Teil I

Kollektive
Selbstbilder

Eunuch and Scholar –
Two Ways to be 'Indian'

Socio-Cultural Significances of the Category 'al-Hindī' in the Late Mamlūk Period[1]

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Abstract   From the late fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries an increased migration of 'Indians' *(al-Hindīyūn)* to the Hijaz is observable due to Jidda's emergence as a major entrepôt in the 'India trade' between Mamlūk Egypt and various regions of South Asia. Besides merchants and *muǧāwirūn* (students and ascetics living in the vicinity of a mosque), most of the arrivals continue their journey onwards to Cairo and beyond, seeking knowledge *(ṭalab al-ʿilm)* along the intricate webs and networks of transregional scholarship. At the same time, 'Indians' were mentioned among the four ethnicities that were recruited to serve as eunuchs *(ṭawāšīyūn, ḫuddām)* at the Mamlūk court.

The period's biographical dictionaries and chronicles refer to these migrants with the generic term 'al-Hindī' as a regional description that basically states the place of origin. However, beyond this nominal attachment, there were at least two distinct ways of being 'Indian' in the late Mamlūk period. Significantly, due to the profile of these narrative sources, an 'Indian' *Selbstbild* never emerges from these sources. I will argue in the following article that being 'Indian' was constructed as a *Fremdbild* within the scholarly discourse of a proliferating historiography. Such forms of 'othering' could play out differently. While eunuchs, on the one hand, rose

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to serve the highest echelons of political power, any former ethnic identity was lost in the narrative of these historiographical texts. Scholars, on the other hand, were integrated into a taxonomy of scholarly rank and merit, and thereby subjected to a distinct form of classification and othering. The assimilation into the 'biographical templates' of these narrative texts presents various examples of how authors perceived 'ethnic difference' and constructed the category al-Hindī as a complex situational marker of cultural identity.

Keywords   Mamluks, Eunuchs, Scholars, Indians

The Middle Period (1000–1500) witnessed growing entanglements of trade and political legitimation between the Islamicate societies of the Red Sea region and the South Asian subcontinent.[2] This also had its effect on migration and the transoceanic movement of people. From the late fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries an increased migration of 'Indians' *(al-Hindīyūn)* to the Hijaz is observable, linked with Jidda's emergence as a major entrepôt in the 'India trade' between Mamlūk Egypt and various regions of South Asia.[3] Apart from merchants, most of the arrivals were *muǧāwirūn* and scholars, but there were also craftsmen and pilgrims, who ventured to the holy cities of the Hijaz and further on to Cairo along the intricate webs and networks of transregional scholarship to study, pray and socialise with the great masters. At the same time, 'Indians' showed up among the four ethnic groups from whom eunuchs *(ṭawāšīyūn, ḫuddām)* were recruited to serve at the Mamlūk court.[4] 'Indian' eunuchs also seemed to have been particularly important as servants at the Prophet's grave in Medina.[5]

   The period's biographical dictionaries and chronicles refer to these migrants with the generic term 'al-Hindī' as a geographical description that basically states the place of origin *(al-aṣl)*.[6] However, due to the profile of

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2   Lambourn 2008 and Tsugitaka 2006.

3   For the rise of Jidda see Facey 2009. For the general argument of diachronic change here and in the following, see Bahl 2017.

4   See Ayalon 1991. For examples see as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 3:86 and 6:226.

5   See for example the biographical entry on Rayḥān al-Hindī in as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 1:352. And for a meticulous study of this subject cf. Marmon 1995.

6   For other relevant works see Bahl 2017. For background on this term see Ahmad et al. 1971.

these narrative sources,[7] an 'Indian' 'self-image' *(Selbstbild)* never emerges from these sources.[8] Being 'Indian' was constructed as an 'external image' *(Fremdbild)* within the scholarly discourse of a proliferating historiography.[9] Yet such forms of ethnic ascription could play out differently. Beyond a nominal attachment, there were at least two distinct ways of being 'Indian' in the late Mamlūk period. While eunuchs, on the one hand, rose to serve the highest echelons of political power and religious prestige, no further ethnic characteristics apart from an 'Indian origin' were ascribed in these historiographical texts. Scholars, on the other hand, though integrated into a taxonomy of academic rank and merit,[10] were subjected to a distinct form of ethnic classification. The assimilation into the biographical templates of these narrative texts presents various examples of how authors perceived ethnic difference and constructed the category 'al-Hindī' as a complex situational marker of cultural identity.

