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Debunking Methodological Colonialism through New Migration: Indian Highly-skilled Migrants as Global Talent in Germany

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Abstract

Through my research on Indian migrants in Germany, I argue that migrants' agency must be located at the center of attention for migration scholars to debunk the existing coloniality of power in migration research methods. Along with negotiating physical borders circumventing state control, migrants derive agency from their talent, competence, skill sets, and scholarship, thereby enhancing their global demand at multiple immigration destinations. This deserves attention with reference to "global talent." Consequently, I propose a conceptual framework that disturbs methodological considerations in migration research. The coloniality of power is the continuity of the structural impositions of inequality that began with European colonialism. Despite episodic struggles for freedom across the majority of the colonies that eventually led to their independence, the pattern of domination that formed during the colonial period has never been completely replaced. Instead, unequal access to resources and opportunities continues through various postcolonial frameworks, further reinforced by economic globalization and neoliberal economic policies. The coloniality of power remains the umbrella framework influencing almost all social, economic, and political categories in erstwhile colonies and erstwhile colonizers, defining the relationship between the two. Migration as a pattern of movement of people, mostly from the so-called Global South to the industrially developed countries of the so-called Global North, is not outside this unequal framework, nor is migration as a subject of research.

Keywords

New migration, Indians in Germany, skilled migration, migrants' agency, migration privilege, new migration quadruple, debunking of methodological colonialism

Introduction: Conceptual and Empirical Context(s)

Since colonialism has a racial context that implicates the power of white people, the world order continues to remain racialized even after the end of colonialism. Therefore, coloniality of power as a conceptual framework points us to the continuity of power relations between erstwhile colonies and colonizers, based on a racial dimension (Quijano 2000). There is a strong gamut of literature on how to disengage migration studies from the shadows of colonialism, adjacent inequalities, and the shackles of the existing global cartographic hierarchy. From Glick Schiller's critique of the nation-state container model to Ayelet Shachar's shifting borders, Boatca's call for creolizing, and Tudor's coinage of migratism, a vast body of literature and research critiques and, to some extent, challenges the coloniality of power.

The primacy of the nation-state and physical borders as the defining premises of migration-related restrictions is a well-known discourse that Wimmer and Glick Schiller vehemently oppose. They further critiqued how migration research begins with the nation-state as the reference point. Instead, Glick Schiller proposed a multiscale framework that recognizes that events are interconnected across the world, often finding both causes and consequences of events beyond national boundaries. In this context, they differentiated among four kinds of people in relation to their surroundings: people as individuals, people as citizens, people as part of their families, and people as part of their communities. Deconstruction of people in migration research allows for the agency of people, both as individuals and as part of a collective, to gain attention. This perspective is useful for further building on the way migrants, as people with a certain amount of agency, interact with and navigate across pathways. Recognition of multiscale networks further reinforces this faith in the agency of migrants as people because such recognition dismisses the nation-state as the defining territory of movements. In this paper, I am interested in Glick Schiller's standpoint that recognizes the potential of migrants' agency in migration studies through a critique of national borders. At a different level, Shachar's engagement with shifting borders is relevant to this study. Shachar (2007) decentered the discussion from the binary of fixed and disappearing borders to draw attention to the evolving and emerging perception of the border, which is not increasingly digital, starts even before people's movements, and turns physical locales into "transit zones" (Shachar 2007). Shachar brings to our attention the complicated distinction between desirable and the less or rather undesirable migrants and how who is allowed to move and cross borders is often decided even before people physically move. This separates the good migrants from the rest and upholds their arrivals in immigrant destinations as hallmarks of pro-migration policies of the sitting governments. Therefore, shifting borders enable nation-states to pass controlled migration as pro-migration, while asylum seekers continue to live at the fringes.

Despite this, migration research continues to rest on the terms and conditions of the colonial period, where industrial countries have bargaining power over potential migrants. While not all countries of origin in the Global South were erstwhile colonies of the host countries, the bargaining power of who enters and under what conditions usually rests with the hegemonic power. This undermines the migrants' agency. The rise of the „new migrants“ from outside the EU arriving in the European Union member states initiates interest in understanding the emerging and shifting location of migrants' agency.

“New Migrants”: Global Demand of “Global Talent”¹

Who are the New Migrants?

