

**Bielefeld Anthropological  
Papers on  
Issues of the Global World  
(BAPGW)**



Working Paper Nr. 5  
March 2025

**Debunking  
Methodological  
Colonialism through  
`New Migration': Indian  
Highly Skilled Migrants  
as Global Talend in  
Germany**

Amrita Datta

## Editors

Minh T.N. Nguyen

Antje Missbach

Phill Wilcox (Managing Editor)

## Editorial Board

Éva Rozália Hölzle

Jingyu Mao

Wayne Palmer

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka

Tobias Reu

Julia Roth

Inka Stock

Phill Wilcox

Heidemarie Winkel

## Editorial Assistant

Alexander Fetting

ISSN:

2939-9149

Webpage:

[https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/fakultaeten/soziologie/fakultaet/arbeitsbereiche/ab6/ag\\_sozialanthropologie/bielefeld-anthropological/about/general-information](https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/fakultaeten/soziologie/fakultaet/arbeitsbereiche/ab6/ag_sozialanthropologie/bielefeld-anthropological/about/general-information)

# Debunking Methodological Colonialism through ‘New Migration’: Indian Highly Skilled Migrants as Global Talent in Germany

**Amrita Datta**

Department of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany  
amrita.csss@gmail.com

## Abstract

Through my ongoing research on Indian migrants in Germany, in this paper I argue that migrants’ agency must be located at the centre of attention for migration scholars in order to debunk the existing coloniality of power in migration research methods. I look at migrants’ agency not from the standpoint of negotiating borders, border control and border guards as physical control mechanisms in the way Cetta Mainwaring (2016) considers. Along with negotiating physical borders to circumvent the state control, migrants also derive agency from their talent, competence, skill sets, scholarship etc., thereby enhancing their global demand at multiple immigration destinations. Located in the broader context of attracting “global talent”, this deserves attention. Consequently, I propose a possible conceptual framework that disturbs the methodological considerations in migration research. Coloniality of power refers to the continuity of the structural impositions of inequality and racism that began with European colonialism. Despite episodic struggles for freedom across the majority of the colonies that eventually led to independence of the erstwhile colonies, the inequality carries on, often reflected in the way people are able to move across the world. This is mainly because the pattern of domination that set the limits for free and forced mobility? That formed during the colonial period has never been completely replaced. Instead, unequal access to resources and opportunities continue through various postcolonial categories and frameworks further reinforced by economic globalization and neoliberal economic policies. Consequently, coloniality of power remains the umbrella framework that influence almost all social, economic and political categories both in the erstwhile colonies and the erstwhile colonisers, defining the relationship between the two. Migration as a pattern of movements 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, and 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 race context that implicated power of the white people, the world order even after the end of colonialism continues to remain racialized. Therefore, coloniality of power as a conceptual framework points us to the continuity of power-relations between the erstwhile colonies and the 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, the 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, to Boatca's call for creolizing to Tudor's coinage of migratism, a vast body of literature and research critique and to some extent, challenge the coloniality of power existing in migration discourses.

The primacy of the nation-state and physical borders are the defining premises of migration related restrictions is a well-known discourse that Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) vehemently oppose. They further critiqued the way migration research begins its research with the nation-state as the reference point. Instead, Glick Schiller proposed a multi-scalar framework that recognizes that events are interconnected across the world that often find both causes and consequences of the 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 the people both as individuals and as part of a collective to gain attention. This perspective in turn is useful to further build on the way migrants as people with certain amount of agency interacts with and navigates across pathways. Recognition of the multi-scalar networks further reinforces this faith on the agency of the migrants as people because such recognitions are based on a dismissal of the nation state as the defining territory of movements. In this paper, I am interested in this standpoint of Glick Schiller's work that recognizes the potential of migrants' agency in migration studies through a critique of the national borders. At a different level though, Shachar's engagement with shifting borders is also relevant for this paper. As Shachar decentres the discussion from the binary of fixed and disappearing borders to draw attention to the evolving and emerging perception of the border 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 the 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 uphold their arrivals in the immigrant destinations as hallmarks of pro-migration policies of the sitting governments. Therefore, shifting borders enables the nation-states to pass controlled migration as pro-migration while asylum seekers continue to live at the fringes.

