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Counter-Frames Against Anti-Asian Racism During the Corona Pandemic in Berlin – Coping With Exclusion, Creating Belonging and Organising Resistance

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Abstract

In 2020, anti-Asian racism re-emerged during the coronavirus pandemic in Germany and elsewhere, manifesting in media narratives, and evoking different forms of violence and exclusion, especially in public space. Racialisation as an everyday process creates “counter-frames” by racialised groups. They are constructed in relation to institutionalised interpellation as “the other.” Building on Feagin’s concept of “white framing” and “counter-framing” and Löw’s concept of space, this paper discusses the effects of racialisation, coping and anti-racist resistance strategies as developed by the Asian diaspora. Social change regarding racism will be analysed through Foroutan’s concept of “postmigrant society.” We based this study on a convenience sample of people with Asian heritage which we conducted in 2020 in Germany. In addition, we included a diary study for which a subset has been sampled. We argue that the pandemic influenced the formation of counter-frames against anti-Asian racism in the specific context of Berlin.

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Keywords

Anti-Asian racism, anti-racist resistance, Covid-19, Asian German

Introduction

The current pandemic exposed and intensified underlying patterns of anti-Asian racism throughout the “Western world” (He et al., 2020; Kong, 2019; Lynteris, 2018). Outside of Asia, Covid-19 has, since its discovery, strongly been associated with “Asian culture” and “Asian bodies.” This has been fuelled most prominently by Donald Trump, who repeatedly referred to it as the “China virus” (Li and Nicholson, 2021; Ong, 2021). In Germany, beginning in 2020 “China” was frequently used in racist media narratives related to the virus (Kororientation, 2021a; Xiao, 2022); such narratives of China have existed since the German colonial regime of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the Asia-Pacific region (Leutner, 2022). In European countries such as Italy, the UK, the Netherlands, and France, the association of the virus with China also sparked increasing hostility and racist attacks against people who are perceived as “East Asian” or “Southeast Asian” (Broekroelofs and Poerwoatmodjo, 2021; Miyake, 2021; Wang and Madrisotti, 2021; Wang et al., 2022; White, 2021). The increase of anti-Asian racism in Germany was, at the level of discourse, specifically directed towards Chinese migrants (Zhou, 2022). However, as we will show in this contribution, through different manifestations in everyday life this racism affected other communities as well.

Around one million people either migrated from Asian countries to Germany or are direct descendants of such migrants (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020). As such, they were potentially affected by this type of anti-Asian racism (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2020). In 2019, for example, the number of people living in Germany included 116,000 first-generation migrants from Vietnam and their 72,000 descendants, 143,000 from China and their 38,000 descendants, 130,000 from India and their 34,000 descendants, 80,000 from Pakistan and their 44,000 descendants, 68,000 from Thailand and their 28,000 descendants, 45,000 from the Philippines and their 32,000 descendants, 38,000 from South Korea and their 11,000 descendants, and 31,000 from Japan and their 11,000 descendants. Other countries of origin include Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Mongolia, and North Korea (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020). In 2021, 19 per cent of newly arriving migrants in Germany came from Asia (Mediendienst Integration, 2022) and the biggest groups arriving from Asia in Berlin were from Vietnam (24,635 migrants) and India (17,330 migrants) (Statista, 2022).

We argue in this contribution that, along with the increase of anti-Asian racism, counter-frames were created by members of the Asian diaspora in Germany, and that this phenomenon was not an isolated and nationally limited development. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez and Diane C. Fujino stated in the introduction to their edited volume, “Contemporary Asian American Activism. Building Movements for Liberation,” that although Asian American activism existed since the later half of the 1960s, it was in 2020 – against the background of the pandemic and related anti-Asian

racism and after the killing of six Asian women in Atlanta on 16 March 2021, by a young white male Christian fundamentalist – that “unprecedented mainstream attention” has been given to anti-Asian racism and Asian American protest (Magalit Rodriguez and Fujino, 2022: 3). On the European level, about twenty young researchers and people working in the field of communication, all of whom have Asian backgrounds and live in Germany, France, or the Netherlands, founded in 2020 the initiative Asian Voices Europe, which is now registered as non-profit in the Netherlands and runs surveys on anti-Asian racism as well as public campaigns against this form of racism (Asian Voices Europe, 2022).

When looking at the context of Germany regarding the broader public visibility of anti-Asian racism, it is important to mention that the regular use of the general term “racism” by German public institutions was only established in roughly the last three years. After the racist attacks in Hanau (near Frankfurt) on 19 February 2020, in which nine migrants were murdered and six more injured by a middle-aged white supremacist, and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the same year, mainstream media in Germany began to use the explicit term “racism” instead of former buzzwords such as “xenophobia” or “group-focused enmity” (“gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit”) (DeZIM, 2022: 12–14).

Anti-Asian racism was an even less publicly acknowledged phenomenon before the current pandemic, due to the existence of a model-minority-myth regarding this group of migrants, similar in meaning to the term originally developed in the United States of America in 1966 (Chou and Feagin, 2015). In this myth, Asian migrants and their descendants in Germany are depicted as diligent, industrious, quiet, passive, and integrated. As a consequence, different to other racialised groups in Germany, Asian migrants and their descendants are rarely perceived as “troublemakers” or politically active, and also their experiences of racism are often overlooked (Hartlep and Bui, 2020). However, the first year of the pandemic not only resulted in manifestations of anti-Asian racism in media outlets and everyday life, but also led to various efforts of countering the prevailing “white frame” (Feagin, 2009). While the discursive counter-framing to anti-Asian racism during the Corona pandemic was often inspired transnationally, most prominently by the global hashtag #imnotavirus, the counter-frames were still adapted, created, and discussed in very localised and specific contexts.

Due to the various manifestations of anti-Asian racism, on either national or local levels, it is important to consider analytical perspectives such as locality and spatiality. Following Althusser (1971), negotiations of belonging in a post-migrant society are always influenced by the interpellation of social groups as “insiders” or “outsiders” or “others” and their related assignment to a symbolic position within a racialised social hierarchy (Spies and Tuidier, 2022: 64–66). The institutional recognition of collective counter-frames as related to anti-Asian racism – or of self-definitions such as “Asian Germans (Asiatische Deutsche)” – plays a major role in unveiling previously marginalised experiences. The emergence of activism is often rooted in and dependent on specific situational factors, as Stjepandić (2022) demonstrated when analysing the formation of a counter-frame after the shootings in Hanau on 19 February 2020.

Highlighting the importance of situational factors and activist networks for the emergence of counter-frames, we present a case study of Berlin. Berlin, the German capital, and, as already noted, home to large Asian-diasporic communities, with members of three or more different generations, provided the essential structures for collective resistance against anti-Asian racism during the pandemic by growing social networks and activist grassroots organisations (see Berking and Löw, 2008, for the intrinsic logic [Eigenlogik] of cities). Essential in this context are access to resources such as funding opportunities for non-governmental organisations (NGOs); physically affordable rental space for non-profits and individuals; an affordable cost of living; a high number of universities, which produces highly educated inhabitants; diverse job opportunities to attract migrants and people of colour. Against the background of the assumption that Berlin provides a specific space within Germany, the following question was raised: how did the Covid-19 pandemic influence the (re)formation of counter-frames against anti-Asian racism in the specific local context of Berlin? This question will be explored by analysing the entanglements of (1) manifestations of anti-Asian racism during the pandemic and (2) the (re)formation of counter-narratives to anti-Asian racism. The focus of our approach resides at the intersection of space, discourse, and agency, in the city of Berlin.

Our results were derived from selected data created with a collaborative, mixed-method study, “Social cohesion in times of crisis: Anti-Asian racism during the Corona pandemic in Germany.” The study was based on a convenience sample of people with Asian heritage and was conducted from August to December 2020 in Germany. The first data set consists of an online survey based on a convenient sample ($N=704$ completed cases; Suda et al., 2020b), followed by a fourteen-day diary study for which a subset was sampled theoretically ($N=82$; Suda et al., 2020a). The diary entries were written by two participant groups, the first batch from 17 November 2020 to 30 November 2020 and the second batch from 24 November 2020 to 7 December 2020. The timeline was determined by the project’s limited financial and time resources. The analysis of the survey’s quantitative data provides general insights into forms, places, and reactions to anti-Asian racism during the pandemic in Autumn 2020, while the diary study allows for specific insights into the participants’ perception of that period and their counter-frames. Combining our results from a survey and diary study, we investigate how the effects of anti-Asian racism as part of a “white frame” overlap with the emergence of “counter-frames” created by members of the Asian Diaspora. Further analysis was based on participatory observation by the first author, who co-designed and co-organised eight workshops in the framework of a federal funded project, “Media Empowerment for German Asians” (MEGA), hosted by *korientation e.V.* in 2020 and 2021. She did this in the role of an employed scientific staff and project manager and had the opportunity to talk to participants (on average seven to twelve people per group, ages twenty to thirty-five) and to her colleagues from Asian and Asian German communities about anti-Asian racism during the pandemic. Before working for *korientation e.V.* in this position, she worked for the network as a volunteer since 2009.