Between 2022 and 2023, approximately 1.8 million new resident permits were issued to “new migrants” with Global Talent entering the European Union from third countries, with Germany topping the chart, followed by France and Poland. As contemporary migrants, so-called highly skilled, suitable for white collar jobs, who have global demand across corporations located in various industrialized countries, these migrants from the postcolonial countries are termed as “new migrants”. In contrast to skilled migrants of the past, new migrants are globally sought after, highly mobile, and exhibit strong tendencies of onward migration due to the rising demand for their skill sets worldwide. Despite the continuation of the coloniality of power, in which erstwhile colonies continue to dictate the terms and conditions of who could enter the immigrant countries and under what conditions, new migrants, with the global demand for their skill sets, are able to command far greater bargaining power as they have the capacity to agentize their immigration choices and decisions.

This number has steadily increased since 2019 (Eurostat, 2023). A majority of these “new migrants” are highly skilled Indian migrants (Datta 2023, Datta 2020) exploring the EU Blue Card migration pathway, further consolidated by the recently passed Skilled Migration Act 2020 by the German government. Some research exists on the motivations for their immigration (ibid). However, we still do not have enough information on their motivations for settling in Germany, onward migration, or return to India.

Indian immigration in Germany is not a new phenomenon, but recent studies have shown a visible increase in their numbers (Faist et al. 2017; Butsch 2020). As such, Indian migration to Germany can be divided into four phases. The first phase started in the 1950s with the arrival of Indian students in Germany; the second phase is marked by the arrival of nurses from Kerala to work in hospitals in the then West Germany in the 1960s (Goel 2008); the third phase started with the massive outflow of Punjabis and Sikhs due to the Khalistan Movement in Punjab in the 1970s and the 1980s (Tatla 1999); and the fourth phase began with the introduction of the Green Card Scheme (2000) by the German government, which initially brought 20,000 Indian high-skilled IT and finance professionals to the host society (Butsch 2016). The current phase that has gathered momentum since 2016 could be termed the fifth phase, during which EU Blue Card Holders, students enrolled in higher-education programs in Germany, and skilled workers with the opportunity card are arriving in large numbers (Datta 2023).

Currently, Indians are the seventh largest migrant population in Germany, and the only immigrant community from outside Europe is dominated by highly skilled, highly qualified migrants. According to the data recently released by the Institut fuer Deutschen Wissenschaft, IW-Report 1/2022, between 2010 and 2020, the total number of Indians in Germany (57.6% are white-collar immigrants) increased from 42,000 to 1,59,000. In addition, the percentage of Indian students joining German universities has increased in the last two years from 25,149 to 33,753 (Source: DAAD India, 2022). The average age of the German population is 42 (DeStatis 2021), leading to an acute labor shortage, particularly in the IT and other technical sectors. Thus, it is not surprising that Germany has received the highest number of Blue Card holders compared to the other EU member states.

At this stage, it is important to discuss why I refer to the so-called highly skilled migrants from India as new migrants”. The prefix “new” is less about pioneering migrants as the first people from a certain country to move to the host country; new stands for the impact and consequences they already bring and have the potential to bring to their home country India and

¹ While the Global Talent program available in multiple countries including Australia and Canada, in this paper the focus is on the global talents arriving in the European Union.

the host country Germany. The steady rise in the total number of Indian migrants in Germany is to address both labor shortages and fill in the demographic deficit due to slow birth rates and a growing aging population in Germany. In addition, as skilled workers, a significant proportion of them fall into the high-income category and pay higher taxes than the average income groups in Germany². Therefore, these migrants enable the German government to maintain the promise of the welfare state and continue to pay social security and pensions to German citizens. This is one of the key reasons the German government has created favorable migration and settlement pathways for Indians in Germany. It is also in Germany's benefit if more Indians decide to live in Germany in the long run, instead of moving to another English-speaking country. In view of such potential, Germany has also introduced legal frameworks for EU Blue Card Holders in the country (Indians top the chart with 26.6%³) to fast-track permanent residency followed by citizenship. As new migrants in Germany, Indians are thereby able to agentize their skill sets through their contribution to the host country's economy, and they hold the promise of contributing to Germany's population by birthing the next generation of skilled workers in the near future.