The category of ethnicity has for some time now served a burgeoning field of inquiries related to studies of social identities across several disciplines. However, this concept has only reluctantly been applied to serve venues of social and cultural history of the medieval period. Among recent exceptions rank the works of Robert Bartlett and Timothy Reuter, who discussed the validity and diverse implications of this term and its analytical strength for pre-modern historical contexts.[11] Their findings and arguments will provide the framework of this paper suggesting that ethnicity was a significant aspect for the construction of identities among different groups during the Mamlūk period. While work by Koby Yosef used the notion of ethnicity to look at issues of solidarity among the Mamlūk ruling elite,[12] the main purpose of this paper to account for the binary opposition of the "external" and "internal" definition of ethnic groups as voiced by Bartlett and Reuter.[13] Simultaneously, the question of 'typicality' in light of fragmentary historical sources also represents major caveats in this investigation. Furthermore, the idea of 'ethnic ascription' has to be correlated with structures of political power and social status. Most significantly, these

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7   For different modes of recording information in these narrative sources cf. Hirschler 2013.

8   I use the terms 'Selbstbild' and 'Fremdbild' in the ways in which they have been suggested by the editors of this volume.

9   For the proliferation of historiographical texts see Meloy 2010.

10 Cf. Khalidi 1994.

11 Cf. Bartlett 2001 and Reuter 2006.

12 See Yosef 2012a and Yosef 2012b.

13 For this and the following cf. Bartlett 2001 and Reuter 2006.

aspects point to the contingency of ethnic labelling itself, defying the idea of ethnogenesis and instead considering ethnic affiliation and its attributes as a 'situational construct', contingent on the respective context of a cultural encounter.

Travel literature has played a crucial role in tracing the different and changing *modus operandi* of cultural encounters across the early modern world.[14] Additionally, prosopographical accounts such as biographical dictionaries or collective biographies can provide a versatile empirical basis to study how cultural diversity and ethnicity were perceived and negotiated. In the following, I will study the contextual construction of ethnic characteristics relating to Indians in biographical works of the late Mamlūk period.[15] By analysing representations of people termed 'al-Hindī' in several narrative sources, this article will explicate the extent to which social context and professional background influenced the profile of cultural affiliation. Mamlūk biographers constructed a specific *Fremdbild* of Indians which was made culturally commensurable within the conceptual matrix of the prosopographical accounts.[16] Most importantly, the *nisba* ("affiliation") functioned as a template of ethnic recordability and comparability. The analysis of different aspects of the *nisba* 'al-Hindī' in combination with an anecdotal enrichment of individual biographies (*tarāǧim,* sg. *tarǧama*) offers insights into the perception of Indians by scholarly groups in Cairo, Mecca and Medina. This case study will thereby contribute to an understanding of the significance of ethnicity in the construction of identities during the late Mamlūk period.

Overall, throughout the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries the notion of 'al-Hind' existed as a distinct part of the known world that was constructed along various epistemological lines, the perception of which is difficult to trace. From about the eighth century onwards, works from the field of *adab* created an image of 'al-Hind' as a legendary place of wonders (*ʿaǧāʾib*), ancient customs and kingdoms which were made sense of in terms of an Islamicate urban culture.[17] Later on, geographical compendia and travel narratives, such as the *Riḥla* of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1368/1369), further fostered this image, but also documented the historical circumstances

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14   See for example Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007.
15   For more recent studies of this genre see Cooperson 2000; Enderwitz 2009; Hirschler 2013.
16   For recent elaborations of the term commensurability see Subrahmanyam 2012.
17   Cf. Shafiq 2013. See also the references to al-Masʿūdī's *Murūǧ aḏ-ḏahab* in Ahmad et al. 1971.