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

understanding the emerging and shifting location of migrants' agency in shaping their own migration trajectories.

## **“New Migrants”: Global Demand of Global Talent**

### ***Who are the ‘New Migrants’?***

Between 2022 and 2023, about 1.8 million new resident permits were issued to “new migrants” with Global Talent<sup>1</sup> who were entering the European Union from third countries in which Germany tops 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, the new migrants are globally sought after, highly mobile and exhibit strong tendencies of onward migration due to the rising demand of their skill sets across the world. Despite the continuation of the coloniality of power in which the erstwhile colonies continue to dictate the terms and conditions of who could enter the immigrant countries and under what conditions, the new migrants, with the global demand of their skill sets, are able to command far greater bargaining power as they have the capacity to agentise their immigration choices and decisions.

The number of “new migrants” has been steadily growing since 2019 (Eurostat, 2023). A majority of them 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 of their immigration (ibid). However, we still do not have enough information on their motivations of settling in Germany, for onward migration or return to India. These would be crucial information to comprehend their privileges and challenges as immigrants in a comparative manner.

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

---

<sup>1</sup> Global Talent program is available in multiple countries including Australia and Canada (Kerr, Kerr, Özden and Parsons 2016) in which highly skilled and highly qualified professionals migrate from the so-called Global South to industrially developed countries for labour market participation in global corporations. In this paper the focus is on the global talents arriving in the European Union from India.

migrants. Going by the data recently released by Institut für Deutsche Wissenschaft, IW-Report 1/2022, between 2010 and 2020, the total number of Indians in Germany (57.6% are white-collar immigrants) has increased from 42,000 to 159,000. Also, from the standpoint of absolute number, the proportion of Indian students joining German universities has gone up in the last two years from 25,149 to 33,753 (Source: DAAD India, 2022). The average age of the German population being 42 (DeStatis 2021) leading to an acute labour shortage particularly in the IT and other technical sectors, it is not surprising that Germany has received the highest number of Blue Card holders in comparison to the other EU member states.

At this stage it is important to discuss why I call the so-called highly skilled migrants from India new migrants. The prefix “new” is less about pioneering migrants as 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 own home country India and the host country Germany. The steady rise in the total number of the Indian new migrants in Germany is to address both labour shortage and fill in the demographic deficit due to low birth rates, a growing aging population<sup>2</sup> and an increasing number of people seeking retirement in Germany. In addition, as skilled workers, a significant part of them fall in the high-income category and pay higher taxes than average income groups in Germany<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, these migrants enable the German government to maintain the promise of the welfare state and continue to pay social security and pension to the German citizens. This is one of the key reasons for the German government to make favourable migration and settlement pathways for the Indians in Germany. It is also in the 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 potentials, Germany has also introduced legal frameworks for the EU Blue Card Holders in the country (Indians top the chart with 26.6%)<sup>4</sup> to fast-track permanent residency followed by citizenship. The Indians as new migrants in Germany are thereby able to agentise their skill-sets through their contribution to the host country’s economy and they hold the promise of contributing the Germany’s population by birthing the next generation of skilled workers in 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<sup>5</sup> background, medical practitioners, academics and IT experts. While Germany, through its shifting legal frameworks are also encouraging the 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

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-finds-population-less-than-previously-thought/a-69463504>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theglobalist.com/india-germany-workers-science-technology-engineering-medicine-education-immigration-earning/#:~:text=Indian%20migrants%20in%20Germany%20earn,origin%20employees%20earned%205%2C359%20euros.&text=A%20key%20reason%20is%20that,India%20have%20above%2Daverage%20qualifications.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Statistik/BlaueKarteEU/blauekarteeu-node.html>

<sup>5</sup> MINT stands for Mathematics, Information i.e. Computer Science, Natural Sciences and Technology whereas STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. With the rise of the knowledge economy and expansion of global corporations, these sectors have a global demand for talent from across the world.