New Migrants as “Global Talent”

Global Talent is a worldwide program that several of the industrially developed countries like Australia, Canada, to name a few, have been actively running due to the global demand from multinational corporations for tech migrants, professionals with MINT and STEM background, medical practitioners, academics and IT experts. While Germany, through its shifting legal frameworks, is also encouraging Global Talent to move to the country for work and life, this paper is not limited to the scope of such programs. Instead, it addresses the term Global Talent in a wider context in which the so-called high qualification and high-level skill sets of the migrants are able to agentize their migrant status for better bargaining from the host countries across the world. In light of this, new migration of Global Talent addresses the shift in migration-related decision-making power and privilege from the host country to the migrants because the new migrants can choose their immigration destination, thereby exercising greater bargaining power.

In their work Tabor, Milfont, and Ward (2015) observe that the self-selection of migration destinations is based on whether, where, and when people can migrate. It is also based on where willing migrants feel wanted. In the context of the “new migrants” as Global Talent, demand for them is high, as multiple countries are offering stable, family oriented migration pathways and opportunities for citizenship. Therefore, these migrants have the privilege of self-selecting their immigration destinations from multiple countries in the Global North, as long as they have university degrees recognized in the host countries. This applies to both students migrating for higher education and highly skilled migrants with employment contracts. When migrants have the privilege of choosing their immigration destinations from a basket of host-country options offering comparable benefits, they have more bargaining power over host countries and can exercise agency and autonomy in creating their own migration trajectories. Indian migrants as people of color in Germany on the one hand and having the capacity to agentize their autonomy in decision-making and bargaining power make an interesting case in point. To understand this shift, we must locate the discourse of migration-related decision-making within the broader debate on the hegemony of the industrial countries of the Global North over the countries of emigration of the Global South.

Indians with tech skills, higher education degrees, and professional training have been the most sought-after immigrant communities (Eurostat, 2023). Historically, Indians are

² <https://www.theglobalist.com/india-germany-workers-science-technology-engineering-medicine-education-immigration-earning/>

³ <https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Statistik/BlaueKarteEU/blauekarteeu-node.html>

considered high-achieving migrants who have established themselves across generations in countries such as the UK, USA, UAE, South Africa, Australia, and Canada, to name just a few. In addition, countries such as Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong are competing for Global Talent. Consequently, as an immigrant community in high demand, it is important to trace how the decision-making power lies with Indians to choose their immigration destinations and why they are choosing EU countries like Germany because of the fast-track citizenship opportunities, social security, public healthcare, and education on offer.

“New Migration Quadruple”

Several factors catalyze the “new migration” of Global Talent. Enabling conditions such as the privilege of decision-making, legislative novelties, onward migration opportunities at a global scale, migrants’ political agency, and the visibility of Indians as “Global Talent” in Germany also contribute to the primacy of migrants’ stories as the center of knowledge production. These factors could disturb the colonial distribution of power, privileges, and resources.

Immigrants’ decision-making privilege and bargaining power. This means that new migrants have migration-related decision-making privileges to choose the immigration destination from multiple options and more bargaining power than host countries. In migration studies, the industrial countries of the Global North continue to regulate potential migrants’ mobility trajectories. As a mechanism for controlling labor migration, this postcolonial hierarchy reproduces at several levels. For example, scholars like Bestemann (2019) argue that migrants from the Global South entering the Global North continue to be segregated, regulated, and controlled by border security. Consequently, the political agency of migrants, despite their profiles (refugees or economic migrants) and migration motivations, remains restricted. Earlier, while locating his work on refugee regulations and exploitation, Richmond (1994) argued that cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity are present in almost all industrial societies in the Global North. However, the concern is whether cultural pluralism is compatible with equality of opportunity and access to resources. In other words, Global North countries allow migrants from the Global South if they can serve their own needs, but do not ensure that the migrants have equal access to citizenship rights in the immigrant society as much as non-migrants. Consequently, the illusion of pluralism and cosmopolitanism is revealed through migrants’ systematic exploitation and mobility regulation.