The following section will introduce our theoretical framework, for which we adapted Feagin’s (2009) concepts of the “white frame” and “counter-frames” to the German

context of a “postmigrant society” (Foroutan, 2019) and integrated Löw’s (2001) sociological concept of the constitution of space. In a subsequent section, we will discuss different forms of anti-Asian racism as experienced by the participants of our study, with a specific focus on data regarding Berlin. The following sections engage with the emergence of “counter-frames” to anti-Asian racism during the pandemic, highlighting the central role of an “Asian German” identity and the specific dynamics of the Berlin context as well as opportunities and challenges concerning analogue and digital activism in creating belonging and organising resistance. Against the background of the mediation of everyday life (Hepp et al., 2014), digital space is considered as overlapping with physical and social space and is therefore included in the analysis. We conclude with general implications for collective anti-racist counter-frames in Germany’s post-migrant society.

“White Frame” and Asian German “Counter-Frame”

Racialised identities as socially constructed categories are in a constant flow, influenced by processes of subjectivation and institutionalised power relations in different historical and present social and spatial settings (McWatt, 2019). The reproduction of everyday life sets the frames for the impact of racialisation processes on people and their agency to resist in individual and collective settings (Essed, 1991). Institutionalised “anti-racist strategies,” such as the documenting and monitoring of racism, are increasingly discussed in relation to spatial and multiple levels of governance. These include, for example, transnational levels (e.g. United Nations), regional levels (e.g. European Coalition of Cities against Racism), national levels (e.g. German National Discrimination Monitor), city levels (e.g. so-called “integration offices” in Germany), and district levels (e.g. Berliner Register) (Koordinierung der Berliner Register, 2021). These frameworks are often designed and conducted under the trope of social cohesion, financed by public resources, and connected to social governance strategies. “Social cohesion” (“Sozialer Zusammenhalt”), a contested term (Chan et al., 2006), is a conceptual framework for nation-building and political stability in the context of plural democracy. It is operationalised by government institutions to monitor potential “troublemakers” (including right-wing, left-wing, and racialised groups) and to prevent and solve social conflicts via administrative and educational measures. The term “social cohesion” is, for example, used for the titles of a federal grand-scale research fund, a federal housing construction programme, and a monitoring programme run by a well-established private foundation. We therefore understand social cohesion as an institutionalised normative setting and wish to contribute to the visibility of critical perspectives of racialised groups on racism. Quantitative surveys that racialised communities design and conduct on racism and its effect on their social position, quality of life, and level of social justice – as, for example, the German “Afrozensus” (Aikins et al., 2021) and the US–American “Stop AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) Hate National report” (Yellow Horse et al., 2022) – are still the exception.

When interpreting and contextualising our data, we refer to Feagin's (2009) theoretical concepts of "white frame" and "counter-frames," and to Löw's (2001) concept of the constitution of space. Feagin (2009) defines the white racial frame as:

includ[ing] a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, interlinked interpretations and narratives and visual images. It also includes racialized emotions, and racialized reactions to language accents and imbeds inclinations to discriminate. This white racial frame, like most social frames, operates to assist people in defining, interpreting, conforming to, and acting in their everyday social worlds. (p. xi)

His concept is based on anti-Black racism and Black counter-frames and then extended to other racialised communities, including Asian Americans. Feagin (2009) depicts four different referential frames in everyday life: (1) the dominant white racial frame, (2) a white-crafted liberty-and-justice frame, (3) the anti-oppression (anti-racist) frame of people of colour, and (4) the "home-culture" frame. The meaning of "the dominant white racial frame" is covered by the quote above. A "white-crafted liberty-and-justice frame" stands for mostly rhetorical performance and less often for the consequential implementation of the idea of "racial equality" of all people by white protagonists. Feagin historically names white abolitionists from the mid-nineteenth century and white civil rights activists from the mid-twentieth century in the US context as examples (Feagin, 2009: 163–166). He describes the home-culture frame, which includes religion, art, and music, as follows: "As a universal type of human framing, the home-culture frame involves important understandings and values that facilitate everyday life, interaction, and support in family and personal settings" (Feagin, 2009: 167). He differentiates between a "home-culture frame" and an "anti-racist frame," the latter of which highlights a shift whereby one sees one's experiences from a broader political perspective and takes action and a clear stance against racism, beyond everyday resilience and survival strategies. An important aspect of his concept is the assumption that multiple frames co-exist in one's mind and shift according to different social settings (p. 163). As for the German context, the term "Asian German" was created by activists from within the Asian diaspora in Berlin as an "anti-racist counter-frame" and is used in the Spivakian sense of "strategic essentialism" (Suda et al., 2021: 352–363; for US context, see Nguyen, 2022). Raksha Pande summarises this concept as follows:

Strategic essentialism advocates provisionally accepting essentialist foundations for identity categories as a strategy for collective representation in order to pursue chosen political ends. The genesis of the term follows her central academic pursuit of exploring the role of representation in subject constitution. (Pande, 2017)

Asian German, as a specific signifier of ethnic identity, is used as a "counter-frame" for disrupting those "white frame" discourses that exclude and "other" Asian Germans. At the same time, this signifier discloses the internal contradictions of "Asian German" in order to ensure that essentialisms will not be reproduced by the very institutionalised

structures that were supposed to become disempowered in the first place. Asian-diasporic communities and identities have been widely researched outside of Germany, for example, in African countries (Sun and Sinclair, 2016) and in South American countries (Pan, 1999), but mainly in anglophone countries. This has been the case, for example, in the context of citizenship (Ong, 1999), cultural representation (Chow, 1993; Yeh, 2014; Zuo, 2022), the model-minority-myth (Chou and Feagin, 2015) and gender (Huang, 2022; Mukkamala and Suyemoto, 2018). Publications about the Asian diaspora in Germany mainly focus on different groups of first-generation migrants involved in state-organised labour migration to West Germany since 1957 (Berner and Choi, 2006; Goel, 2019; Kataoka et al., 2012; Lee, 2021) and to East Germany since 1980 (Kocaturk-Schuster et al., 2017). In these publications, racism is described as something that is generally based on people's legal and social status as so-called "guest workers" ("Gastarbeiter*innen") or "foreign workers" ("ausländische Werkstätige"). But instead of the specific term "anti-Asian racism," these publications make use of broader terms such as xenophobia ("Ausländer-/Fremdenfeindlichkeit") and implicitly connect experienced discrimination to immigration status (Weiss and Dennis, 2005). The interviewees who are quoted in this literature reflect on their national and cultural identity, sharing mixed emotions related to belonging and experiences of marginalisation in Germany. However, this does not happen in relation to the term Asian German.

The Asian-diasporic organisation "Koreanische Frauengruppe in Deutschland e.V." was founded by members of the first generation of South Korean migrants in 1978. As one of the earliest organisations to collectively represent their interests in public space – in this sense they were outstanding – they added a significant layer of intersectional discourse and critical representation due to their emphasis of being simultaneously members of the Asian diaspora, women, and members of the working class in Germany (Cho-Ruwwe, 2021: 123–124). Those Asian migrants who arrived in Germany working as nurses and miners came from diverse social backgrounds (Berner and Choi, 2006; Lee, 2021).

It took until 2012 for the term "Asian German" to be introduced and established in German discourse. It was developed and then also included in publications and discussed in public events by a network of scholarly activists – with members mostly from the 1.5 and second generation of the Vietnamese and Korean Diaspora, but also from other Asian Diasporas in Berlin – all of whom belonged to a generation born in the second half of the 1970s. The term was also critically discussed, for example, by Urmila Goel and Nivedita Prasad. The discussions around this term are presented in the book "Asiatische Deutsche," edited by Ha (2012a). Another collective publication regarding the term "Asian German" was an edition of the cultural magazine "freitext" with the title "Auftauchen" (Emerging) (freitext, 2013), which was accompanied by a public discussion inter alia with Yoko Tawada at Ballhaus Naunynstrasse in Berlin. "Asian German" emerged from a lack of discursive and political representation and is constantly in flow, still extending its coverage to people with different backgrounds. As such, it functions as a political umbrella, serving strategic coalitions for members of several different communities rather than representing and (re)confirming the singular identity of a

group sharing (or at least arguing about) the same ethnic/national “markers” in racialising processes (Suda et al., 2021).

Encompassing a great variety of experiences, the term “Asian German” is currently an embodied signifier for the abolition of “othering” in Germany. It often functions as an additional rather than as a central identity marker, thereby preventing the formation of a solid, essentialised identity category. It is primarily used for specific occasions of counter-framing, when it is politically important to build a public coalition to emphasise a shared history, memory, experience, opinion, or political demand – or to create a counter-frame as an individual by referring to one’s membership in this strategically created collective. It can also be understood as a hybrid identity in the sense described by Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), opening a “third space,” especially for cultural self-representation beyond the “reinvention of tradition.” Some second-generation members of specific Asian communities also use corresponding terms, such as “Korean German,” that serve as counter-frames to anti-Asian racism and “othering” and that relate to their parents’ country of origin (Kibria, 2000; Roberts, 2012). Only a few publications have approached the perspectives of second-generation Asian diasporas in Germany so far (Berner, 2018; Castañeda and Chan, 2022; Goel et al., 2012; Ha, 2012a; Roberts, 2020; VLab, 2020).