Talent in a wider context in which the so-called high qualification and high-level skill sets of the migrants are able to agentise their migrant status for better bargain from the host countries across the world. In the 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 exercise 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 the willing migrants feel wanted. Put 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 (ibid). When migrants have the privilege of choosing their immigration destinations from a basket of host-country options offering comparable benefits, they can have more bargaining power over the host countries and exercise agency and autonomy in creating their own migration and settlement trajectories. Indian migrants as people of colour in Germany on the one hand and having the capacity to agentise their autonomy in decision-making and bargaining power make an interesting case in point. To understand this shift, we need to 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 their tech skills, higher education degrees and professional trainings have been the most sought-after immigrant communities (Eurostat, 2023). Historically, Indians are considered to be high-achieving migrants establishing themselves across generations in countries like the UK, USA, the UAE, South Africa, Australia, and Canada, to name just a few. In addition, countries like Japan<sup>6</sup>, Singapore<sup>7</sup> and Hong Kong<sup>8</sup> are also competing for Global Talent. Consequently, as an immigrant community in high demand, it is important to trace how the decision-making power lies with the 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 free education on offer.

### ***‘New Migration Quadruple’***

There are several factors that catalyse the new migration of Global Talent. Enabling conditions like 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 to migrants’ stories as the center of knowledge production. These catalysing factors could disturb the colonial distribution of power, privileges and resources.

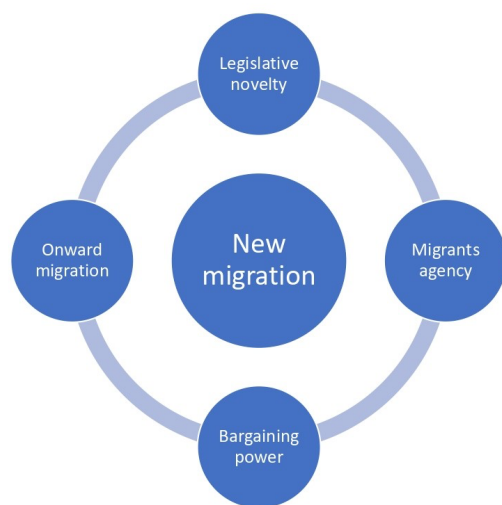
---

<sup>6</sup> <https://jfit.ucsd.edu/programs/global-talent.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.beglobalready.gov.sg/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/services/visas/TTPS.html>

Immigrants’ decision-making privilege and bargaining power. This means that new migrants have migration-related decision-making privilege to choose the immigration destination from multiple options and more bargaining power than the host countries. In migration studies, industrial countries of the Global North continue to regulate potential migrants’ mobility trajectories. As a mechanism for controlling labour migration, this postcolonial hierarchy reproduces at several levels for example scholars, such as Catherine Bestemann (2019), migrants from the Global South entering the Global North continue to be segregated, regulated and controlled by border security. They are also treated as disposable population with short-term contract coupled with little pathway to citizenship. Consequently, the political agency of the migrants, despite their profiles (refugees or economic migrants etc.) 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 to investigate whether cultural pluralism is compatible with equality of opportunities and access to resources. In other words, Global North countries allow in 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 the non-migrants. Consequently, the illusion of pluralism and cosmopolitanism is revealed through the migrants’ systematic exploitation and mobility regulation.