This is also documented in Boatca’s (2019) work through what (she calls the coloniality of citizenship, in which the institutional frameworks of citizenship in Western countries rest on



the exclusion of non-Europeans. Indian skilled migrants offer a break from this tradition, as under the Skilled Migration Act passed in 2023, Blue Card holders in Germany can get permanent residency after 27 months of pension contribution, including fast-track citizenship after learning the German language until level B1. Indians are currently the seventh largest immigrant population in Germany with the highest number of skilled migrants and students enrolled in higher education. The Skilled Migration Act, together with the family migration framework, such as the EU Blue Card, is enabling an increasing number of Indians

to seek permanent residency in Germany. Indians are the only rising population from outside

Europe, dominated by skilled and highly qualified migrants. The rising demand for “new migrants” as Global Talent offers a counter-narrative to this concentration of privilege. As quoted by one of my long-standing participants, “As a Blue Card holder, it was easier for me to get a PR (permanent residency) in Germany. I have now applied for citizenship...I am just forty-four (years old). I will later decide if I want to move to the US, or say Singapore or Australia, or move back to India, but for now, Germany works.” Therefore, the migration decision-making privilege and the concomitant bargaining power emerge as significant catalyzing factors for the “new migration” to gather momentum. Due to the global demand for their skill sets, it is the new migrants and not the host countries that are making immigration decisions of “sampling” multiple countries before choosing the country of settlement, contrary to the classical tradition of the arrival of the guest workers, where the terms of migration and mobility were solely decided by the wealthier industrial societies.

Legislative novelties. This points to how the governments of multiple host countries are creating stable migration pathways and citizenship possibilities and competing for migrants’ attention. Apart from EU member states, Germany, Poland, and France, for example, exhibit legislative novelties through the introduction of various stable visa frameworks for skilled migration and student migration, leading to permanent residency and fast-track citizenship. While these attractive visa packages are only designed to induce new migrants to migrate to these countries, fast-track permanent residence leading to citizenship indicates that countries like Germany do not just have labor shortages in highly qualified jobs, but also that they need to outsource people to address the demographic challenges faced by slow birth rates and a rising elderly population, by motivating the skilled labor force from third countries to live for the long term in the countries of immigration. Comparable legislative frameworks are also witnessed in other countries outside Europe, such as Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and Canada. This further emphasizes the global demand for Global Talent.

This draws our attention to the observation that the “new migrants” are not restricted by immigration opportunities to just one country or region but have the choice of moving to multiple countries through different stages of migration. Legislative frameworks are designed to facilitate the mobility of the “new migrant” as Global Talent so that they continue to remain eligible for highly qualified jobs across the world, coupled with the promise of citizenship and settlement.

Global onward migration opportunities. Due to the global demand for new migrants, they also have opportunities to re-migrate to other industrially developed countries. As observed in my earlier studies (Datta 2023) and also mentioned by my participant in this paper, a section of the new migrants migrate further after acquiring the passport of the initial host country. Passports are the defining premises for continuing the hegemony of the erstwhile colonies of the Global North, even in a postcolonial global order (Favell 2022). Therefore, for immigrants from the Global South, acquiring powerful passports with less border control and higher mobility remains one of the biggest motivations. However, as Global Talent with global demand, the “new migrants” have the possibility of immigrating to one Global North country or region, acquiring the passport of that region within five to seven years, and then moving to another country with their new citizenship. Changes in citizenship also change migrants’ social status and social capital and create upward mobility for them globally, thus increasing their political agency and autonomy. This is because the hierarchy of passports places Global North countries above Global South countries. According to the Henley Passport report, the top place in the citizenship hierarchy is reserved for citizens of the EU and North America. In *Citizenship 2.0: Dual Nationality as a Global Asset* (2019), Ayelet Shachar points us in the direction of how migrants are increasingly choosing dual citizenship to tackle passport hierarchy by acquiring citizenship of the EU and North America as a compensatory mechanism to travel the world freely and have greater citizenship and human rights. One of the most popular ways of acquiring

upward mobility in status by Global Talent is to acquire the passport of a Global North country to enjoy free mobility all over the world.

However, onward migration decisions are informed by immigrants' and their families' experiences in the host country and the possibility of bringing their parents to the host country on a long-term basis (ibid.) and the level of immigrants' inclusion. While the tendency is to settle in the country of immigration, the possibility of such onward migration opportunities lends more agency to the migrants, making the host countries compete with each other for their attention.