Self-confident narratives aiming at political self-representation within the German discourse appeared only less than a decade ago when some of the descendants of the Asian migrants who came to Germany in between 1957 and 1989 finished higher or tertiary education or joined university life and white-collar professions. Their self-narratives create a picture of a social group with certain collective features beyond the specific national backgrounds of its members’ parental generation and a different claim regarding legal rights and symbolic belonging in Germany. Following our data analysis and participatory observation during the pandemic, we argue that the term “Asian German” functions in two ways. It constitutes itself as a result of processes of racialisation, of external “othering” within a white frame, and at the same time as a product of self-positioning from within the Asian diaspora for the strategic purpose of “counter-framing” racism. This duality reflects the general German public debate, in which the narrative about belonging to German society is increasingly contested while “othering” of (post-)migrants is still the norm (El-Tayeb, 2016; Mecheril and Teo, 1994; Steyerl and Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2003).

The intersectional discrimination of Asian-diasporic women became a topic in the German media for the first time after the Atlanta Shooting in March 2021, in which six Asian women were murdered by a young white male Christian fundamentalist (Li and Oppel, 2021; Nguyen, 2021; Yun, 2021). A network of Asian German and Asian activists organised a demonstration with several hundreds of participants in the geographical and political centre of Berlin and published an open letter addressing the racialisation and sexualisation of Asian women (korientation, 2021b). Linking the attack in Atlanta to prior attacks in Germany, such as the murder of the Chinese female exchange student Li Yangjie in Dessau in May 2016, this protest can be seen as fuelled by a transnational movement and narrative of resistance, and at the same time as a strategy to

re-contextualise the broader issue for the local German context. “Asian German” as a counter-frame can thereby be conceptualised as transnationally informed but locally embedded by an activist framework. Although the term “Asian German” was developed in Berlin, as described in the paragraph above, there is no difference to the rest of Germany when comparing the self-identification of the survey participants. Both in Berlin and in the whole of Germany, 13 per cent of the survey participants used this term for their self-identification (for statistical effects, see Supplemental Table 1).

The inspiration for the creation of an Asian German identity draws especially on the struggle of Asian Americans and other Asian-diasporic communities and the activism of the Black German movement. It can be considered a product of new forms of post-migrant activism in Germany that are organised under labels such as “New Germans” (Ha, 2021). It therefore includes transnational and national layers of narratives and counter-frames. Although this activist notion is the dominant narrative in scientific literature, there are also other trajectories for “Asian German.” When the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and its economy collapsed in 1989, Vietnamese contract workers were dismissed along with other workers from the GDR’s socialist “sister state” (“Bruderländer”). Many who decided to stay faced not only financial difficulties but also precarious legal situations due to the loss of their resident permit status. The social climate was dominated by scapegoating and overt racism, which was not only voiced and acted on by right-wing extremists and conservative politicians in the general political discourse, but directly experienced by racialised groups in everyday life, especially in, but not limited to, East Germany (e.g. see *Opferperspektive e.V.*, 2022).

The legalisation of Vietnamese former contract workers was not decided until 1997. To make ends meet, many started small businesses or diners and a small fraction got involved with informal activities such as selling untaxed cigarettes (Weiss, 2017). In this context, the derogatory trope of a “cigarette mafia” emerged, framing all people of Vietnamese heritage as part of organised crime. To counter this frame, a narrative of “Asian virtues and values” was pushed by some members of the community, who presented themselves as diligent and polite members of German society. Additionally, in the late first decade of the twenty-first century, the notion of a Model-Minority was introduced to a broader public, highlighting the educational success of people of Vietnamese heritage compared to other minorities in Germany (Hartlep and Bui, 2020).

The model-minority-myth functions as a stabiliser for the German white racial framework by essentialising and racialising people with Asian heritage, pitting “successful” Asian migrants and their descendants against other racialised groups who are framed as less “integrated” in Germany. Although academics and activists have pointed out the harmful effects of an internalisation of the model-minority-myth on a political but also individual, psychological level, other parts of the diverse Asian Diaspora still lean into and affirm the concept. This observation is reflected in our survey data, with 45 per cent of our participants agreeing with the statement “Compared to other groups in Germany, those seen as Asians are better integrated and more successful” and 36 per cent agreeing with “I’m proud of how well integrated Asians are in Germany.”

Although the relatively high rate of affirmation of the model minority narrative can be interpreted in various ways. It seems plausible, based on the work of Chou and Feagin (2015: 42–43), that such affirmation on an individual level can make it more difficult to acknowledge how one is being affected by anti-Asian racism.

A “home-culture frame” as defined by Feagin can function as a means of self-empowerment and everyday resilience but, depending on the situational context, can also be assessed as a singular or repeated act of direct resistance. This frame was particularly present in the participants’ diary entries, which included examples highlighted in the literature such as detailed descriptions of meals based on family recipes, of conversations with family members and friends in Asian languages and of places such as Asian grocery stores (Lin et al., 2020; Roberts, 2018; Zauner, 2021). In the diary study, eating and sharing “Asian” food was described by half of the participants. Since Chinese food, for example, was accused of being unhygienic, this counter-frame plays an important role in tackling the culturalisation and racialisation of the virus (King et al., 2021). Examples of both types of counter-frames will be discussed in this article.

Contemporary anti-Asian racism in Germany dates to various historical transnational and local contexts and the pervasive effects of coloniality extend to current discourses and political settings (Meinhof and Boatcă, 2022: 138–140). European racist narratives about Asian bodies and cultures can be traced back to travel writing and missionary reports from the thirteenth century, while the discursive construction of a “yellow (Mongolian) race” originates in scientific publications in the fields of biology, anthropology, and medicine beginning in the late eighteenth century (Keevak, 2011). With the emergence of racist narratives, gender-specific racial stereotypes were created and are still reproduced in US–American and European cultural products such as novels and opera libretti (Frayling, 2014; Marchetti, 1994). This was the case throughout the history of Germany – starting from Germany’s active colonial politics at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (Leutner and Mühlhahn, 1997), running through the Nazi regime (1933–1945) (Amenda, 2005; Krebs, 2022; Yü-Dembski, 1997, 2022), the Cold War Era (Neddermann, 2022), and extending well into the post-reunification period after 1989/1990 (Suda et al., 2020c). Echoes of colonial narratives created during the German colonial Kaiserreich in China could be heard in anglophone and German-language media reports about the pandemic in 2020. For example, the term “yellow peril” was reproduced directly and indirectly, depicting Asian bodies as scapegoats for the spread of the virus (Kong, 2019; Li and Nicholson, 2021; Lynteris, 2018).

When discussing counter-frames as a mode of resistance to racism and as a carrier of social change in Germany, we must consider discourses of migration and their relation to research on racism. In Germany, critical or reflexive migration research is still upheld as a placeholder for research on racism, which often neglects the effects of racism beyond the immediate impact of the migration regime on first-generation migrants. The scholarly discussion on everyday and institutional racism in Germany started in the second half of the 1980s (Kalpaka et al., 2017) but it became publicly acknowledged and further institutionalised only very recently. In order to contribute to a systemic understanding of racism – how racism shapes structures, institutions, and intergroup and interpersonal interactions –

while at the same time paying attention to German discourses and empirical research, we connected Feagin's (2009) concepts of "white frame" and "counter-frames" with Foroutan's (2019) concept of "postmigrant society." The latter focuses on processes of negotiation about equal participation in society. As a result, integration – and social cohesion – must be understood as a constant multi-directional process instead of a one-way street walked down only by (post)migrants. Conflicts and frictions, such as those regarding representation in institutions and the distribution of public resources, are seen as positive forces and as having the potential for social change. How society deals with migrants and "New Germans" (Neue Deutsche) is seen as a placeholder argument for the implementation of equality in a plural democracy (Foroutan, 2019).

Under the term "Neue Deutsche Organisationen" (NDO) a nationwide umbrella organisation of diasporic/migrant organisations was founded in Berlin in 2015; it currently involves 160 member organisations, about ten of which are Asian-diasporic or Asian German organisations. Ferda Ataman, a Turkish German who was the spokeswoman of ndo from 2017 to 2021, has held the position of federal commissioner for anti-discrimination since July 2022. This development on the representational level symbolises a social change in the sense that moderately politically active members of racialised groups get the chance to operationalise new and more inclusive norms in government positions, even if in a highly contested political environment. Right-wing activists inside and outside the German government are creating their own "counter-frames" against anti-racist politics with hate speech in media, but also with direct violent attacks on houses and cars of politicians who stand for immigration and diversity (see Engelbrecht, 2020 for information about right-wing attacks).

