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3 Navigating Belonging in a Mobile World: Young Indian Students and Researchers in Germany

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Since 1998, there has been an ongoing internationalization of higher education. One result of this has been an increase in student mobility. The OECD estimated in 2013 that more than 4.5 million tertiary education students were internationally mobile (OECD 2013). To attract students and researchers to Germany, the government as well as research institutes and universities have developed numerous programs and advertising strategies. Institutions such as the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and the International Max Planck Research Schools (IMPRS) court young students by offering attractive financial and scientific opportunities. In doing so, Germany has attempted to brand itself as the “land of ideas,”¹ a land of innovation, and science. Statistics show that India is one of the top three sending countries for postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers.² With its university and variety of research institutes (mostly Max Planck Institutes), Göttingen, or the “city of science,”³ is one center attracting Indian students and researchers. As of 2017 around 300 Indian postgraduates and postdoctoral fellows are studying or working in the

¹ The ‘Germany – Land of Ideas’ initiative is supported by the German Government, the Foreign Office, the Ministry for Education and Research and various companies (<https://land-der-ideen.de/en/partners>).

² Data from the website <http://www.wissenschaftweltoffen.de/daten/1/2/1>, run by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW).

³ “Göttingen – City of Science” (“Göttingen – Stadt, die Wissen schafft”) is the slogan of the city.

city, mostly in the fields of engineering, natural sciences, and mathematics. There are also about 30 Indian students and researchers in the humanities and social sciences. Only about 30 percent of the Indian students and scientists in Göttingen are female.⁴ These students and researchers come from different regions, are from the heterogeneous Indian middle class, are mostly single, and typically aged between 22 and 35. Most of them plan to stay in Göttingen until they complete a certain academic degree, and thus their stays are limited in duration.

In the following pages, I sketch out strategies the students and researchers adopt to navigate their lives between ‘home’ and abroad, what being a scientist means for their biographic navigation, and how the presence of India influences their feelings of belonging in a mobile world. My findings are based on data from qualitative interviews, participatory observation, and online research on Facebook between August 2010 and April 2016.

Theoretical and Methodological Framing: Studying Belonging in a Mobile World

Because “all the world seems to be on the move” (Sheller and Urry 2006: 207), we, as social scientists, have to ask how we can study the dynamics of belonging in a mobile world. Sheller and Urry propose the “mobility paradigm” (ibid.), which asserts that mobility (physical, virtual, material) is an important part of most people’s lives. At the same time, they note that spatial, infrastructural, and institutional “moorings” (ibid.: 210) enable and shape the mobility of individuals. This underlines the fact that mobility is influenced by multiple structures of power and inequality, for not everyone has the same access to mobility (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006: 3). This is elaborated in Glick Schiller and Salazar’s (2013) concept of “regimes of mobility,” which emphasizes that individuals are not free to move as they want, not even the highly skilled. Building on this, I have developed the concept of the “regime of student mobility” as a tool for analyzing the biographic navigation of the young students and researchers (Fuhse, forthcoming). This concept takes into account that my respondents navigate in a transnational space that is shaped by multiple actors, structures of power (international, national, regional, familial), inequalities, discourses, and imaginations. The process of biographic navigation entails the positioning and negotiation of multiple formations of belonging and conscious and subconscious constructions of the self (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 10–11). The students and researchers balance different modes of belonging, create new ones, combine them creatively, and thus reestablish their “social location” (ibid.: 2) in a new context.

⁴ This imbalance is also indicated by statistics that include all Indian students in Germany and studies about Indian students in other countries (Sondhi 2015). The reasons for the gender imbalance are discussed in Sondhi (2013) and Fuhse (forthcoming).

In moving – both physically and virtually – between India and Germany, the students and researchers negotiate different social spaces, and therefore different modes of belonging. As Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013:13) argues: “Belonging is an emotionally charged, ever dynamic social location – that is: a position in social structure, experienced through identification, embeddedness, connectedness and attachments.” If individuals or groups feel threatened or insecure, feelings of belonging tend to become increasingly relevant. In this process, people start to (re)consider the normal, self-evident and unconscious feeling of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011: 4). That leads to the articulation, (formal) structuring, and in some cases, to the politicization of belonging (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2012: 16), or what Yuval-Davis (2011:4) calls the “politics of belonging.”