New migrant's agency and visibility as Global Talent. While several aspects of the new migration quadruple are about migrants' agency and bargaining power over a host of immigration destinations, in countries like Germany, in which PoC migrants' visibility is not just in the social spaces but also in the industry, academia, and government-run spaces, it makes it a special case. In countries where PoCs have not had political visibility, meaning that migratism has mostly defined their lived experiences, migrants' visibility itself has an agentizing effect. Since Indians are the first PoC migrants with relatively greater access to white-collar jobs, higher education, and fast-track citizenship in Germany, their continuous existence, presence, and constant visibility in the German labor market also informs the way these so-called skilled migrants perceive and allocate their own agency in the host country.

The visibility of Indians in the UK, US, Canada, UAE, and Australia, to name just a few, is well established. However, in a post-Brexit European Union, and specifically in countries like Germany, the systematic and increasing arrival of highly skilled Indian migrants is a new phenomenon. This is coupled with their increasing visibility in public spaces, government institutions, corporations, industries, schools, and universities. While other EU member states, such as France, had a few colonies in India, the visibility of highly skilled Indian migrants with long-term employment and living possibilities in Germany is a recent development. As these migrants demonstrate upward social mobility at work and increasing visibility in social spaces in host countries, they are expected to gather greater political agency within Germany. This new and emerging visibility is also linked to the class factor of the Indian "new migrants" in the EU, which could classify them as good migrants or model migrants (Wyszynski, Guerra and Bierwiazzonek, 2020) because of their highly skilled jobs and concomitant social status⁴.

Can Migrants *Choose* their Destinations?

Within the scope of the new migration quadruple, it is important to estimate the extent to which migrants can exercise their agency in choosing their migration trajectories and destinations. It is important to estimate the extent and conditions under which it is feasible for Indian highly skilled migrants in Germany and Indian Global Talent to capitalize on their migration agency. Four key questions deserve attention at this stage.

How do new migrants disturb the axis of bargaining power by *choosing* their immigration destination from a basket of options? How does this choice *agencyze* the migrants to practice resistance?; How to *instrumentalize* this agencying lens of migrants' choices to understand new migration; and What type of *methodological refreshing* is required to accommodate this shifting power relation between new migrants and immigrant countries?

⁴ Indian Global Talents in Germany or anywhere else in the world are dominated by caste Hindus due to caste, religious and social inequality in India that does not allow minorities (e.g. lower castes and Muslims) equal access to resources like higher education. Consequently, minorities in India do not have equal opportunities for moving outside the country for white collar jobs in global corporations or pursue higher education in globally competitive institutions. Therefore, as non-Muslims, Global Talent as highly skilled migrants from India are not seen as a potential threat in the immigrant countries in the EU. Their achieved and ascribed status combined together make them model migrants, a trend already witnessed among the Indian migrants in the USA.

To agentize the choices of migrants in pursuit of their decision-making regarding migration trajectories based on multiple and comparable immigration frameworks across the world, migration scholars from both industrially developed and the so-called Global South countries must acknowledge the broader contexts of the coloniality of power existing in migration research. This acknowledgement is a stepping stone for locating migrants' agency. Migration research approaches foregrounding migrants' agency also enable us to identify certain shifts in migration research methods that could disturb the existing framework of coloniality. To accommodate these shifts and identify the "ripple" that such shifts could create in the existing body of literature on migration research, this paper introduces the term "methodological colonialism." The remaining part of the paper discusses the origins of this framework, how to "debunk" methodological colonialism in migration research, and the challenges migration scholars, especially from the so-called Global South, could face.

Shifts for Debunking Methodological Colonialism

Borrowing from Andrea Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller's coinage of methodological nationalism that dismisses the nation-state container model, methodological colonialism refers to the continuation of the colonial lens in migration research methods, where the host countries are the pivot, and research begins vis-à-vis the requirements of the migrant-receiving countries, thereby undermining migrants' bargaining power, agency, migration choices, and decision-making capacity. The adoption of the storytelling approach in migration research is insufficient, and questions such as who is able to tell whose stories and what is the location of migration scholars of color in migration research need deeper engagement to challenge the coloniality of power within the subject of migration research. The debunking of methodological colonialism as a research perspective is located at the crossroads of race, color, and migration to recognize the primacy of migrants' agency, migrants' inclusion, and home countries as the central site in migration research.