of the expansion of the *dār al-islām* into al-Hind.[18] The Delhi sultanate was stretched out widely across the northern parts of the subcontinent and was ruled from the city of Delhi, the symbolic bastion, that had managed to survive the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century. Generally, in the biographical works, 'al-Hindī' denoted the cultural affiliation of a person to this *bilād al-Hind*. In Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsqalānī's (d. 1449) biographical work *ad-Durar al-kāmina*, Muḥammad b. Tuġluqšāh is the only recorded king of al-Hind for the fourteenth century.[19] Yet scholars and a few craftsmen who travelled to the west also become discernible among the *aʿyān* (nobles) of the eighth / fourteenth century, due to their original cultural affiliation with the subcontinent. At the same time, al-Hind is a famous place for merchants, especially the *kārimīs* and their spice trade business, and thus a way to make a fortune.[20] Overall, the realm of al-Hind contained many different components that together put it on the map as one historical region of the Islamicate world. Still, an assessment of the circulation of this kind of knowledge is problematic and difficult to trace given the fragmentary nature of the perception-side of these sources.

Biographical entries of a variety of Indians from the biographical dictionaries of Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsqalānī for the fourteenth century, Taqī ad-Dīn al-Fāsī (d. 1429) for the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries in Mecca, and Muḥammad as-Saḫāwī (d. 1497) for the fifteenth century, offer a crucial case study to examine continuities and changes in the forms of ethnic ascription among scholarly groups over time.[21] The analysis of this extracted corpus of Indian *tarāğim* has to take into account their historically contingent calibration within the respective works along three crucial lines. Firstly, the extensive coverage of geographical regions from Maghreb to Mashreq in the cases of Ibn Ḥağar and as-Saḫāwī, suggests a transregional conception mirrored in the intensified transregional movements that took place in this period.[22] Secondly, the works focus on a record of scholarly pursuits. Characterisations followed conventions of prosopographical rhetoric corresponding to a discourse of achievement and prestige which established "a hierarchy of rank and merit".[23] Thirdly, specific normative-oriented data and anecdotes of a person's life are

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18   Conermann 1993.

19   Cf. Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsqalānī, 1972, 5:204.

20   Tsugitaka 2006.

21   Al-Fāsī 1998; Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsqalānī, 1972; as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937; as-Saḫāwī 1993.

22   See the prefaces to both biographical works.

23   Cf. Khalidi 1994.

articulated in literary idioms and schemata which emphasise a linguistic level of normative representation.[24]

In consequence, it is necessary to search for traces in the prosopographical sources that indicate the construction of an Indian ethnic identity. In particular, it is possible to look at the ways in which diachronic quantitative changes in the movement of people were registered on a synchronic qualitative level. Recent studies on early modern travels have emphasised the heuristic value of the idea of 'commensurability' as a way to conceive of cultural encounters.[25] Commensurability represents a helpful analytical tool in the present context, because it describes the process of semantic approximation of socio-cultural difference according to the same standard. In other words, cultural encounters and observations were made commensurable to the observer's own cultural horizon. As far as the notion of ethnicity is concerned, it was fundamentally articulated in the *nisba* of each person. This category carried a sense of a person's belonging to the cultural complex of a community and place.

The idea of an inherent 'Indian-ness' is encoded in several *tarāǧim* of figures from both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In these cases, the juxtaposition of multiple *nisbas* is intended to communicate migration and residency in different places. The Meccan chronicler al-Fāsī introduced Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā as *al-Hindī al-aṣl* ("Indian by origin"), who was nonetheless *al-Makkī al-mawlid wa-l-manšāʾ* ("born and raised in Mecca"), and then resided in Medina.[26] Analogously, al-Saḫāwī listed a certain Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, who was referred to as *al-Hindī as-aṣl al-madanī al-mawlid al-makkī al-ḥanafī* ("of Indian origin, born in Medina and settled in Mecca").[27] The sequence of different *nisbas* functions as a record of settlement showing the long-term stays of a person as well as their migration. Implicitly, this means that pointing out the ancestral Indian origin of these scholars was important and remained a valid way of characterising figures on ethnic terms in the biographical dictionary. Although neither a specific ethnic attribute, such as physical appearance or cultural aspect, nor a simple genealogical purpose, were made explicit in these cases, the ethnic ascription of 'al-Hindī' as a cultural marker that was retained even after migration and resettlement seemed to have been a common parlance in scholarly circles.