This is also documented in Manuela Boatca’s work through what Boatca (2019) calls coloniality of citizenship in which institutional frameworks of citizenship in the 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 the Blue Card holders in Germany can get permanent residency after 27 months of pension contribution including fast-track citizenship after learning 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. Skilled migration Act together with the family migration framework like 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 of the “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 a significant catalysing factor 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 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 governments of multiple host countries are creating stable migration pathways and citizenship possibilities and competing for the migrants' attention. Apart from EU member states like 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 the new migrants to migrate to these countries, fast-track permanent residence leading to citizenship indicates that countries like Germany does not just have labour shortages in highly qualified jobs, but also that they need to outsource people to address the demographic challenges faced by low birth rate<sup>9</sup> and a rising elderly population, by motivating skilled labour force from the third countries to live for long term in the countries of immigration. Such comparable legislative frameworks are also witnessed in other countries outside Europe like Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, or Canada. This further emphasizes the global competition over 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. The 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 the new migrants, they also have opportunities of onward migration 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 defining premises for continuing the hegemony of the erstwhile colonies of the Global North even in a postcolonial global order (Favell 2022). Therefore, for the immigrants from the Global South, acquiring powerful passports with easier border crossing requirements and higher mobility remains one of the biggest motivations. But as Global Talent with global demand, the “new migrants” have the possibility of immigrating to one Global North county 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 the 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 locates the Global North countries above the Global South countries. According to the Henley Passport report, top place in citizenship hierarchy is reserved for citizens of the EU and North America. One of the most popular ways of acquiring upward mobility in status by the Global

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-birth-rate-drops-to-10-year-record-low/a-70634645#:~:text=Germany's%20birth%20rate%20has%20hit%20a%20new%20record%20low.,than%20in%20Germany's%20western%20states.>

Talent is to acquire the passport of a Global North country to enjoy free mobility all over the world<sup>10</sup>.

However, onward migration decisions are informed by the immigrants' and their families' experiences in the host country, the possibility of bringing their parents to the host country on a long-term basis (ibid.) and the level of inclusion of the immigrants' inclusion. While the tendency is to settle in the country of immigration, the possibility of such opportunities of onward migration 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 is about migrants' agency and bargaining power over a host of immigration destinations, in countries such as Germany in which PoC migrants' visibility in not just in the social spaces but also in the industry, academia and government-run spaces makes it a special case. In countries where migrants as PoCs have not had political visibility, meaning migratism has mostly defined their live experiences, migrants' visibility itself has an agentising 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 labour 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, the UAE and Australia, to name just a few, is well-established. However, in a post-Bexit European Union, and specifically in countries like Germany, systematic and increasing arrival of Indian highly skilled migrants is a new phenomenon. This is coupled with their increasing visibility in public spaces, government institutions, corporations and industries, and schools and universities. While other EU member states, such as France had a few colonies in India (Aldrich 2004), 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 the host countries, it is expected that they will 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 status<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> In *Citizenship 2.0: Dual Nationality as a Global Asset* (2019), Ayelet Shachar points us to the direction of how migrants are increasingly choosing dual citizenship to tackle passport hierarchy by acquiring citizenship of EU and North America as a compensatory mechanism to travel the world freely and have greater citizenship and human rights.

<sup>11</sup> 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 ascribes status combined together make them model migrants, a trend already witnessed among the Indian migrants in the USA.

## Can Migrants *Choose* their Destinations?

Within the scope of the new migration quadruple, it is important to estimate to what extent can migrants exercise their agency privilege of choosing their migration trajectories and migration destinations. This is important to estimate to what extent and under what conditions it is feasible for the Indian highly skilled migrants in Germany and Indians Global Talent to capitalize on their migration agency. There are four key questions that deserve our 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 *agentize* the migrants to practice resistance?; How to *instrumentalize* this agentizing lens of migrants' choices to understand new migration; and What type of *methodological refreshing* is required for accommodating this shifting power relation between the new migrants and the immigrant countries?