Löw takes an intersectional approach that includes "class" and "gender" but does not further extend her concept to include "race" as an analytical category. Feagin's and Löw's concepts are therefore complementary when applied to anti-Asian racism in urban space. If space is understood as symbolic and material at the same time, then discourse is part of the constitution of space and its inherited social order (Löw, 2001). Löw reflects on different aspects of social inequality as follows:

The reproduction of social inequality is systematically possible and does occur at every level of the constitution of space. Structural principles such as class and gender permeate all levels of constitution and are instrumental in establishing advantages and disadvantages, exclusion, and inclusion. In addition to gender and class, the repetitive and institutionalized discrimination of social sub-groups due to ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, or mental and physical potentials, must be reflected upon in the process of the constitution of space. (Löw, 2017: 177)

The city of Berlin is advertised as "cosmopolitan" by public stakeholders and it bears the many traces of migration histories that are inscribed into its material and social fabric (Akcan, 2018; Ha, 2012b). The city uses this self-image to compete internationally with "global cities" such as London or New York in order to attract human resources and investments to increase its economic, cultural, and social capital, or even to keep its current status quo in this regard. At the same time, the city government depicts its structures as democratic

and rational, and in June 2020, it passed a legal framework against discrimination, the Berliner Landesantidiskriminierungsgesetz, which is outstanding in the German context (Senatsverwaltung für Justiz, Vielfalt und Antidiskriminierung, 2020).

The former migration from South and North Vietnam into East and West Berlin and recent labour migration provide prominent examples of the layered migration history that is inscribed into the city's fabric. At the same time, certain Eastern districts of Berlin, such as Marzahn-Hellersdorf and Lichtenberg, are known for frequent racist attacks targeting young Vietnamese and Viet Germans (see also *Koordinierung der Berliner Register*, 2021). Lichtenberg also hosts the Dong Xuan centre as a regional and local hub for economic and social activities for members of the Asian diaspora. Preußenpark in Berlin's Western district of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf is called "Thai Park" because of its food stalls run mainly by first- and second-generation members of the Southeast Asian diaspora. While providing a space for social exchange and cultural self-assurance for the respective communities, the park is also included in the list of tourist attractions of the district and at the same time discussed as a place with potential disturbances of the public order (Ha, 2016). The "Thai Park" provides a good example of conflicts and negotiations arising between the "home-culture frame" of a self-organised community space and the "white frame" resulting in claims for commodification and securitisation.

In our study, public space was the central spatial setting mentioned as a site of anti-Asian racism and the participants' reception of space changed after experiencing racism and due to fear of further racist attacks. Public spaces such as public transportation, streets, and public squares were most mentioned. The image of Berlin as "cosmopolitan" – which according to Feagin (2009) can be labelled as a "white-crafted liberty-and-justice frame" – is strongly contested by conjunctures of racism (see e.g. also Jahre, 2021). At the same time, Berlin has been researched and discussed as a space for anti-racist activism, including various social movements regarding Black refugees (Steinhilper, 2021: 125; Wilke and Lambert, 2015) or second-generation migrants such as Turkish Germans (Demir et al., 2020; Kahveci, 2017). The city also hosts the headquarters for cross-community organisations, such as the already mentioned "Neue Deutsche Organisationen," that represent political interests of (post)migrants or "New Germans," and fosters networking and representation in the German discourse on racism and migration. Therefore, Berlin exerts a specific function in Germany for creating an anti-racist counter-frame.

The Pandemic "White Frame": Anti-Asian Racism During Covid-19 in Berlin

In this section, we will describe different forms of anti-Asian racism experienced by the participants of our quantitative survey and qualitative diary study, with a focus on Berlin. Our results are based on the first scientific quantitative survey on anti-Asian racism ($N=704$ completed cases) conducted among members of nationwide Asian, Asian-diasporic and Asian German communities as well as on a follow-up diary study ($N=82$) (fourteen days). The survey was online-only and field access for the convenient sampling was

generated via the non-profit community organisation *korientation e.V.*, a network of Asian German, Asian-diasporic, and Asian people, which focuses on empowerment and self-representation. Beyond practical support during the data collection, cooperating with this type of activist self-organisation that is striving for social justice enabled us to reflect on the often “objectivist” approach to scientific research. Reflecting on the “objectivist” approach in this context meant taking a closer look at the norms used in our research design, asking the participants of our study for their self-definition in the quantitative survey, and discussing embodied knowledge, positionalities, and related issues.

While most members of the Asian diaspora in Germany are first-generation migrants, most of our survey participants were born in Germany (63 per cent). Thirty-one per cent of the participants were based in Berlin, 61 per cent in former West Germany, and only 8 per cent in former East Germany. This spatial bias and the missing voices of people from the first generation are due to the location of *korientation e.V.*'s headquarters in Berlin, a lack of formalised community networks in East Germany, the limitations of conducting research under lockdown conditions and a very short funding period. The questionnaire was only available in German, English, and Vietnamese due to limited financial resources. Probably due to the association of Covid-19 with the People's Republic of China in international and German media and to the related effects on discrimination patterns, mainly people with East Asian and Southeast Asian heritage answered our survey. Only a few people with South Asian heritage responded, therefore, we cannot make any claims about how they perceived the pandemic in Germany. Additionally, 76 per cent of the participants were female and rather young (average age: 28.9; median age: 27).

As we briefly remarked in the introduction, anti-Asian racism, along with the racialisation and culturalisation of the coronavirus in the German media, appeared in various forms and was acknowledged under this conceptual term. The most common forms of anti-Asian racism, as mentioned by the survey participants, were experiences of non-verbal confrontation, including dismissive and aggressive gestures (75 per cent). Non-verbal forms included staring, being avoided in supermarkets and public transports, and being preventively kept at a certain distance by gestures such as outstretched arms on the street. Institutional exclusion (Bukow and Cudak, 2017; Feagin, 2009; Gomolla and Radtke, 2007; Terkessidis, 2004) was mentioned by 27 per cent of participants who experienced racism. This form included, for example, not getting an appointment in a medical clinic due to an Asian name. Since the perception of non-verbal and institutional discrimination is strongly tied to individual awareness of unequal treatment, we focused on more manifest forms of racism, namely experiences of verbal discrimination (62 per cent) and physical discrimination (11 per cent) (Figure 1).

Since there are no previous quantitative data on anti-Asian racism in Germany, we can only compare our results to studies that analysed racism regarding other racialised groups in Germany. One such study was provided by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (ADS) in 2017 (Beigang et al., 2017). Following a similar research design based on a convenience sample from 2016, the study shows a very similar distribution of verbal and physical discrimination when compared to our results. We could document that anti-Asian racism during the pandemic was a widely spread phenomenon exceeding

single cases published in the media. The comparison to the ADS study highlights that, at least within the researched period, the extent of everyday racism experienced by people with Asian heritage cannot be downplayed as “marginal,” neither in Germany as a whole, nor in Berlin.

The “Stop AAPI Hate national report” (Yellow Horse et al., 2022) from the United States provides another point of reference. For the period between 19 March 2020 and 31 December 2021, 63 per cent of the respondents reported verbal harassment and 16 per cent of the reported assaults included physical violence. Forty-eight per cent of all incidents took place in public and AAPI women reported slightly more harassment (70 per cent) than AAPI men (63 per cent). Since there was almost no awareness of the topic before the pandemic, neither in the German public nor in German academia, the comparable percentage of experienced discrimination underlines that anti-Asian racism during the pandemic was a serious threat and a common occurrence in Germany.

In Berlin, 61 per cent experienced verbal violence and 14 per cent experienced physical attacks since the beginning of the pandemic. When compared to other parts of Germany, the extent of discrimination is very similar, with 62 per cent experiencing verbal violence and 10 per cent experiencing physical attacks. Our data suggests that the situation in Berlin was quite similar to the rest of Germany.

During the researched time frame racist incidents happened most often in public space (Figure 2). Most often mentioned were the street (72 per cent Berlin/71 per cent Germany without Berlin) and public transportation (69 per cent Berlin/68 per cent Germany without Berlin), followed by shops (43 per cent Berlin/42 per cent Germany without

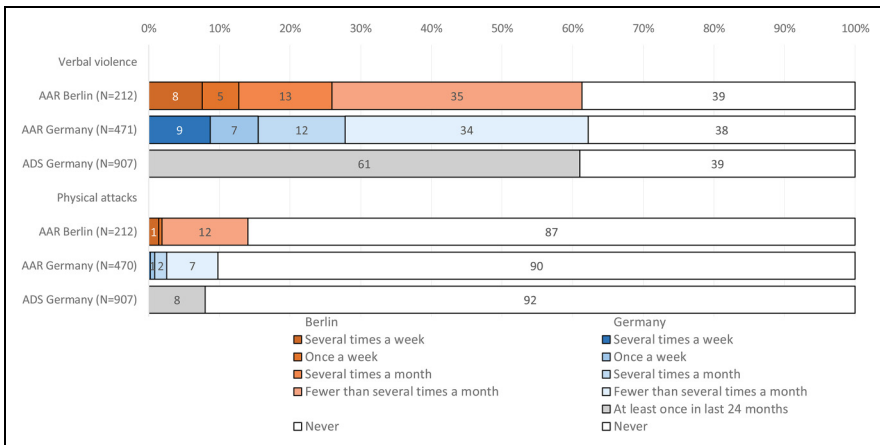


Figure 1. AAR Berlin and AAR Germany “have you experienced the following forms of different treatment in public spaces since the corona pandemic began?”, data set from Suda et al. (2020b); ADS Germany from Beigang et al. (2017: 218) verbal and physical violence experienced in the area of “public and leisure” according to discrimination based on (ethnic) origin or race for physical attacks values of “physically attacked” and “physically threatened” added.