"The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established" (Quijano 215:2000). Racial discrimination and colorism lie at the core of the coloniality of power that needs debunking. "Debunking of methodological colonialism" aims to expose the challenges of ignoring the race angle in migration for the sake of class and status. In the context of Indians as highly skilled Global Talent in Germany, it is observed that skill-set alone cannot decide migrants' choices and their migration trajectories. Experiences of highly skilled migrants as non-white communities in Europe, specifically in countries like Germany, need to be considered as well. Indians are by far the only colored migrant community in Germany that is dominated by highly skilled and qualified migrants. This needs to be considered because prior to the arrival of the Indians, Germany did not require skilled migrants, and most of the migrants came from Europe, while displaced people fleeing war came for refuge from countries like Syria, Iran, and Afghanistan, to name a few. Indians, from that standpoint, stand out as an immigrant community with access to economic capital, but as colored migrants in Germany, they are minorities. While it may be debatable whether Indian Global Talent in Germany could be called migrant subalterns due to their highly skilled and highly qualified status, it is hard to ignore the potential marginalization that comes with the baggage of non-white skin tone. Despite this, Indians in Germany continue to agentize their migrant status, participate in the highly skilled labor market, make decisions of settlement in Germany through permanent residency and citizenship, and further curve their onward migration trajectories with stronger passports.

As shared by my participant Avanti Gaur, "I have applied for German citizenship. I want to move to Dubai after this. However, I am waiting for citizenship to happen (sic). I am now making some inroads in the re-insurance sector in Dubai to check if there are jobs for me. I am giving myself two years to relocate. If the opportunities in Dubai are suitable, I may go to

Canada. As a German citizen, I can live here indefinitely. That option remains, but I still want to try harder because I am only in my late thirties, so I have time to experiment, you know!” On another occasion, Riyaz Hussain, a Master’s student finishing his degree in Public Policy, said, “I came as a gig worker and initially stayed with a friend. Gradually, I joined a master’s program and is now working in an IT firm in Düsseldorf. When I came, I saw that not too many people took me seriously, but now I have permanent residency and am planning to buy a house...suddenly, people are impressed by me. How funny. If I did not achieve what I did, my German friends would not think I was capable. When I was a rider for a food delivery app, I remember how my basketball partners thought I was the only loser, whereas all other Indians in Germany were working in big companies. Now, the same people congratulate me. Such is life.” Riyaz’s journey is indicative of how the categorization of migrants into strict compartments of gig work, skilled labor, etc. could be ineffective as it tends to miss people’s journeys at large in which migrants often navigate across multiple migrant profiles across time. Accordingly, I propose four types of methodological shifts in migration research to disturb the existing coloniality of power and debunk methodological colonialism in migration research.

Debunking of Methodological Colonialism

Migrant typologies. Categorizing migrants into strict profiles pits them against each other, diffusing their shared histories and immigrant experiences, and challenging their political agency. This is a reductionist approach that limits migrants’ experiences to a specific profile. In addition, this not only reduces them to numbers, but also leads to a wastage of primary data, as it is often possible that a new migrant’s profile changes from student to employee within a few years of arrival in the country of immigration. Strict migration categories imply differential migration policy-making by host countries. This further separates migrants from each other with respect to their status, rights, and employment opportunities in the immigrant country. Such strict categorization based on the convenience of the governments and policymakers of the host and home countries does not allow for the subjective experiences through the intervention of the intersectionality of gender, religion, and caste to be examined. In this context, Bashir (2007) discusses the survival of the knitted, emphasizing the importance of migrants’ solidarity networks for reducing polarization between good and bad migrants. Strict typologies of migrants that separate the interests of refugees from those of skilled migrants challenge such solidarity frameworks. Often, the so-called skilled migrants remain under the impression that the general anti-migrant sentiment of a sitting government in the immigrant country will not affect them as those sentiments and policies are primarily targeted against the refugees. Such false consciousness of migrant privilege obfuscates their judgement regarding the political and social situation in the immigrant country vis-à-vis their migrant status. This does not imply that diasporic politics do not affect migrants’ lives. Instead, it emphasizes that migrant typologies further enable the marginalization of certain types of migrants by both the immigrant state and the diaspora.