Eunuchs, in the sources commonly called *ṭawāšīyūn* or *ḫuddām*, were clearly registered with their *nisba* as 'Indian', however no further

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24   Noth 1994, 62–63 and 109–110.

25   Subrahmanyam 2012.

26   Cf. al-Fāsī 1998, 2:333.

27   Cf. as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 2:179.

characterisation in terms of ethnically distinguishable aspects was documented in their *tarāǧim*. While his teacher, Ibn Ḥaǧar, made no mention of Indian eunuchs, one eunuch appears in as-Saḫāwī's *at-Tuḥfa al-laṭīfa*. Rayḥān al-Hindī (d. after 720/1320) was remembered for his service as *ḫādim* at the *masǧid an-nabawī* in Medina and his excellent achievements, such as the endowment of two *ribāṭs* (Sufi lodges) and the construction of a fountain.[28] As-Saḫāwī lists three additional entries in his *ad-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, namely Ǧawhar al-Yašbakī al-Hindī and two called Kāfūr al-Hindī.[29] One Kāfūr al-Hindī was the chief eunuch of the *ǧamdārīya* ("keeper of the wardrobe") and died in 854/1450.[30] Just like their fellow eunuchs from the lands of Rūm (Byzantium), al-Ḥabaša (Abyssinia) and the Ṣaqāliba ("the Slavs"), they retained the *nisba* as a marker of their place of origin.[31] In their function as eunuchs, they were subjected to highly elaborate protocols of courtly behaviour and hierarchies, serving the highest echelons of political power in Cairo or the symbolically charged religious space of the prophet's mosque in Medina. The biographical dictionaries though, offer neither an ascription of ethnic attributes beyond the nominal attachment 'al-Hindī', nor do they provide a particular justification for the employment of Indians as eunuchs. In their prescribed and described dedication to the service for their respective master, they are emptied of any ethnic identity which could have manifested itself in a cultural affiliation or practice.

In contrast to the eunuchs, the biographical dictionaries that cover the fourteenth century in Egypt and the Hijaz relate a particular cultural aspect to Indian scholars who sought knowledge or resided as *muǧāwirūn* in Mecca and Medina. Here, Indians were characterised due to their linguistic specificities. For example, Ibn Ḥaǧar referred to Muḥammad b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥīm Ṣafīy ad-Dīn al-Hindī al-Faqīh aš-Šāfiʿī, who was born in the city of Delhi in al-Hind and travelled to Yemen, the land of Rūm, Cairo, Damascus and performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, where he resided for some time.[32] Apart from his academic attributes and intellectual endeavours, his speech was characterised as having a "Persian twist of the Indian type which he kept until his death" *(wa-kānat fī lisānihi uǧmata l-hunūdi bāqiyatan ilā an māta).*[33] Similarly, al-Fāsī reported about Muḥammad b. Muḥammad ad-Damrāǧī al-Hindī and his prolific compositional activities

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28   As-Saḫāwī 1993, 1:325.
29   Cf. as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 3:86; 6:226 and 6:226a.
30   Cf. as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 6:226.
31   Ayalon 1991.
32   Cf. Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, 1972, 5:262–263.
33   Cf. Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, 1972, 5:262–263.

based on the *samāʿāt* of his Šayḫ Ibn Sakkar.[34] He described the encounter of this Muḥammad with ʿAfīf ad-Dilāṣī, the Quran reciter *(muqriʾ)* of the *masǧid al-ḥarām*, who mentioned that Muḥammad was not able to articulate the language clearly, probably meaning his Arabic.

Therefore, in the biographical entries of scholars the provenance of a person was culturally charged on the basis of anecdotal observations referring for example to linguistic skills and scholarly practices, affiliating a person on cultural terms to an ethnic group. While the assessment of linguistic skills was meant to determine a scholar's reliability in the practice of reciting religious texts, Ibn Ḥaǧar and al-Fāsī both noted the predominance of the Persian register among the Indian scholars. Especially in the case of the aforementioned "Persian twist of an Indian type", Ibn Ḥaǧar ascribed the prevalence of Persian in the scholarly world of the fourteenth century Delhi sultanate as a cultural peculiarity that characterised Indian scholars.[35]