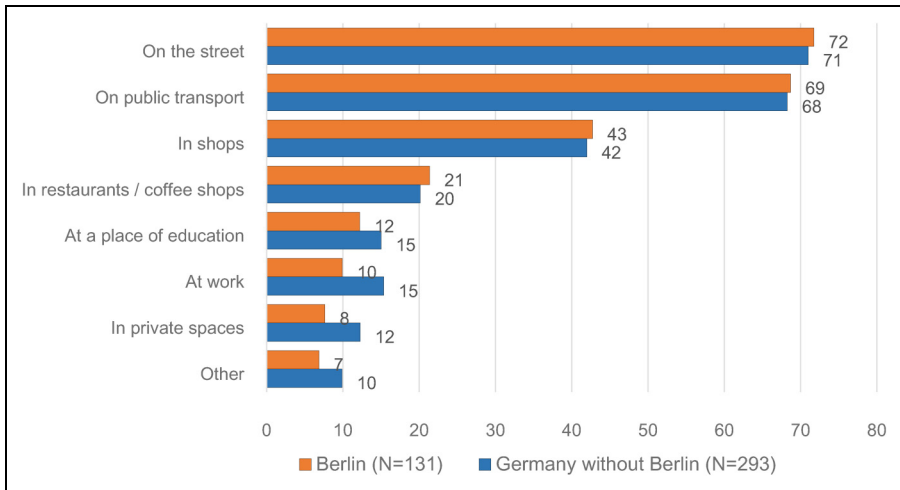


Figure 2. Filtered if physical or verbal discrimination during pandemic was experienced, “where did you experience these cases of discrimination?”, multiple answers possible, data set from Suda et al. (2020b).

Berlin), and restaurants/coffee shops (21 per cent Berlin/20 per cent Germany without Berlin). For more highly regulated settings, such as places of education, workplaces or private spaces, significantly less often discrimination was reported. In public space, where the social status and class of a person is often rather unclear, “race” as a structural category (often in intersection with gender) can have a strong impact on the constitution of space and the social position and agency of people involved.

These findings challenge the narrative of Berlin as an open-minded, cosmopolitan, and safe space for everybody. As such, the promise of a safe public space, which is often constructed against the backdrop of the adjacent, more rural Brandenburg, cannot be perpetuated. There is a discourse on the racialisation of space in Berlin, especially regarding anti-Muslim racism, in which racism and classism are strongly interlinked. This is the case when, for example, certain areas such as parts of the district of Neukölln are declared as “social hot spots” (“soziale Brennpunkte”), as was done by the politician Thilo Sarrazin (2010, 2018).

We contextualised the survey results with the qualitative diary study to gain additional perspectives, especially regarding individual coping patterns, counter-frames, and interdependence with strategic formation of racialised identities. The qualitative data suggests a more complex, multi-directional relationship between racialised identities and coping strategies with stress caused by racism, which supports research conducted with the Black American community (Brondolo et al., 2009). Participants of the diary study were asked the following questions: “What did you experience today? In your opinion, how was this affected by the way that others perceive you as ‘Asian’? And how did this make you feel?” The question was worded as openly as possible to collect a broad

variety of experiences. The diary entries were anonymised and, if necessary, quotes were translated from German to English and Vietnamese and adapted for readability. In the diary study, around half of the participants reported racist incidents directly related to Covid-19.

Several of the participants stated that racialisation of the virus and related negative stereotypes in German media reminded them of constantly being perceived as “the other,” even though they were born in Germany, grew up there and held German citizenship. This feeling stuck with them in everyday life, raising their consciousness, and they were trying to avoid being seen as an embodiment of the coronavirus:

Today I've spent some time outside [...]. However, I had the feeling to be very “conspicuous”: that my look makes me “different” [...]. Often, I have this feeling when I [...] notice that I'm the only “Asian-looking” person. I'm using “Asian” here in the sense of “Southeast Asian looking person” since people mostly perceive me as “Korean/Japanese/Chinese” although I'm from Central Asia. For most people here, “Asia” seems to mean Southeast Asia [...]. Many people think [...] that they cannot distinguish [...] Asians from each other. I also remembered that when medical masks were not yet introduced, I felt ashamed for wearing one. So, I [...] went shopping without wearing a mask even though I knew that such masks are [...] effective because I did not want to be visible as ‘that Asian person with a virus.’”

The term “mask” was mentioned in approximately every second diary entry regarding incidents directly related to Covid-19. Study participants reflected on the potential of adding to their visibility in the context of racist attacks when they wear a mask, since masks were not yet standard in Germany. On 25 April 2020, a Korean couple was attacked in a subway wagon and on a subway platform in the context of the pandemic in Berlin, first verbally, then physically. This incident of anti-Asian racism was the first one within the context of the pandemic to receive significant media and political attention in Germany (Welscher, 2020). Incidents that took place in subways and that were directly linked to anti-Asian racism also occurred transnationally in other places such as New York (Martinez, 2022). In accordance with the survey data, the incidents reported in the diary study happened most frequently in public space and made up approximately half of all reported incidents. The following diary entry provides a typical example in its description of repetitive dismissive treatment during a subway ride in autumn 2020. This kind of experience changed the way this participant perceived the constitution of space inside subway wagons whenever she was riding a subway during the pandemic:

This afternoon I took the S-Bahn with my Chinese female friend. We were sitting together in a corner on the end of the wagon and were both wearing masks. Everything was normal, until I noticed that the people getting on the train and coming in our direction to find a seat, quickly took the opposite direction after briefly looking at us. It happened at least three times. [...] Maybe they thought that we just came from China to Germany and were probably carrying the virus.

Yancy (2016) writes in “Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America” about Audre Lorde’s experiences in Harlem and Frantz Fanon’s experience in France of being stared at and avoided while riding trains, of being perceived as repulsive, as threat, as if their bodies and existences are being defined by the white gaze (p. 8). Although Black and Asian experiences in public can differ greatly, both highlight the importance of the white gaze for defining and constructing racialised bodies. The preceding dominant discourse on Asian Germans as “quiet” and “(politically) passive” and as an “almost invisible” model-minority (Hartlep and Bui, 2020) suddenly changed to a perception of them as hyper-visible and as a collective physical threat.

Being confronted by blatant racism, reflective processes in the Asian German community accelerated and focused on internalisations of anti-Asian racism, addressing distorted self-images and often gendered and racialised conceptions of being positioned in a hierarchical system. Those discussions echoed similar experiences, described in Chou and Feagin’s (2015) “The Myth of the Model Minority” and Cathy Park Hong’s (2020) “Minor feelings,” from the US context. The often-quoted model-minority-myth particularly highlights the connection of the Asian German frame with its anglophone counterparts. This appears as even more important since the deconstruction of this myth is a core part of (self) critical narratives of Asian Germans and serves a precondition to create effective counter-frames. This insight is based on participatory observation (by the first author) in community activities in 2020 and 2021. Park Hong summarises the internalisation of anti-Asian racism as follows:

Racial self-hatred is seeing yourself the way the whites see you, which turns you into your own worst enemy. Your only defense is to be hard on yourself, which becomes compulsive, and therefore a comfort, to peck yourself to death. You don’t like how you look, how you sound. You think that your Asian features are undefined, like God started pinching out your features and then abandoned you. (Park Hong, 2020: 9–10)

Other study participants said that being discriminated against was an ongoing, everyday experience. After experiencing “special” discrimination during the pandemic for a while, they started to perceive it increasingly as “just” another, additional layer of racial discrimination resonating with previous experiences, and it became the “new normal”:

I repeatedly noted how suspiciously (white) people are looking at me and my mother. They often change the side of the street, or they try to avoid us, after they already directly stared at us. My insecurity exponentially increases when my mother and me talk to each other in Vietnamese. When I’m walking around with my *white* German friends, nobody reacted this way. [...] Maybe they assume that the “China virus” is connected to all Asian-looking people. In the beginning, this type of hostile behavior was rather disturbing to me. Meanwhile, these microaggressions just become part of my everyday life.

This study participant points out how, from her perspective, linking phenotypical markers and cultural markers such as language might increase the chance of being “othered” – and thus discriminated against – within a space that she perceives as a white frame. Another quote from this diary study exemplifies verbal racism at the workplace.