In order to agentise the choices of the migrants in pursuit of their decision-making regarding migration trajectories on the basis of multiple and comparable immigration frameworks across the world, migration scholars both from the industrially developed and the so-called Global South countries regarding must acknowledge the broader contexts of coloniality of power existing in migration research. This acknowledgement is the stepping stone for locating migrants' agency. Migration research approaches foregrounded in migrants' agency also enables us to identify certain shifts in migration research methods that could disturb the existing framework of coloniality. In order to accommodate those shifts and identify the "ripple" that such shifts could create in the existing body of literature on migration research, in this paper I introduce the term "methodological colonialism". Next and the remaining part of the paper engages with where this framework comes from, how to "debunk" methodological colonialism in migration research and what challenges migration scholars especially from the so-called Global South could face on the way.

## 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 method 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, migrants' agency, migration choices, migrants' decision-making capacity. Adoption a storytelling approach in migration research is not enough, questions like who is able to tell whose stories and what is the location of migration scholars of colour in migration research need deeper engagement for challenging the coloniality of power within the subject of migration research. Debunking of methodological colonialism as a research perspective is located at the crossroads of race, colour and migration to recognise the primacy of migrants' agency, migrants' inclusion and home countries as one of the central sites 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 2000:215). Racial discrimination and colourism lie at the core of coloniality of power that needs debunking. Debunking of methodological colonialism aims at exposing the challenges of ignoring the race

angle in migration for the sake of class and status. Put in the context of the Indians as the highly skilled Global Talent in Germany, it is observed that skill sets alone cannot decide migrants' choices and their migration trajectories, experiences of highly skilled migrants as non-white communities in Europe specifically countries, such as Germany needs to be considered as well. Indians are by far the only coloured migrant community in Germany that are dominated by highly skilled and qualified migrants<sup>12</sup>. 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 who has access to economic capital, but as coloured migrants in Germany are minorities. While it may be debatable if Indian Global Talent in Germany could be called migrant subaltern due to their highly skilled, highly qualified status, it is hard to ignore the potential marginalization that comes with the baggage of non-white skin tone. Despite that, Indians in Germany continue to agentise their migrant status, participate in the highly skilled labour 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. But I am waiting for the citizenship to happen (sic). Now I am 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 move there. If Dubai opportunities are suitable, maybe I will go to Canada. As a German citizen, I can always live here. That option remains but I still want to try harder because I am only in my late thirties so I have time to still experiment, you know!" On another occasion, Riyaz Hussain, a Master 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 program and now working in an IT firm in Dusseldorf. When I came I saw not too many people took me seriously but now I have a permanent residency and 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 am capable. When I was a rider for a food delivery app, I remember how my basketball partners thought I am the only loser whereas all other Indians in Germany are working in big companies.....now the same people congratulate me. Such is life." Riyaz's journey is indicative of how categorization of migrants into strict compartments of gig work, skilled labour 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, there are four types of methodological shifts in migration research approach that I propose in this paper, in order to disturb existing coloniality of power and debunk methodological colonialism in migration research.

## **Debunking of Methodological Colonialism**

Migrant typologies: Categorization of migrants into strict profiles, such as skilled vs unskilled? pits them against each other, diffusing their shared histories and shared immigrant experiences, and challenge their political agency. This is a reductionist approach that limits migrants'

---

<sup>12</sup> Migrants and refugees from Syria and Ukraine e.g. also have highly skilled professionals. However, the legal frameworks and political considerations in which they enter are distinct and not comparable with the case of the Indians.