Belonging is multidimensional and consists of different elements which are often difficult to combine (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2013: 9, 21). Over the course of their lives, individuals encounter and therefore navigate through diverse constellations of belonging (ibid.: 21). In this process, the individual person negotiates collective constellations and hence (re)creates belonging (ibid.: 20). As an analytical tool to capture this dynamic relationship between individual agency and the social environment (see also Vigh 2009) I use the concept of „biographic navigation“ (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2012, 2013; Vigh 2009).

I studied young Indian students and researchers in Göttingen and their individual strategies of navigating the diverse constellations of belonging in their mobile “life-worlds” (Schütz and Luckmann 1973). In this chapter, I focus on different dimensions of belonging central to their biographic navigations: regional and national identifications, professional belonging, and imagined futures. All four revolve around different articulations of belonging: social relations, practices, and narrations. I use ‘articulation’ in the twofold meaning of ‘to express’ and ‘to connect,’ as proposed by Hermann and Kempf (Hermann and Kempf 2005: 313–315, referring to Comaroff 1985, and Hall 1980, 1986). Social relations, narrations and practices are not only expressions of belonging, but also ways to connect oneself with other people, places, or discourses. These articulations take place in specific situations and are individual or collective ways of expressing and negotiating different modes of belonging, such as nationality, religion, region, profession, gender, and class.

Organizations and Festivities as Spaces for Practicing Belonging

Steven Vertovec (1999: 450, referring to Gilroy 1987, 1993) states that “the awareness of multi-locality stimulates the desire to connect oneself with others, both ‘here’ and ‘there’ who share the same ‘routes’ and ‘roots.’” In the case of the young Indians I studied, this awareness is reflected in formal and informal organizations, festivities and leisure activities. Analyzing these aspects and the processes connected to them – such as the construction of organizations and groups – and the dynamics of exclu-

sion and inclusion, can reveal a lot about the dynamics of belonging in the form of negotiated and performed commonality (see also Pfaff-Czarnecka 2013: 14–15).

Nirmiti, the “Indian fraternity in Göttingen,” states on its website: “We sowed the seed of our association in 2009 and now aim to create an environment of mutual support, social interaction and a blend of two countries and cultures – India and Germany. Our name and logo thus signify creation.”⁵ As a student association with an elected committee, Nirmiti organizes several events each year, including a Sports Day, Indian Independence Day, and Diwali,⁶ and attempts to integrate newcomers from India into the group. This organization is founded on a common notion of Indianness, and tries to acknowledge the diverse meanings of this concept. In practice, this means selecting events that are considered Indian (that is, events not especially connected to one region or religion), and to organize these events as representations of India’s diversity, such as in the event’s cultural program. As an increasing number of Indians are coming to Göttingen, the events are becoming larger, and the task of organizing them to everybody’s satisfaction is becoming increasingly complicated. Aside from these difficulties (which will be described in the following section), these events provide the young students and researchers with an important space for socializing and self-expression. In addition to allowing Indians to meet each other and eat Indian food together, the cultural program is an essential part of these functions. Everybody who wants to is allowed to perform dances, songs, or other pieces, thereby offering each an opportunity to enact what he or she considers to be Indian culture. In Butler’s (1990, 1993) concept of performativity, these practices are not only the expression, but also constitutive elements, of belonging. In performing, the individuals connect with each other through their collective belonging as Indian, and evoke norms and values already associated with these performances. Festivals are therefore a space to meet other Indians, and to socialize and perform ‘culture’ in familiar ways. These two aspects are described by a member of the Nirmiti committee:

[We] started these celebrations just like fun-feel party. And then as time went on, [we] moved on so. We wanted to use this get together function – I mean mainly after Nirmiti started to take this over, so we started to organize celebrations in more Indian way, so [that] every little thing started to remind us of our home. So we wanted to celebrate Diwali at the closest weekend possible and ... crackers and every little thing, the puja, everything, the cultural activities, the quiz. ... So we wanted to recreate our Indian celebration in a foreign land. So this not started out like this, [at the time] we just wanted to get every-

⁵ Website Nirmiti (<https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/132691.html>).