Today I’m on a 24 h shift in the clinic. We were very busy. A patient which I had known for several days suffered from a hemorrhage and was slightly confused. She greeted me with the words “Hello, my small Shao Lin fighter.” At the moment I’m wearing a bandage on my right wrist but this comment was crossing a line, all the time I’ve got to listen to these types of comments by my patients.

Experiencing this type of verbal humiliation in the spatial setting of a hospital, in which medical doctors are usually on the top of the social order, makes this study participant very much aware of the effects of racialisation on her social position in Germany. In some of the cases described in the diary study, it is not clear whether verbal racial discrimination was symbolically encouraged by the ongoing scapegoat narrative related to the pandemic, or was simply part of what this Asian German medical doctor experienced on a daily basis regardless of the pandemic frame(ing). Several participants explicitly discussed their perception that the already existing racism and pandemic-related forms of racial discrimination added up and increased emotional discomfort especially in public space. They experienced less ownership and potential of agency in the constitution of space due to external racialisation. Othering and microaggressions, such as jokes in personal interaction or in social media, are regularly part of the “white frame” and made up more than half of the incidents described by the participants of the diary study. There are similar experiences of microaggressions by participants, such as the following:

Today, an acquaintance from my university posted an Instagram story showing Asian food with the wording “Fleunde heute gibt es Leis” [Today we eat “l/r”ice]. Those weren’t typos and she probably wanted to point out that Asians cannot pronounce “R.” Ironically, she was the first in our circle to paint banners saying “Black lives matter” and presenting herself as a supporter of that movement.

It was surprising to the participant of the diary study that her friend published this post despite her efforts of creating an anti-racist and woke self-image in social media. According to Feagin, this can be labelled as a “white-crafted liberty-and-justice frame”: it is different from the “white frame” but still can never function as a real anti-racist frame. It is limited to the “performative diversity” of a white person in the context of social desirability and involves no motivation for social change. Social media is particularly bound to this type of “white frame” since what is at the centre of this framework of self-representation is social desirability and the construction of a “good self” rather than taking political action in everyday life (Zheng et al., 2020).

Counter-Frames Against Anti-Asian Racism During Covid-19 in Berlin

Anti-Asian racism can be understood as an everyday phenomenon that shapes life in covert and overt forms (Essed, 1991; Feagin, 2009). At the same time, the increase of racist narratives and attacks under exceptional circumstances leads to new counter-frames. Before the pandemic, the racist pogroms following the reunification of East and West Germany, for example, in Hoyerswerda in 1991 and Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992, were seen as an exceptional threat for Viet Germans. They had to get organised collectively in order to fend off physical attacks in public space. Nguyen Dinh Khoi talks about his experience of the so-called “Baseballschlägerjahre” in a documentary produced by public television (Sasse and Neubecker, 2020). These “Baseballschlägerjahre” have become part of public memory for the Asian diaspora and anti-fascist organisations, whose members were also affected by right-wing attacks during those years in Germany, and increasingly for the overall German public.

The transnational, national, and local frameworks are all relevant when looking at counter-frames regarding anti-Asian racism and Asian German identities specifically during the pandemic. The Asian diaspora exists as a transnational phenomenon and identities, cultural belonging and counter-frames are influenced by constant flows of narratives from different locations around the world. The sphere of influence covers not only “motherlands” and countries of residence but also the residential countries of extended circles of family and friends and the space of (social) media (Mayer, 2005: 123–167). At the same time, historical and contemporary “systemic belonging,” in the sense of “capitalist democracy” or “socialist democracy” as a political system, is constantly negotiated, for example, between members of the Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese diaspora (Sun and Sinclair, 2016) and between people with migration histories from South and North Vietnam (Nguyen, 2017).

On 16 June 2020, taking the increase of anti-Asian racism during the pandemic as occasion, *korientation* organised in cooperation with *ndo* a public online discussion with the title “In the Name Of” to elaborate on terms and positionalities of Asian German communities (*korientation*, 2020b). This discussion about the term “Asian German” as an anti-racist counter-frame centred around public intellectuals from different Asian communities, including Sun-ju Choi, Noa Ha, and Saboura M. Naqshband, and from German Black community organisations, including panel guest Saraya Gomis (at the time representing Each One Teach One e.V and today state secretary for diversity and anti-discrimination at the senate of Berlin) and spontaneous commentator Abenaa Adomako (Adefra e.V.). It became clear that the reference in the term “Asian German” to “Germany” as a national entity politically made sense as long as “being German” was still defined in the broader public as being “white” (Hund, 2017).

In November 2022, under the title “VaryAsians,” a new series of online discussions about Asian German identities was started (*korientation*, 2022). In 2017, a network called Deutsche Asiat*innen Make Noise (DAMN*), which was founded by a second-generation Viet German woman born in the 1990s and was mostly joined by women

and queer people with the same background, became visible in social media, thereby promoting a German Asian collective identity and participation in public political action. DAMN* currently has 1,000 followers on Facebook and 1,800 followers on Instagram. *korientation e.V.*, which was founded in 2009 by the children of Korean migrants (nurses and miners) who came to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, and which in 2011 opened its board for people from other Asian communities, has 2,400 followers on Facebook and 5,588 followers on Instagram.

People who work with the label “Asian German” in order to discuss social justice can be seen as pioneers in the sense that, in contrast to the US context, there is no Asian German civil rights movement from previous decades as a base to build upon. The only documented exception was the Korean women’s group, mentioned in the introduction of this paper that achieved their right to stay in 1978. The route to collective organising for both DAMN* and *korientation* was the pursuit of cultural self-representation as an attempt to create a counter-frame. With cultural formats such as exhibitions, a film festival, and a performance and spoken word event series, networking was initiated and community building successful. When the murder of six Asian women happened in Atlanta in March 2021, Berlin Asian Film Network, DAMN*, Korea Verband, *korientation*, *Yeoja* mag, and several individuals together mobilised almost 300 people who demonstrated in the city centre of Berlin against anti-Asian racism.

On the other hand, several participants of the diary study reported that they were caught by surprise since they were not used to experiencing overt manifestations of anti-Asian racism in public space. One exemplary experience of only “coping” with a situation is described below:

Today I had to go to a printing company [...] and three teenagers [...] came my way. They were smiling, whispering and when they passed by, one of them shouted at me: we must be careful not to catch the Coronavirus! Coronavirus! I was shocked, but couldn’t say a word. I turned around and could see the looks of other passersby. I felt very uncomfortable and left as fast as possible. I tried to rise above the situation, but I deeply regretted that I did not counter them.

The fact that she was not prepared to talk back can be interpreted as a consequence of an internalisation of the so-called “model-minority-myth,” which depicts Asian Germans as well-integrated and quiet “others” (Hartlep and Bui, 2020), seemingly protected from racism.

Another aspect affecting reactions to racial discrimination can be found in the biographical experience of migration. Participants of the second generation often represented the racism experienced by their parents in their diary entries, emphasising their own social position as being stable enough to talk back when experiencing racism when their parents could not. There were different examples of how the parent’s social position was analysed among our diary study participants: in one case, the mother of a participant was verbally abused at the office of a job agency, which can be labelled as institutional racism, while in another case, the mother of a

participant was falsely accused of stealing chewing gum in a gas station, which can be labelled as racial profiling. In both cases, the mothers suffered silently while their grown-up children were verbally defending their mothers. While the resistance of the grown-up children literally had to be heard, no apologies were given to their mothers, nor were the outcomes changed.

Another example was the exclusion of a participant's father from a bank's credit programme. When the father tries to explain his legitimation for applying, his phone call was cancelled due to his "foreign" accent. Afterwards, his son handled all phone calls with German institutions. Growing up and being educated and socialised in Germany, the second generation feels more empowered to claim equal treatment in German society, as was done in these three diary entries. They have German-language skills and often a better understanding of administrative processes in Germany. Such interventions take place on a broad, discursive level when second-generation Asian Germans are increasingly heard in public or on the level of everyday life, as demonstrated in the examples of talking back and calling out racist practices in social media instead of staying silent. Additionally, in the narratives of second-generation Asian Germans, the experiences and representations of their Asian parent(s) are often included, retold in their own words, and thereby interpreted and reframed in order to call attention to acts of injustice.

The mere threat of an attack related to racial discrimination during the pandemic can also change one's self-perception and self-positioning as a member of German society, as this participant of the diary study describes:

On my way to buy groceries, I saw a van waiting at the traffic lights, and I got frightened – from far away it looked like a police van, and I noticed my fear of being attacked by some right wing “Querdenker”-protesters which might walk around in my district after an [anti-corona-governmental-measurement] demonstration. In this type of situation, I always feel very different and very Asian.