experiences to a particular profile. In addition, this not only reduces them to numbers, it 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 mean differential migration policy-making by the host countries. This further distances the migrants from each other with respect to their statuses, rights and employment opportunities in the immigrant country. Such strict categorization based on the convenience of academic research and governments and policy-makers of the host and home countries does not allow the subjective experiences through the intervention of intersectionality of gender, religion and caste to be examined. In this context, Vilna Bashi (2007) talks about survival of the knitted that emphasizes the importance of migrants' solidarity networks for reducing polarization between the good and the bad migrants. Strict typologies of migrants that separate the interests of the refugees from that of the 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 of the immigrant country will not affect them as those sentiments and policies are primarily targeted against asylum seekers and refugees. Such false consciousness of migrant privilege obfuscates their judgement regarding the political and social situation in the immigrant country vis-à-vis their own migrant status. This by no means implies that diasporic politics do not affect migrants' lives. Instead, it emphasizes that migrant typologies further enable marginalization of certain types of migrants both by 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 gives primacy to the site of immigration and ignores the site of emigration (Collins 2022). This lack of attention to the countries of emigration is primarily due to the assumptions that only the country of immigration is instrumental in the migration process and that the migrants lack political agency and bargaining power. However, this paper 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, for understanding migrants' agency, the narrative must begin from why people are moving from their home countries and under what conditions (Datta 2023). For politicizing the geographies of migration (Blunt 2007), migration research method must acknowledge the significance of home countries as one of the primary sites of research. Put in this context, migration pathways, trajectories and decisions of the 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 the allocation of research funds and resources to the home countries as a site of research. This is also linked to the documentation of migrants' storytelling, as all migration stories emerge from potential migrants' background situations in the home countries. Without knowing the socio-political, economic, cultural and historical contexts of their home countries, it is not feasible to document migration stories at large; nor is it possible to conduct long-term and biographic research on immigrants and their lives.

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

Integration is a hostile framework foregrounded on migrants' subordination and putting the burden of proof of good migrant behaviour 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, e.g. compulsory evidence of language proficiency and knowledge of the history and politics of the host society, to obtain permanent residency and citizenship. At the same time, possibilities of onward migration enable them to get certain leverages. For example, my 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 money and time. I also curated a questionnaire sample that I gathered from peers to identify the kind of questions they ask during citizenship test. So I do not know a lot of German but exactly as much to sail me through the examination (sic)."

For establishing relation between the 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 the migrants. As Global Talent, new migrants are able to exercise their agency to gain visibility in public domain in the host country. While as colored migrants 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 and migration research approach must push for these ideological shifts, specifically in the area of policy making. Frameworks of migrants' participation and inclusion also reduce othering of the migrants, especially those arriving with relatively less privilege.

Location of the researcher: Alyosxa Tudor (2023) coined the term *migratism* to connote race to migrants in which they argue that certain migrant communities are racialized notwithstanding their class, status, privilege or the lack of it. 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 the scholars of colour in white-dominated migration discourses like in Germany. Discourse of colour, caste and gender must find attention 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), in Germany it is relatively neglected. As an increasing number of coloured academics from outside Europe enter Germany as a part of skilled migration with many being migration researchers themselves, positionality of the researcher and intersectionalities of their agency as both migrants and migration scholars deserves attention.

## Disclaimer

This paper has no conflict of interest.

## Acknowledgement

Prof. Antje Missbach's remarks and insights deeply informed this paper. I acknowledge Prof. Julia Roth and Dr. Inka Stock for their invaluable comments on the draft. I presented this paper at ABI Freiburg, IMISCOE Annual Conference 2024 (Lisbon) and University of Siegen (trans-MID project workshop) and received crucial feedback from colleagues that immensely helped me to finalise the paper.