⁶ As did my respondents, I will use the English spelling without diacritics. Diwali is the ‘festival of lights,’ celebrated almost all over India, which commemorates the return of the mythical couple Rama and Sita to Ayodhya (there are also other stories about the origin of this festival) (Malinar 2009: 164). A presentation is held on Diwali to inform the non-Indians colleagues and friends about the reason for the festival.

body together and have fun. That's what happened in [the] first or three Diwali's, but after [that] Nirmiti started to take [over] this thing themselves... I think the main reason why it attracts more people is the togetherness they can find more Indians here and it brings back the Indian celebration, the whole mood, everything. Nirmiti was successful in achieving this to the fullest level, to the complete level. We, they give attention to minor details that is very nice. ... Food will also be one of the most important factors. (Interview R.⁷, 15.09.2011)

Some respondents stated that the time of the festivals was when they missed home and family the most. In recreating the festivals in the most Indian way possible, the young Indians try to build a 'home away from home' and "reroot" themselves (Ghosh and Wang 2003: 274). Thus, the festivals could be understood as providing a place to practice, perform, express, and articulate multiple modes of belonging and identities (such as national, regional, religious, and class identities). Diwali, which many of my respondents consider to be celebrated more or less all over India (sometimes also regardless of religion), is one of the main events for coming together. Every year, the Diwali celebrations are organized by the Nirmiti members, with planning starting months before the event. The celebration is almost the same every year: It starts with a short presentation about Diwali, followed by a *puja*⁸, the cultural program, games, dinner, sparklers, another game, and ends with people dancing to the newest music from India. Both my observations at the event and interlocutors statements suggest that the religious aspect of Diwali is not so important for most present. Although *pujas* were performed by a student with a Brahmin background at the Diwali celebration in 2010, 2011, and 2012,⁹ the other aspects of the celebration, like the food, games, cultural program, and the presentation language are given significantly more attention in the organizing phase and during the event itself. Indeed, the choice of clothing, participation in the cultural program, the choice of food and so on are the central platforms for the articulation of the group's perceived diversity, and therefore also of multiple ways of belonging (such as regional, class, caste).

The importance of socializing with other Indians is not restricted to the festivities and important events. The circles of friends and thus the day-to-day interactions also show that belonging to the Indian community is an important part of life for most of the young Indians I spoke to. As one respondent stated:

⁷ Male, early thirties, PhD, was a founding member of the Nirmiti committee. Has been in the USA for a postdoctoral fellowship since 2012.

⁸ Puja (Sanskrit) "Worship" is a religious ritual where offerings are made to a deity. Done at multiple occasions and settings: from the daily puja at home, to elaborate temple ceremonies and large festivals (Oberlies 2008: 23–24).

⁹ I was not present in 2013. No puja was performed in 2014 and 2015, as, according to one respondent, no one there had the ceremonial knowledge to perform it.

I know that people from my land are here, my own people are here. And then the Nirmiti's Diwali program ... it brought me in contact with so many Indians, Bengalis, Non-Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Gujaratis, so many Indians. And then the bond started increasing and it increased like anything, and nowadays I feel like I'm not alone here... . [In my] first month, I had the feeling that I should escape from here, this is not for me. But now it feels like I could stay here for three more years or four more years for PhD ... The friends' circle is something which Germany gave to me. (Interview An.¹⁰, 20.02.2013)

As these groups of friends are often organized around regional affiliations, they provide a place for speaking in the same mother tongue, eating regional dishes and watching movies. This points to the importance of regional identification and belonging, and leads to the next aspect I focus on.