Site of research. In most cases, migration research methods focus solely on the host countries as the countries dictating the terms and conditions of migration. The Global North countries and their positionality in migration research methods give primacy to the site of immigration and ignore the site of emigration (Collins 2022). This lack of attention to the countries of emigration is primarily due to the assumption that only the country of immigration is instrumental in the migration process and that migrants lack political agency and bargaining power. However, this study observes that the country of emigration offers significant insights into migrants’ migration-related decision-making, including the possibilities of onward migration, settlement, and return migration, as well as how new migration offers the privilege of decision-making to the willing migrants. Therefore, to understand migrants’ agency, the narrative must begin with why people are moving from their home countries and under what

conditions (Datta 2023). To politicize the geographies of migration (Blunt 2007), migration research methods must acknowledge the significance of home countries as the primary site of research. In this context, the migration pathways, trajectories, and decisions of new migrants as Global Talent cannot be fully examined without beginning the investigation from the society, economy, and politics in India that impacted their emigration.

Conceptual shifts in migration research also entail allocating research funds and resources to home countries as research sites. This is also linked to the documentation of migrants' storytelling, as all migration stories emerge from the potential migrants' background situations in their home countries. Without knowing the socio-political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts of their home countries, it is not feasible to document migration stories.

Adaptation and migrants' inclusion and participation. New migrants with their bargaining power and migration privilege do not have the obligation to integrate into the host countries. For example, EU Blue Card holders or students enrolled in higher education in Germany are not obliged to learn the local language. As family members of EU Blue Card holders, their spouses are eligible for employment in host countries immediately upon arrival. None of them had to undergo integration courses. This privilege further facilitates their migration choices and trajectories.

Integration is a hostile framework foregrounding migrants' subordination and placing the burden of proof of good migrant behavior solely on the migrant (Spencer and Charsley 2021). While entry and initial years are less obligatory, new migrants as Global Talent are subject to such frameworks of inequality through state instrumentation, for example, compulsory evidence of language proficiency and knowledge of the history and politics of the host society, to obtain permanent residency and citizenship. Simultaneously, the possibilities of onward migration enable them to obtain certain leverages. For example, one participant, Sushant, shared, "I have learnt B1 only for citizenship. I home-schooled myself and took the examination as an external candidate. This helped me save both time and money. I also curated a questionnaire sample that I gathered from peers to identify the types of questions they ask during the citizenship test. So I do not know a lot of German but exactly as much to sail me through the examination (sic)."

To establish a relationship between migrants and the larger society in the immigrant country, it could be beneficial to adopt an approach for participation, adaptation, and inclusion that does not put the burden of adjustment solely on migrants. As Global Talent, new migrants are able to exercise their agency to gain visibility in the public domain in the host country. For example, for migrants of color, such visibility could create ripples, interface between the locals and the migrants, and the immigrant state and the migrants must be based on mutual efforts. Migration research approaches must push for these ideological shifts, specifically in the area of policy making. Frameworks of migrants' participation and inclusion also reduce the othering of migrants, especially those arriving with relatively less privilege.

Location of the researcher. Tudor (2023) coined the term *migratism* to connote race to migrants, arguing that certain migrant communities are racialized, notwithstanding their class, status, privilege, or lack thereof. While Indians in Germany as the so-called highly skilled migrants are not the typical profile to be racialized due to their economic privileges, colourism is hard to deny, as also witnessed in migrants' narratives. Further extending Tudor's argument, I propose that apart from storytelling, migration research could significantly benefit from foregrounding the research philosophy on the migration experiences and positionality of the researchers, especially with reference to the location of scholars of color in white-dominated migration discourses such as Germany. The discourse on color, caste, and gender must be considered in European migration research. While these are long-standing practices in migration research in other parts of Europe (Raghuram, Brienens and Gunter 2024, Leung 2017), they are relatively neglected in Germany. As an increasing number of academics of color from outside Europe enter Germany as part of skilled migration, with many being migration

researchers themselves, the positionality of the researcher and intersectionalities of their agency as both migrants and migration scholars deserve attention.

Disclaimer

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