## References

- Aldrich, R. (2004). *Vestiges of colonial empire in France*. Springer.
- Bashi, V. (2007). *Survival of the knitted: Immigrant social networks in a stratified world*. Stanford University Press.
- Besteman, Catherine. "Militarized global apartheid." *Current Anthropology* 60.S19 (2019): S26-S38.
- Blunt, A. (2007). Cultural geographies of migration: mobility, transnationality and diaspora. *Progress in human geography*, 31(5), 684-694.
- Boatcă, M. (2019). Coloniality of citizenship and occidentalist epistemology. *Decolonial Theory & Practice in Southeast Europe*, edited by Polina Manolova, Katarina Kušić, and Philipp Lottholz, special issue, *Dversia*, 19, 55-77.
- Boccagni, Paolo. "Rethinking transnational studies: Transnational ties and the transnationalism of everyday life." *European Journal of Social Theory* 15.1 (2012): 117-132.
- Chandrasekhar, C. "India's economy: The end of neoliberal triumphalism." *The Marxist* 28.2 (2012): 3-28.
- Chin, Rita. *The guest worker question in postwar Germany*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Ciesielska, Malgorzata, Katarzyna W. Boström, and Magnus Öhlander. "Observation methods." *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies: Volume II: Methods and Possibilities* (2018): 33-52.
- Collins, Francis L. "Geographies of migration II: Decolonising migration studies." *Progress in Human Geography* 46.5 (2022): 1241-1251.
- Constant, Amelie, and Douglas S. Massey. "Labor market segmentation and the earnings of German guestworkers." *Population research and Policy review* 24 (2005): 489-512.
- DAAD India <https://www.daad.in/en/2023/08/11/indian-student-numbers-touch-a-record-high-in-germany/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20Indian%20students%20in%20Germany%20has%20grown%20by,students%20enrolled%20at%20German%20universities>
- Datta, Amrita. "Ethnoscape-Financescape Interface: Work Space Experiences for Indian Guest-Workers in Germany." *Transcience* 7.1 (2016): 51-68.
- Datta, Amrita. "Does Covid Facilitate New Migration? Exploring a Fast-expanding Indian Diaspora in Germany". *Boasblog*. 2020

- Datta, Amrita. "Mobility as survival and freedom: Pandemic, Immobility and its implications for women and queer migrants." *Migration Letters* 19.6 (2022): 791-799.
- Datta, Amrita. *Stories of the Indian Immigrant Communities in Germany: Why Move?*. N.p., Springer International Publishing, 2023.
- Downe-Wamboldt, Barbara. "Content analysis: method, applications, and issues." *Health care for women international* 13.3 (1992): 313-321.
- Erdal, Marta Bivand, and Jessica Hagen-Zanker. "Migration decision-making." *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies* (2022).
- Ersanilli, Evelyn, and Ruud Koopmans. "Rewarding integration? Citizenship regulations and the socio-cultural integration of immigrants in the Netherlands, France and Germany." *Migration and Citizenship Attribution*. Routledge, 2013. 61-79.
- Eurostat. 2023. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
- Faist, Thomas, Mustafa Aksakal, and Kerstin Schmidt. "Indian high-skilled migrants and international students in Germany: Migration behaviors, intentions and development effects." (2017): 66.
- Faist, Thomas, and Başak Bilecen. "Transnationalism." *Routledge international handbook of migration studies*. Routledge. (2019). 499-511.
- Favell, Adrian. "Immigration, integration and citizenship: elements of a new political demography." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48.1 (2022): 3-32.
- Federal Office of Migration and Refugees in Germany <https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Statistik/BlaueKarteEU/blauekarteeu-node.html>
- Glick Schiller, Nina. "Explanatory frameworks in transnational migration studies: the missing multi-scalar global perspective." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38.13 (2015): 2275-2282.
- Gonzalez, Gilbert G. *Guest workers or colonized labor?: Mexican labor migration to the United States*. Routledge, 2015.
- Haug, Sonja. "Migration networks and migration decision-making." *Journal of ethnic and migration studies* 34.4 (2008): 585-605.
- International Centre for Migration Policy Development Report. *International Centre for Migration Policy Development*. 2023
- [https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/58952/file/ICMPD\\_Migration\\_Outlook\\_2023.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/58952/file/ICMPD_Migration_Outlook_2023.pdf)
- Institut für Deutschen Wissenschaft, IW-Report 1/2022 <https://www.iwkoeln.de/en/studies/wido-geis-thoene-ein-grosser-erfolg-fuer-deutschland.html>
- Krantz, Frederick. *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology*. (1988). United Kingdom, B. Blackwell
- Kerr, Sari Pekkala, et al. "Global talent flows." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30.4 (2016): 83-106.
- Kogan, Irena, and Jule Schabinger. "Successful due to STEM? Labour market returns to STEM qualifications among skilled immigrants in Germany." *European Societies* (2023): 1-32.
- Kõu, Anu, et al. "A life course approach to high-skilled migration: Lived experiences of Indians in the Netherlands." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41.10 (2015): 1644-1663.