Dilemmas of Belonging: The Importance of Regional Identities, or the Difficulties of Being 'Indian'

For many of the Indian students and researchers that I met in Göttingen, one of the key dimensions of belonging is the regional background, which seems to play an important role in forming a circle of friends, leisure time activities, and organizing events (regional and Indian) (see also Bhat this volume). Aside from Diwali, which is understood as an Indian celebration, there are other celebrations that are organized around regional and/or religious belonging. In 2013, for example, a group of mostly Bengalis organized Saraswati Puja which was also announced as the "Bengali Spring Festival." As the invitation stated:

We are now named as Bangladesh and West Bengal (part of India). Politically and officially we are two different countries. Somebody had drawn a fractal boundary and we are divided. But, we still share the same culture. Our cultural authenticity, our language transcend the political boundaries. One of our cultural events to welcome the spring is Saraswati pujo¹¹. It is a Bengali Hindu religious custom of worshipping the goddess of education and culture. But, we celebrate all Bengali cultural events without maintaining any barrier of religious and political boundaries. We carry our culture beyond the geography, surpassing the religious view. So, come and join us in this joyous moment to welcome the spring.¹²

¹⁰ Female, 23 years, from Calcutta, doing her master's degree in sociology, short-term DAAD stipend for Germany, plans to do PhD in Germany.

¹¹ 'pujo' is the Bengali version of *puja*.

¹² The invitation was circulated via the Facebook group "Nirmiti: Indians in Göttingen" (04.03.13).

As the authors of the invitation use words and phrases like “we,” “our cultural authenticity,” “our language,” and “same culture,” and point out that “the Bengali culture” transcends religious and political boundaries; they highlight the common belonging, culture, and language of Bengalis, be it in India or Bangladesh. This emphasis on a common background is also reflected in the event program: “Breakfast with typical Saraswati pujo food”; “games that will remind your childhood with some gifts”; “all homemade typical Saraswati pujo food made with the spirit of Charuibhati (picnic): Khichuri, Aloor dum, Payesh, Pantooa.” Although not only Bengalis were invited to the event, at least 80 percent of the participants had Bengali roots, be they in India or Bangladesh. In offering an opportunity to speak Bengali, eat Bengali food, sing Bengali songs, play Bengali games, and perform a Bengali Hindu ritual, the celebration provided Bengalis with a space for articulating their belonging, both to their region as well as to their group and each other as Bengalis. As inclusive as this event was for Bengalis with different national citizenships and religions, it excluded non-Bengalis, especially through language. While language can be a strong factor in exclusion, for people with the same mother tongue, it can also be an important means of creating feelings of familiarity and belonging (Antonsich 2010: 648). As one respondent told me:

If I get to talk in my language I feel most happy and you know. And I might tend to talk to people who are talking in my language ... you know [this is] the thing which happens in India, so which we do not realize it... (Interview S¹³., 26.01.2013)

The importance of speaking or writing in one’s mother tongue is also illustrated on Facebook. A few of the young Indians (almost) exclusively use their mother tongue in posts or comments. Language use is typically related to the people they are connected with via Facebook (family and friends from the same region) and the topics they are discussing, such as regional politics, music, or movies. Language is also a sensitive topic in the organization of Diwali and other major events. In 2012, a committee member noted that the previous year some students from Tamil Nadu had commented on the use of Hindi in the presentation and the music. As such, the committee decided to pay more attention to language and ensure the presentations, the cultural program, and the music choice was multilingual. This illustrates the importance of language in articulations of belonging, and the powerful role that language can play in including people in or excluding them from a defined group. In attempting to reconcile the importance of regional belonging with the wish to unite Indian students and researchers of all backgrounds and religions in Göttingen under the umbrella of *Nirmiti*, members of the organization emphasize the notion of ‘unity in diversity.’ Especially when there are occasions for the representation of India or the Indian students and researchers in Göttingen, a lot of thought is put into the

¹³ Female, early thirties, PhD, back in India and searching for postdoctoral position.

program. At the annual Indian Cultural Night (ICN) for example, master's students from one of the MPI programs in Göttingen are asked to represent the country. For the 2013 Indian Culture Night, as the host of the evening stated, organizers chose 'Indian festivals' as the theme to showcase India's diversity. Different regional and religious festivals (Hindu and Muslim, but no Christian or Buddhist festivals) were presented and demonstrated through songs and dances. The Indians in the audience I spoke to were impressed by the choice of the topic and the attempt to represent India's diversity. But not everybody was content with the presentation. One interlocutor stated that some regions were not represented, such as Northeast India. So how much diversity is enough? Is being diverse part of being Indian? It seems to be so in the perception of a former Nirmiti president:

So now the aims of Nirmiti team as such is to promote this mixing of different cultures, which is like, if you are in India from a region and you did not have a chance to go to other region and study or, for some reason, then you are somehow confined to that region and then you take values only from there. But when you come here then you get a value from this country and also of your own country from [a] different region. And we want to promote this really, and we wanted people to recognize this difference and also to respect this in a way. Because there are been instances where people confined from a particular region did not respect the differences from the other region, and they somehow tried to either dominate or suppress others, which we do not really want to happen. So that's one thing we wanted to promote: that India is of different values and different diversity and this need to be respected and accepted as a fact, and that's where it brings in more spice I guess. Because if you expecting your Indian food to be spicy it's not just one spice that brings in, but it's different a lot of things that brings in that taste, so I believe this. ... [S]imilarly, Indian community is also a masala of something. (Interview V.¹⁴, 26.03.2013)

Employing the image of the Indian community as a "masala", a mixture of different spices, V. illustrated that he understood being Indian as being diverse (to have different mother tongues, different religions, different food), and he wanted to acknowledge this diversity. The discourse on 'unity in diversity,' and the attempt to implement it in the events, is a way of trying to integrate everybody into the 'Indian masala.' But this rather apolitical view of India masks the problems that India actually has with regionalism and communalism (among others), and therefore excludes the more critical or political young Indians in Göttingen, who find it difficult to relate to Nirmiti and its events.¹⁵ In this process, Nirmiti as an organization acts as a

¹⁴ Male, 24 years old, pursuing PhD at MPI for Biophysical Chemistry, member of the Nirmiti committee.

¹⁵ I realized this aspect in an interview with an Indian social scientist whom I had never met at any

“regime of belonging” (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2013: 19) that influences individual persons and defines its boundaries. Nevertheless, in trying to define for themselves what India and Indianness mean, the Indian students and researchers in Göttingen are part of a larger process of defining and redefining India in and beyond its territorial boundaries.

Being a Scientist in “Göttingen – City of Science”

One spatial and social location for the young Indians I worked with is Göttingen, the “city of science”, in Lower Saxony. Although it only has about 130 000 inhabitants, Göttingen is a well-known university city, highly regarded for its achievements in mathematics and the natural sciences, and boasts over 40 Nobel Laureates. In telling me about leaving India and coming to Göttingen for their studies, my interlocutors provided me with narrations on who they think they are, on what is important to them at this stage in their lives, and how Germany provides them the opportunity to achieve these goals.

A common topic in the narrations about the decision to leave India for studies is competition at home. As one interlocutor told me, “there are a lot of students in India, and it’s always a kind of competition, which happens especially in the study place” (Interview Ar.¹⁶, 14.12.2011). The selection of Germany is also partly connected to this spirit of competition:

One [reason to come to Germany] is to be [a] little bit different from where others are going. Second is, like, to learn from the place where – especially in my field – where it came from. All the technology is [from] there/here, so I thought “okay.” (ibid.)

In their narrations my interlocutors represented India as a country full of skilled people, but with few good opportunities for study. Germany, however, is understood as a country that has a lot of quality institutes, charges no tuition fees, and offers the possibility of achieving a doctoral degree within three years. For my respondents, it is clear that mobility is the key to career success. In order to achieve a good position in the future, it is necessary to go abroad, work in well-respected institutes with established researchers, and to be part of a scientific community. However, it is not only important for the success in one’s work life; a career is also a “cultural product” (Cohen, Duberley and Ravishankar 2012: 106) that is situated in dynamic contexts. It is not only formed by the scientific community (in this case), but also by the expectations of one’s family, peers, and society. My interview partners repre-

Nirmiti event, but at other events like Saraswati Puja. She made it clear to me that it is hard for her to relate to the apolitical and sometimes idealized manner in which India is represented at the events.

