Studium.
- Miller, Dan/Slater, Don (2000) *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, Oxford: Berg.
- Mitra, Ananda (1997) "Virtual Commonality: Looking for India on the Internet." In: Steven Jones (ed.) *Virtual Culture. Identity and Communication in Cyber-society*, London: Sage, pp. 55-79.
- Paske, Mareile (2006) *'Andere Deutsche' – Strategien des Umgangs mit Rassismuserfahrungen*, Frankfurt/Oder: Viadrina, September 14, 2007 (<http://www.urmila.de/UDG/Forschung/publikationen/Paske2006.pdf>).

- Rommelspacher, Birgit (1995) *Dominanzkultur*, Berlin: Orlanda.
- Steyerl, Hito/Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Encarnación (2003) *Spricht die Subalterne deutsch? Migration und postkoloniale Kritik*, Münster: Unrast.
- Terkessidis, Mark (2004) *Die Banalität des Rassismus. Migranten zweiter Generation entwickeln eine neue Perspektive*, Bielefeld: transcript.
- Tißberger, Martina/Dietze, Gabriele/Hrzan, Daniela/Humann-Kastein, Jana (2006) *Weiß-Weißsein-Whiteness. Kritische Studien zu Gender und Rassismus*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Veer, Peter van der (1995) "Introduction: The Diasporic Imagination." In: Peter van der Veer (ed.) *Nation and migration – The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 1-16.