As-Saḥāwī's centennial dictionary marked a historical shift, since those who were denoted as 'Indians' exhibited a greater social and cultural diversity as a group that participated in the reading and teaching circles of the holy cities of the Hijaz.[36] There were the distinct scholarly figures, who were characterised with a multi-sided portfolio of Islamicate knowledge, academic virtues and scholarly acquaintances. Additionally, there were at least two other discernible groups of Indians with different social backgrounds. Firstly, several craftsmen and minor teachers attended to intellectual pursuits. Secondly, and more importantly, there was a whole group of Indians who were only listed because of their participation in as-Saḥāwī's extensive reading and teaching circles in the holy cities. While as-Saḥāwī might have certainly noted these figures in order to demonstrate the grandeur of his discipleship, especially in Mecca, they also indicated the social and cultural broadening of Indian groups in their migration and travelling practices to the Hijaz.

Several of as-Saḥāwī's biographical entries of 'Indians' featured with a new *nisba* that was added to the affiliation al-Hindī. He thereby provided insights into the ways in which shifts and transformations in cultural markers and ethnic ascriptions were mirrored in the political fragmentation of the subcontinent over the course of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[37] From the second half of the fourteenth century onwards the

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34   Cf. al-Fāsī 1998, 3:393–394.

35   Cf. Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, 1972, 5:262–263.

36   For this and the following see the argument that was fully elaborated in Bahl 2017.

37   Cf. Bahl 2017, 260–261.

Delhi Sultanate was repeatedly in political turmoil. Timur's campaigns in North India and his sacking of the capital Delhi exacerbated these developments. Regions such as the northern Deccan under the Bahmanīs, which had become politically independent in the mid-fourteenth century, were joined by newly emerging political dispensations in Gujarat, Malwa, Jawnpur and Bengal, transforming the political landscape into a regionalised paradigm across al-Hind.[38] During the fourteenth century the realm of the Delhi Sultanate had represented one of the major political powers of the subcontinent. Muḥammad b. Tuġluqšāh featured as one of its most famous kings in Ibn Ḥaǧar's work.[39] In contrast, over the fifteenth century many newly crowned sultans began to constitute a group of *mulūk al-hind* ("kings of India"), each with his own political realm dividing up the South Asian subcontinent. With this designation they were recorded in as-Saḫāwī's biographical work,[40] underscoring the scholarly groups' awareness about these processes of political decentralisation.

These political changes also had consequences for the perception of Indians in the Hijaz. Indian sultans, among them those from Bengal, Gulbarga and Cambay, began financing construction programs of *madāris* (sg. *madrasa*) to leave their mark on the landscape of religious and scholarly patronage of the holy cities in the Hijaz.[41] The royal patronage of the Banǧaliyya, the Gulbarǧiyya and the madrasa of the Sultan of Cambay presented the new politically regionalised paradigm of the subcontinent to the Islamicate world that gathered in the Hijaz. Correspondingly, henceforth many Indian migrants and travellers were not just perceived as 'Indians' anymore. Their cultural affiliation was now specified with respect to the new regional and local power structures and the cultural identities and loyalties these created or enhanced in this transformation. Although the *bilād al-hind* continued to be a crucial point of geographical reference and a marker of origin, *nisbas* such as al-Aḥmadābādī (Ahmedabad), al-Kanbāyatī (Cambay), al-Bankālī (Bengal), al-Laknawhī (city in East Bengal) ad-Daknī (the Deccan), al-Kulbarǧī (Gulbarga) made manifest a diversified range of cultural belonging.[42] At the same time, these new affiliations placed regional next to local designations, coexisting on the same level, e.g. Gulbarga being the capital city of the Bahmanī kingdom within the Deccan. Regional and local affiliations were suffixed to the *nisba*

38   For these processes of political regionalisation see Asher and Talbot 2006, 85.

39   Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, 1972, 5:204.

40   Cf. for example, as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 1:209–210.

41   Cf. Mortel 1997, 244–249.

42   Cf. respectively as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 6:180; 6:160–161 and 4:210.

al-Hindī and thereby provided a new element that broke up and differentiated the ethnic ascription of al-Hindī. Encoded in them was the commensurable articulation of ethnic identities as they were perceived across Mamlūk Egypt and the Hijaz.