¹⁶ Male, 28 years, pursuing PhD at MPI for Biophysical Chemistry, member of Nirmiti committee.

sented migration as something which everybody does, and which makes the family proud. The “diasporic path” (ibid.: 116), and the social capital that can be ‘earned’ by fulfilling it, is sanctioned by families and communities, and provides a feeling of security in a situation characterized by temporality and social, financial, and other forms of insecurity. This means career and national and/or cultural affiliations are interrelated, as “ongoing facets of individuals’ identities as they develop diasporic careers” (ibid.:106).

Providing the young Indians with a space for scientific research, networks, and contact with colleagues from various countries, the workplace is a space for negotiating different aspects of belonging. One aspect is the work itself. For my respondents, being a researcher and belonging to a scientific community is important. This is reflected in the time they spend at work – most say they work 10 hours a day, up to six days a week – and in their narrations about the decision to come to Germany. As one said:

Germany, for many reasons. One of the reasons is [that] Germany is very famous for physics. You know the modern physics have started in Germany: Max Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein. All are from Germany. And Germany has this rich tradition of producing wonderful physicists. And I’m a physicist so it is quite natural selecting Germany. (Interview P.¹⁷, 10.07.2011)

The freedom of research at the Max Planck Institutes, the easy availability of resources like chemicals and laboratory equipment, and the work environment, which is often described as very liberal, are understood as central in providing the possibility of achieving one’s full scientific potential.

Aside from being a place of research and work, the institutes are also a space for meeting people and socializing. For some, it is the only place where they socialize with non-Indians on a regular basis. It is thus also a space for the negotiation of belonging to different nation-states, ‘cultures,’ religions, and so on. This becomes obvious in the various cultural evenings organized by the students, which include Slavic Culture Night, German-Swiss Night, Arabian Culture Night, Nepali Culture Night and, of course, Indian Culture Night. At these events, students and researchers are expected to represent their country, and thus their ethnic-national belonging, to their colleagues, professors, and friends through food, a cultural program and games.

Depending on the stage they are at in their careers, the young Indians are either planning to finish their PhD, or are applying for a postdoctoral fellowship or a permanent position. However, a foreign doctoral degree appears to be regarded as only the first step on the diasporic path. Completing at least one postdoctoral fellowship outside India is perceived as the next imperative in working one’s way

¹⁷ Male, early thirties, in Göttingen as a postdoctoral fellow, shifted to Weizmann Institute in Rehovot in January 2013, has been in the USA for another postdoctoral fellowship since 2014.

up. My interlocutors' ideas about the necessity of going abroad, about where to go, what to achieve and when to go back 'home' are related to the structures, inequalities, images, and discourses that constitute the regime of student mobility (Fuhse, forthcoming).

Almost every respondent formulated the wish to return to India at some point in time, though this was likely to be (repeatedly) delayed on the basis of pursuing further qualifications, be it a PhD, or a (second or third) postdoctoral fellowship. I now turn to how this narrative of returning to India is part of the negotiation of belonging.

“One Day I’m Going Back to India”: (Imagined) Futures in India

Still India is, well for me, Delhi is the best city. [That] means, no matter how unsafe it is or how much crime levels are there, I still want to stay in Delhi forever, like really forever, the life kind of thing.
(Interview S., 26.01.2013)

This statement reflects the sentiment of many of my respondents: there is a definite wish to go back to India, but exactly when and how has not been planned in detail. I argue that it is not important if the young Indians return or not: the very concept of India as the 'arrival point' (cf. 'arrival points,' Baas 2010: 3) and as a permanent 'anchor' in their biographic navigation is what is of interest here. Baas (2010: 3) defines arrival points as “imaginary moments in the future when migrants imagine themselves as having arrived at where they intended to be by going through a particular migration process” (Baas 2010: 3). In a time of insecurity concerning their personal and professional future (being away from family, searching for a partner, having temporary employment, and so on), India and being Indian provide the young students and researchers with continuity and rootedness. One of my respondents, who in fact returned to India in summer 2013, expressed it in the following way:

There were times that I wanted to leave but I always had the hope that I’m going anyway. So this was very good. For me this surety of going back was very important. (Interview G.¹⁸, 19.01.2013)

Thus the simple knowledge that one will go back, even if it is not clear when exactly, can provide the individual with a feeling of security and certainty, and may even help to continue through hard and frustrating times.