- Kuption, Christiane, and Eng Fong Pang, eds. *Competing for global talent*. International Labour Organization, 2006.
- Leung, M. W. (2017). Social mobility via academic mobility: Reconfigurations in class and gender identities among Asian scholars in the global north. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(16), 2704-2719.
- Liu-Farrer, Gracia, Brenda S. Yeoh, and Michiel Baas. "Social construction of skill: An analytical approach toward the question of skill in cross-border labour mobilities." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47.10 (2021): 2237-2251.
- Mainwaring, Cetta. "Migrant agency: Negotiating borders and migration controls." *Migration studies* 4.3 (2016): 289-308.
- Nguyen, Van. "Regulating Migrant Integration: Examination of Multiculturalism and Assimilation." (2019).
- Patnaik, Prabhat. "The Nehru–Mahalanobis Strategy." *Social Scientist* 43.3/4 (2015): 3-10.
- Phellas, Constantinos N., Alice Bloch, and Clive Seale. "Structured methods: interviews, questionnaires and observation." *Researching society and culture* 3.1 (2011): 23-32.
- Raghuram, P., Breines, M. R., & Gunter, A. (2024). De-migrantizing as methodology: rethinking migration studies through immobility and liminality. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 12(1), 24.
- Richmond, Anthony H., and Kathleen Valtonen. "Global apartheid: Refugees, racism, and the new world order." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 14.6 (1994): 25-28.
- Schinkel, Willem. "Against 'immigrant integration': For an end to neocolonial knowledge production." *Comparative migration studies* 6.1 (2018): 1-17.
- Scholte, Jan Aart. *Globalization: A critical introduction*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. "Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration." *Annals of the New York academy of sciences* 645.1 (1992): 1-24.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, and Georges E. Fournon. "Terrains of blood and nation: Haitian transnational social fields." *Ethnic and racial studies* 22.2 (1999): 340-366.
- Seale, Clive Ed. *Social Research Methods: A Reader*. United Kingdom. (2004). Routledge.
- Spencer, Sarah, and Katharine Charsley. "Reframing 'integration': acknowledging and addressing five core critiques." *Comparative Migration Studies* 9.1 (2021): 18.
- Tabor, Aidan S., Taciano L. Milfont, and Colleen Ward. "International migration decision-making and destination selection among skilled migrants." *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 9.1 (2015): 28-41.
- Tudor, A. (2023). Ascriptions of migration: Racism, migratism and Brexit. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 26(2), 230-248.
- Walia, Harsha. *Border and rule: Global migration, capitalism, and the rise of racist nationalism*. Haymarket Books, 2021.
- Warin, Thierry, and Pavel Svaton. "European migration: Welfare migration or economic migration?." *Global Economy Journal* 8.3 (2008): 1850140.

- Weiß, Anja, and Samuel N-A. Mensah. "Access of highly-skilled migrants to transnational labor markets: Is class formation transcending national divides?" *Globalization and inequality in emerging societies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011. 211-234.
- Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. "Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation–state building, migration and the social sciences." *Global networks* 2.4 (2002): 301-334.
- Wiesbrock, Anja, and Metka Hercog. *Making Europe More Attractive to Indian Highly-skilled Migrants? The blue card directive and national law in Germany and the Netherlands*. 2012.
- World Migration Report. *International Organization of Migration*. 2022 <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>
- Wyszynski, Mia Caroline, Rita Guerra, and Kinga Bierwiazzonek. "Good refugees, bad migrants? Intergroup helping orientations toward refugees, migrants, and economic migrants in Germany." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 50.10 (2020): 607-618.
- Zeitlin, Jonathan. "Social theory and the history of work." *Social History* 8.3 (1983): 365-374.