Born in Germany, he generally considers himself as “German.” But in this situation, in which he feels threatened by verbal and physical violence and feels reduced to being othered as “Asian only,” he anticipates having a lower social position. Here, perceived racism from the outside dissolved his previous sense of belonging and he experiences public space with less ownership. A female first-generation participant, pregnant at the time of the study, reflected that the scientific method of the diary study had increased her awareness of racial discrimination. At the same time, she pointed out that she did not even expect to be treated equally and just wished to be integrated in the future, which can be seen as a typical narrative for the first generation and an influence of the model-minority-myth on her thinking:

Writing the diary makes me much more aware of my Asian identity in everyday life. It makes me wonder if something might have happened differently if I would not be seen as Asian. Of course, I believe some issues like looking for an apartment or a midwife would be much

easier if we were German. But I've concluded that most people that I have met personally do not judge or discriminate against my husband and me because we are Asians. Generally, they are friendly. The hurdle might be slightly higher for us in accessing some social resources, but it is not impossible. It might take some time, but I think it is eventually possible for us to be well integrated into the society.

Close social relations with people, for example, a parent or spouse, who are considered as white Germans or with people who also experience racialisation can influence the perception of one's own social position within a white frame and its related racial hierarchies and social orders (Chen and Takeuchi, 2011; Mishra, 2018). Accessibility and exclusion may vary especially in institutional settings such as the housing market and healthcare system, which were frequent examples in the case of this participant.

Racialisation processes and experiences of racism encountered by Asian and Asian Germans during the pandemic end of 2020 were multi-fold. On the one hand, the decrease in ownership of public space due to being avoided, stared at, shouted at, or spit at, due to the fear of being attacked and the feeling of not having the right to be there, can be seen as strongly impacting everyday life, leading to a decrease of Asians' and Asian Germans' agency in public and to a change in their self-narrative, such that they are positioned as "the other" and "not-German." On the other hand, racialised identities could provide access to community, activist networks, and coping and resistance strategies (Brondolo et al., 2009: 11) and function as "anti-racist counter-frames." Using this type of frame in everyday life could decrease the impact of experiencing racism, since it allows racism to be perceived as a structural, rather than individual, issue and since it enables a collective agency to be developed. Some perceived their experiences during the pandemic as "more of the same," applying activist strategies and building on frameworks such as Asian German identities that were developed before the pandemic. Others sought shelter by explicitly or implicitly reaffirming aspects of the model-minority-myth. They were hoping to become invisible and minimise exposure to "fit in" again. Strategies that were mentioned by the participants included not speaking Asian languages in public, not wearing a mask in public space in order to avoid the medially fostered association of an "Asian-looking person" with the pandemic, and "normalising" and rationalising discriminatory behaviour.

Is Activist (Post)Migrant Berlin a Spatial Hub for the Creation of Counter-Frames?

When one is active against racism, one needs others to create collective agency to promote social change. This seems especially true for the topic of anti-Asian racism, given that the topic is barely visible at the margins of German discourses on racism. An obvious indicator for engagement is membership in so-called "migrant self-organisations" and initiatives. In Germany, including Berlin, 13 per cent of the survey participants were already active in such an organisation before the pandemic and 5 per cent started their engagement during the pandemic (Figure 3).

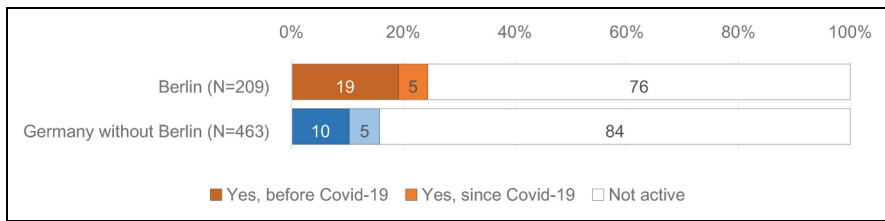


Figure 3. “Are you active in a migrant self-organisation or initiative?”, data set from Suda et al. (2020b).

Although this question needs to be interpreted cautiously, since field access was generated by the self-organisation orientation, it still suggests that the pandemic led to an increase in activism. In absolute numbers, thirty-seven participants of the survey started their anti-racist engagement after the pandemic began.

Additionally, there are noticeable differences in engagement when comparing Berlin to the rest of Germany. While only 15 per cent of the participants living outside of Berlin were involved in an organisation or initiative, 24 per cent of participants inside Berlin were active, which is the highest value among all federal states. The difference remains significant when controlling for gender, migration background, citizenship, education, and age in a logistic regression model with average margin effects with a 1 per cent confidence interval (Supplemental Table 2). Also, the high response rate in Berlin ($N=213$) made up for almost one-third of our total sample. High participation among respondents from Berlin suggests that a great deal of activism against anti-Asian racism in Germany takes place precisely in its capital. This is due to the well-established organisational and interpersonal networks in Berlin whose historical roots were described above.

The online platform “ichbinkeinvirus.org” is but one example of a counter-frame emerging from a Berlin-based activist network. After anti-Asian racism increased within the German pandemic context, the platform was launched by mostly second-generation Asian Germans. Launching the website was inspired by projects such as “Stop AAPI hate” in the United States. Berlin was a hub where Information Technology specialists and activists met in person to launch “ichbinkeinvirus.org.” Its aim was to collectively document cases of racism to make them visible to a broader public, creating proof on a national level. Young Asian German and mostly female social media activists, who up until that point were only individually engaged on the issue, started networking after increased public discourse about anti-Asian racism in 2020. As part of their project MEGA, the Berlin-based non-profit organisation orientation took the role of “facilitator” by establishing a media working group. While MEGA’s staff was based in Berlin, participants of its media working group came together from all over Germany, for example, from Hamburg, Munich, Cologne, and the Ruhr area. In 2020, due to the pandemic-related lockdown, online calls were a central method of communication, which means that there were no geographical limits (orientation, 2020a, 2021c).

A young Viet German participant of the diary study presented a quite different example of counter-framing in which both spatial and discursive matters literally

intersect. She claims ownership to the city of Berlin and creates representation for herself and her father by working as a tour guide for a non-profit association, where she tells how their story is inscribed into the city:

I'm active in a non-profit association which offers guided city-tours from the perspectives of marginalized people (homeless, refugees and migrants). [...] Through this work I'm experiencing that somebody is interested in my biographical experiences and stories, or rather those of my father (he came to Germany as contract worker in the GDR), and to be seen and to have to the opportunity to tell my story in a positive way. At the same time, participating in this project leads to a strengthening of my own dealing with my Viet German identity and discover new aspects of my cultural heritage.

As an effect of the "white frame," her work is not present in the official historiography of Berlin and is invisible in history books, which is why her effort can be considered as an anti-racist framing. At the same time, dealing with one's own cultural heritage fits very well into the concept of the "home-culture frame," which she uses as she strengthens the process of looking at her individual situation, the collective history and presence of former Vietnamese contract workers and their descendants.

Another example of a counter-frame, which came up in a handful of diary entries, was the growing visibility of an increasingly diverse cast of Viet Germans in traditional media and the representation of Asian and Viet Germans in social media. Although this example was given by a person outside of Berlin, we nevertheless decided to include it in our analysis since it holds a specific queer perspective and demystifies Berlin as the only "progressive space" inside the German context. The mediatisation of everyday life (Mattoni and Tréré, 2014) leads to the spread of news beyond one physical location. Particularly during the pandemic lockdown of autumn 2020, the digital space became even more important for the creation of counter-frames:

On a social media platform, I saw a post of an [...] artist, in which he referred to an article about his experience as an Asian German queer artist. The article will be published by [...] a newspaper in a bigger city in Saxony. [...] I'm very interested in this article, because he is the son of a former Vietnamese contract worker and at the same time a queer person. He is a marginalized person within an already marginalized social group. He caught my attention through his art, which he presented on his social media account. In addition, he is an attractive person and I'm fascinated by his face. [...] I'm looking so much forward to reading his text [...], this feeling of looking forward makes me feel [...] empowered.

Being represented by this artist, Minh Duc Pham, who is based in Berlin, provides a role model and a counter-frame for this participant after growing up with a "white frame" within the local context of the former GDR county (Saxony). Apart from the effects of racialisation, gender plays a major role too.

There are almost no Viet German heteronormative male characters in German media, and those who are included are mainly positioned in terms of racist stereotypes. Queer

Asian characters can be hardly found at all. As this participant felt fascinated by and attracted to the appearance of a Viet German queer person, he could at the same time see himself as a desirable subject. Against the background of the desexualisation of Asian masculinities in the German heteronormative and homonormative “white frame,” this is a significant aspect of the participant’s counter-frame. There are no German publications referring to this context, but those based on research in the United States and Great Britain are partly comparable (Chou, 2012: 103–135; Luther and Ung Loh, 2019). As shown in Lars Amenda’s (2011) article “White Girls ‘Hypnotized’ by Yellow Men,” Asian men were also depicted as “predators” – in this case oversexualised instead of desexualised – but only if it was useful for racialisation of gender relations in a white frame.

In addition, two Viet German participants talked about the representation of their respective communities by Vanessa Vu, a Berlin-based journalist, in a late-night talk show called “Anne Will,” which is broadcasted on German public television (Das Erste, 2021). Vu also collaborated with Minh Thu Tran in the creation of the podcast “Rice and Shine,” which became known to a wider German audience. This podcast came up in two diary entries as a medium of representation. No similar media representation was mentioned for other East or Southeast Asians. Although occasionally providing a platform for Asian German self-representation, traditional German media outlets play an ambivalent role since they had a significant impact in framing people of Asian origin as scapegoats for the spread of the virus during the start of the pandemic, as, for example, in the SPIEGEL magazine 6/2020 (korientation, 2021a).