The idea that the migratory process leads to a certain arrival point reveals another important facet of the students' and researchers' biographic navigation: coming to

¹⁸ Male, finished his PhD in theology in Göttingen in April 2013, has been back in India since May 2013, holds a position at a theological college in his hometown.

Germany is part of the fulfillment of long-term goals. Completing a degree, a PhD, or a postdoctoral fellowship in Germany or another ‘western’ country is perceived as a requirement to create a certain imagined future – a future that many of my respondents envisage in India, and that will hopefully include a well-paid job and finding a partner. International mobility is thus a strategic means not only of shaping one’s scientific career, but also one’s personal future, by accumulating the social capital important for marriage.¹⁹ Underlying these perceptions are discourses that are part of the regime of student mobility. These discourses naturalize international mobility as something everybody does and you have to do if you want to be successful in India or internationally (Fuhse, forthcoming).

Yes, yes, yes, given the chance I want to go back. I’m here to fulfill that *requirement*. No, I have respect on this country, but I think it is quite natural, you know it is quite natural that, I have some social obligations as well, I have to go and serve my people: something like that. I feel like that I have to go back and I have to take up some job in India. If I take [a] job outside India, it is out of compulsion, not out of choice. Because if I don’t get any job in India, good job I mean, which can suit my qualification and my interest, then I may take up some job in Europe or US. But it is definite[ly] not by choice. I will, given the chance, I want to go back... . (Interview P., 10.07.2011; emphasis added)

In other words, there are not only clear ideas and discourses on how to make a career (by going abroad), but also how this path should end – in India. How this will be accomplished, and how the feelings of responsibility and the wish to find a job that suits the acquired qualifications are consolidated, depends on the individual and poses a number of challenges.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined four facets of the biographic navigation of young students and researchers from India in a mobile world. Firstly, formal and informal organizations and festivals provide the Indian students and researchers the opportunity to meet and socialize, as well as practice, perform, express, and articulate multiple modes of belonging. Secondly, the importance of regional background in this belonging is demonstrated in the way regional festivals and get-togethers are organized, circles of friends are formed, and in the use of regional languages. The relevance of regional belonging can also be recognized in the organization and the

¹⁹ Education and degrees are very important in the process of finding a spouse. Many of my respondents married after completing their PhD. At least half of the marriages were arranged with the help of the parents.

realization of important events that are considered to be Indian such as Diwali and Independence Day. At such events, organizers try to prevent the predominance of one Indian language, and the cultural program aims to represent India's diversity. In doing so, the organizers try to unite all students and researchers from India in Göttingen into a big 'Indian masala' that is 'united in diversity,' thus seeking to avoid the broader dilemma of trying to define what it actually means to be Indian. As I argue above, this does not mean that all of the students and researcher from India are able to relate to *Nirmiti* and its goals.

Thirdly, for my respondents, being a scientist is another important aspect of belonging. Expressed in their narratives about the decision to come to Germany, the time they spend at their workplace, and their future plans, it is apparent that mobility and being part of an international scientific community are understood as crucial to career success. Since a career is a cultural product, the international mobility of the students and researchers from India is sanctioned by families and communities, and thus leads not only to professional success but also to social capital. That means that career and national and/or cultural affiliations are interrelated facets of individuals' belonging. For professional and personal reasons, most of my interlocutors envisage their diasporic path ending back in India. In this way, India becomes a permanent anchor in their biographic navigation and provides them with continuity and rootedness in a time of insecurity. My respondents understand their international mobility as a step to the fulfillment of specific long-term career and personal goals. I understand this imagination and working for an aspired future as an important strategic means of coping with living in mobility and in avoiding dilemmas of belonging. In this dynamic, to be Indian is only one facet of their multiple modes of belonging that intersects with multiple other dimensions, including professional or regional identifications and imagined futures. In other words, in navigating these new, multiple and challenging social spaces, these young students and researchers from India are constantly constructing and reconstructing their belonging.

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