While the matrix of cultural belonging was differentiated in this process, these new ethnic ascriptions could be charged with similar details of linguistic and physical characteristics. For example, a Bengali scholar who travelled across the medieval Middle East was recorded accordingly in his *tarǧama*, which is quoted in some detail in the following:

> Ġarīb b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Hindī al-Bankālī al-Ḥanafī, his father gave him the title Niẓām ad-Dīn. He came to Cairo in the year 872 [1467/68] and took up quarters in al-Bard Bakiya and it was reported about him that he lived alone in some of the quarter's secluded lodgings during the entire month of Ramaḍān [...]; he deprived himself of food during the entire month. He broke the fast on a clove (qaranfula) and he gathered several excellent characteristics regarding this which were known in his language. He was asked about his age and he said: around forty-nine years. His Šayḫ called him in accordance with the convention Sunan ad-Dīn al-Bankālī and at that time he was twenty-three of age. He used to provide him with food at the start of his instruction making the use of scales and every day he decreased it [the food] so that [ultimately] he [Ġarīb] ended up eating one clove over a period of forty days. During the night while breaking the fast he filled the palm of his hand with a little bit of water and added the clove. He licked up the water and left the clove behind, and after the forty days had elapsed he ate it [...]. His lodgings were in a dark place and there was a lamp [shining] night and day. He was not married. He never attained puberty and he travelled to all the places such as Ḫurāsān, Baġdād, Rūm, Ḥalab, aš-Šām, the three mosques [Masǧid al-Ḥarām in Mecca, al-Masǧid an-Nabawī in Medina and the Masǧid al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem] and Egypt and it was mentioned that he was of a light brown complexion with a black beard, slender skin and a thin body, a mysterious voice, which in some regards embellished his Arabic. Likewise he understood what was said to him and he replied with humbleness, tranquillity and good manners. He is inexperienced with the letters with diacritics and furthermore with the un-pointed ones [...].[43]

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43   Cf. as-Saḫāwī 1934–1937, 6:160–161.

In this example as-Saḫāwī stressed not only the transregional mobility of Ġarīb, his specific fasting practices during Ramaḍān, but also his physical appearance in terms of a "light brown complexion with a black beard". Of particular importance are his linguistic skills and peculiarities regarding the "mysterious voice" that "embellished his utterances in Arabic". The transregional peregrinations were a common feature of most of the Indian scholars coming the Hijaz in this period. Thereby, they became crucial agents of knowledge transfer. In consequence, the characterisations of linguistic skills were dictated by the purpose of these prosopographical works to assess the scholarly capabilities of its subjects. By paraphrasing a title by Susanne Enderwitz at this point, one could ask the following question: under which specific conditions did the "individual fit into the community"?[44] Again, just as with Ibn Ḥağar's Indians in the previous century, Ġarīb also features with linguistic peculiarities. They had an effect on his Arabic, both in terms of sound and orthography which can both be linked to his previous acculturation in an Indo-Persian environment. It thus needed to be noted among learned groups who used these biographical dictionaries to dispense authoritative assessments of scholarly skills.

In conclusion, a historically contingent Indian ethnic identity was constructed within culturally commensurable parameters pertaining to a scholarly sphere of cultural encounters. This also meant that there were different ways to be Indian. On the one hand, the professional background of the eunuchs did not produce any socio-cultural significance beyond the nominal attachment of the *nisba* 'al-Hindī'. On the other hand, the transregional perspective of these biographical dictionaries, together with their focus on intellectual endeavours recorded Indian scholars according to their geographical provenance and linguistic peculiarities. Taking this perspective of the professional world of scholars, 'al-Hindī' was a distinguishable marker of cultural affiliation. These traces of ethnic ascription were influenced though by broader transoceanic developments. The growing flow of people brought about an augmented circulation of knowledge pertaining to India and Indians in general. The intensification of connections across the Western Indian Ocean shaped the awareness of observers across Mamlūk Egypt and the Hijaz. Political decentralisation over the course of the fifteenth century led to the emergence of a culturally diversified subcontinent which was perceived across the Mamlūk realm due to an increased inflow of Indians and was made definable by the differentiation of their regional and local affiliation.

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44   Enderwitz 2009.

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