Ultimately, anti-racist counter-frames can also be created and facilitated beyond a single racialised social group, or they might be even more effective in everyday life if, for example, they were created in institutional spaces such as schools and universities, public administration, or hospitals. One participant of the diary study made the following entry:

I’m working as a medical doctor in a hospital. During our morning meeting with the chief physician, a racist comment was made about a Turkish patient, that she should not get a laser treatment of her carcinoma due to the pandemic. The chief meant that he could not trust [her] [...] to participate properly in corona-prevention measures and that she might bring the virus into our hospital. Nobody wanted to challenge the chief [...]. But there was a lot of solidarity between all postmigrant colleagues which I experienced as very empowering. So, my Asian phenotype helped me, today, to lessen the stress caused by everyday racism through constructing this group of racialized people and to create solidarity.

In this situation of racialisation, the participant investigates not only the context of the effects of the “white frame,” but also the potential creation of “counter-frames.” If those colleagues who he labelled as “post-migrants” had not positioned themselves as racialised and if they had not read the study participant as racialised, the solidarity in this situation would not have included him. Their knowledge and consciousness of the effects of the “white frame” connected them beyond their membership in one specific racialised community and the fact that they were colleagues.

Reporting Anti-Asian Racism in Analogue and Digital Spaces

According to our survey data, only a small fraction of people who experienced verbal or physical discrimination reported the incidents. In Germany, not including Berlin, 8 per cent of discrimination experiences were reported to an institution such as the police, an NGO, an ombudsperson within the organisation or a political deputy. In Berlin, 15 per cent of incidents were reported to an institution. When controlling in a logistic regression model, the difference between Berlin and the rest of Germany does not remain significant. The reporting of discrimination to institutions is better explained with the individual engagement in self-organisation and the generation (Supplemental Table 3 and Figure 4).

What appears as an important barrier to the reporting of discrimination is the fact that there is little knowledge about the possibility of reporting incidents and about which institutions are actually interested in categorising the complaint. For the German case, it should be noted that existing infrastructure for low-threshold reporting and consulting in cases of discrimination is still quite new and lacks funding (Beigang et al., 2017: 273–275). As a result, the slightly higher rates in reporting discrimination could be explained by Berlin's lively and diverse civil society. As such, Berlin could provide more convenient opportunities to report discrimination in comparison with more rural areas, but this is precisely because it hosts the activist networks, which are necessary for highlighting the importance of reporting incidents.

Those who have experienced discrimination were also asked whether they posted about relevant incidents on social media as an alternative to traditional ways of reporting to institutions. Since it has become easy to share immediate experiences online, there is no necessity to register incidents with an institution. In this sense, the threshold of reporting has become much lower, but such reporting does not provide access to professional consulting. Additionally, during the researched time frame, social media and the digital sphere were prioritised since various regulations of public space and movement were put into practice to slow down the spreading of Covid-19.

When asked about reports on social media, the rates in Berlin and the rest of Germany are the same (17 per cent), also after having been statistically controlled (Supplemental Table 4). What differs in other parts of Germany, when compared with Berlin, is not so much the frequency or awareness of discrimination but rather the opportunities and access to support structures. The pandemic, however, also led to an increase of digital forms of activism.

Even before we concluded our data analysis, the results were in high demand by journalists working for the German public media. This highlights the fact that the term anti-Asian racism is now included in a broader public discourse that goes beyond scholars and activists. This was a remarkable development regarding the political recognition of anti-Asian racism, one which will increase the visibility of specific aspects of racialisation and provide more opportunities to get support from other social groups that are affected by racism as well as from governmental institutions involved that are involved in anti-racist work.

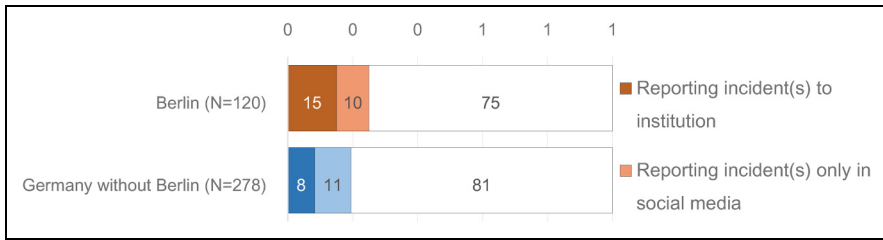


Figure 4. Filtered if physical or verbal discrimination during pandemic was experienced, “if you’ve experienced incidents of discrimination related to the pandemic, did you report or talk about them?” institutions: police, victim-support organisation, anti-discrimination organisation, responsible person at workplace, (Asian) non-profit organisation, political representative; on social media; multiple answers possible, data set from Suda et al. (2020b).

The hashtag #imnotavirus, which efficiently connected individual users into a collective movement, became a transnational phenomenon and a campaign against anti-Asian racism was created. Basically, everyone with internet access could join this campaign. On the other hand, platforms such as “ichbinkeinvirus.org” need institutionalised structures because they need to get registered, receive donations, and find volunteers in order to ensure the sustainability of their project. Therefore, for a counter-frame to survive beyond the existence of a certain hashtag hype within a specific period, stakeholders in different areas of society must constantly work on self-representation and self-developed narratives in order to build a base for a counter-frame at any time. The white frame and related norms can only be countered when a collective counter-frame provides long-term reliability. At the same time, individual narratives such as diary entries or publicly shared, embodied identities are very much needed for the formation of a collective narrative. They create authenticity and provide proof of the fact that there is a growing number of people behind the term “Asian Germans.” And, most importantly, those people are pushing for social change, which shows that this term is not simply an invention of social scientists trying to address social injustice or a mere buzzword for a discursive change in academia.

Conclusion

Our data verified the existence of different manifestations of anti-Asian racism during the pandemic in 2020. At first glance, there was hardly any difference regarding the frequency, forms, and locations of anti-Asian racism between Berlin and other areas of Germany. When compared with the rest of Germany, Berlin was not perceived as providing a safer environment during that period. From a spatial perspective, it can be concluded that, due to an increase in various forms of racism, public space was experienced as a loss of symbolic ownership during the pandemic in 2020. This loss led to a decrease in feelings of belonging to Germany as a symbolic and geographical entity. When summarising our results with Feagin (2009), it can be concluded that the experience of being “othered” as scapegoats for the spread of Covid-19 and of being

subjected to racism was soon parried by Asian Germans publicly speaking out about the consequences of racism and developing strong counter-frames.

Berlin – even if not “safer” – could be seen as providing a spatial hub for the creation of different forms of counter-frames with transregional effects on networking and on anti-racist strategies against anti-Asian racism in Germany. The creation and enforcement of a politicised counter-frame would not have been possible without engagement in the previous decade by Asian German and Asian-diasporic activists, as this engagement provided organisational structures and a theoretical framework. Therefore, in 2020, during the lockdown and beyond, in-person organising and building on personal trust still served as the basis for operationalising collective counter-frames – both online and offline.

If racism that is triggered by a specific event against a specific group influences processes of subjectivation, then we can observe the effect of self-identification in the precise moment when it turns collective. It becomes a collective experience and narrative by being perceived and voiced among affected people. If the interpellation of the members of a social group changes, their social positioning will be (re)negotiated. Individual affects and acts of coping are strongly related to discourses in our mediatised world. The practice of sharing narratives about one’s social identity and about the experience of racism as a regular act can contribute to the creation of collective counter-frames. Due to a lack of data regarding the situation before the emergence of Covid-19, the assumed increase of anti-Asian racism caused by the pandemic cannot be measured. Therefore, its impact as a catalyst for a broader dissemination of the terms “Asian German” and “marked/perceived as Asian,” as well as for the increased visibility of the term “anti-Asian racism,” cannot be understated. These three terms became incorporated not only in German media but also in Germany’s scholarly discourses on racism beyond anti-racist activist circles. The interventions were successful in leading to a higher awareness of anti-Asian racism in the German public.

Increased discussion of the impact of racism challenges the prevailing model-minority-myth and creates a context in which the racism that was experienced during Covid-19 can feed into larger debates on anti-Asian racism and racism in general. The newly established counter-frame and networks can provide a framework for future collective action in German post-migrant society under the umbrella term “Asian German.” In the analysed case of anti-Asian racism during the pandemic, networks of activists, particularly those based in Berlin, appeared to be very important in framing and reporting singular experiences of racism as a collective and structural issue and in developing an activist counter-frame. In the future, activist impulses will likely arise in Germany’s metropolitan regions, where an increasing part of the population consists of (post)migrants and where these activist networks are embedded.

The quantitative data set, on which this article is based, will be archived soon at <https://fdz.dezim-institut.de/>. The dofile (STATA) can be provided on request.


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Supplemental Material

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