Exploring Migrant Lives

Non-Elite South Asian Migration to Hamburg and Beyond From a Microhistorical Perspective, c. 1920-1950

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Introduction

In 1952, "Henry Obed", born as Abid Hussein[1] into a Lucknow family, was allegedly murdered by his German wife. The Indian Muslim had spent the war years in an Irish prison as a result of a failed espionage mission to Ireland on behalf of the German foreign Secret Service "Abwehr II". During his imprisonment, he had kept in touch with his wife through a regular letter exchange until he applied to be repatriated to Antwerp, where the couple lived. Due to his previous record as an arms smuggler, he was denied his wish to return to mainland Europe but was instead transported to India in 1947. However, he was eventually granted an Indian passport and travelled to Belgium. According to the military historian Mark Hull, his wife subsequently discovered an affair with the daughter of a local police official, and she allegedly killed her husband, to whom she had been married for 28 years.[2]

Based on the explicit information gathered from Hull's book on German espionage in Ireland during the Second Word War, I believed Obed to have been the victim of a homicide. When I discovered his tombstone during a research visit in Antwerp in 2018, I was surprised to find his death date inscribed as February 1951. Taken aback, I checked the sources again. The footnote relating to his alleged murder reads as follows:

> Obéd's passport and a copy of his original letter to Nehru are kept at the Military Archives in Dublin. Obéd's family donated the documents when they visited Ireland.[3]

My doubts grew since this piece of reference neither provided the signature of the archival source in the Dublin Military Archive nor did it specify in which way the information about his murder was documented in the file. Eager to find out more, I visited the archive, only to find out that the file, which most likely contained Obed's documents, "IMA, G2/0345", was under review for data protection issues for an unknown period of time. I could get a hold of neither the passport nor the letter to Nehru. Further research eventually took me to the Documentatiecentrum van de Antwerpse Noorderpolders in Ekeren, a small regional archive in Antwerp. Here, I discovered an exchange of letters between the superintendent of the

[1] Born as Abid Hussein, he adopted the name Henry Obed when he left India around 1915. The details of his name change are discussed in Chapter 6.

[2] Mark M. Hull, *Irish Secrets. German Espionage in Wartime Ireland, 1939-1945* (Dubin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), p. 255.

[3] Ibid., p. 362.

Ekeren police, the mayor of Schepenen, and Candula Margaretha Homan [sic!], Obed's wife.[4] In May 1951, Mrs. Obed had requested the mayor to take action against theft and vandalism on her properties, a depot called Villa "Hindustan" in the Stratiestraat.[5] The mayor forwarded her letter to the superintendent of the police, referring to the plaintiff as "Mrs. Widow Obed", meaning that Obed was already dead. In August the same year, the police replied to the mayor, stating that the house had been neglected long before Mrs. Obed had filed the complaint with the police. Therefore, the municipality was not responsible for the damage done to her properties and the police would not press any charges. This information was conveyed to Mrs. Obed by the mayor's office.[6]

A little disappointed by the absence of a crime scene, I refrained from endorsing my previous narrative of Henry Obed's death. If Mrs. Obed had actually killed her husband, she would hardly have contacted the police three months later to complain about damage done to their depot, where the couple had stored their animal stock before the war. The police and mayor, being aware of her widowhood, found nothing suspicious about her request and merely rejected it due to formal issues. Moreover, Hull dated the murder in 1952, when Obed had already passed away according to his tombstone. I therefore assumed the Indian, aged 55, to have died of a natural cause and not at the hands of his jealous wife. It took me another two years of research to figure out the actual reason for his passing. His death was unnatural and lead to a criminal investigation and a court case. The charge, however, was poisoning instead of homicide, and the accused was the local pharmacist and not his wife.

This anecdote illustrates one of the major issues this thesis grapples with. Given the arbitrary content of the sources, allowing for a myriad of interpretations and analysis, amplified by superficial readings of fellow historians, one easily comes to false conclusions about their significance. Given the life Obed had led, a murder seemed not completely unintelligible, and I trusted Hull's take on his demise. Besides this rather straightforward case of insufficient fact-checking, there are more subtle ways in which the sources can be misleading. Apart from accidental imprecisions and indifferences in the creation process of a document, such as

[4] I was kindly provided with scanned copies of the letter exchange by an employee of the Documentatiecentrum van de Antwerpse Noorderpolders in Ekeren. This person did not convey, however, the exact call codes of the files, and has not done so until this date.

[5] Homan to the mayor of Schepenen, DAN/letter exchange, 10.5.1951.

[6] Mayor of Schepenen to Homan, DAN/letter exchange, 13.8.1951.

accidentally transposed digits or typos, and the very common misspelling of names and places foreign to the author due to ignorance, there are more structural reasons why it is hard to navigate through the multitude of perspectives contained in one file.

According to Edward Said and his followers, colonial knowledge production can never be anything but a semantic reiteration of western domination over its object, the 'orient'. As the literary critic has famously claimed in his *opus magnum*:

> Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West.[7]

In other words, American or European archives are only testimonies of the formers' attempts to establish domination over eastern cultures by juxtaposing their alleged inferiority with a perceived western superiority. While the sources expose how the 'west' consolidated its own identity in opposition to the 'east', the realities of the colonized remain a skewed western fantasy in the written sources of the colonizers.

Surely, the power structures inherent to this sort of knowledge production are among the major issues to be considered when working with not only European or American but all kinds of historical documents. Michel Foucault has drawn our attention to the link between power, knowledge, and subjectivity in his philosophical and historical writings. By analysing disciplinary institutions such as the school, the hospital, and the prison, he has delineated how knowledge is the result of a desire to dominate the subject:

> Knowledge simplifies, passes over differences, lumps things together, without justification in regard to truth. It follows that knowledge is always a misconstruction. Moreover, it is always something that is aimed, maliciously, insidiously, and aggressively, at individuals, things, situations.[8]

Archival sources, however, bear witness to contested power relations and not only to those exercising dominance. This chapter shows how physical encounters between historical actors produce different meanings, which all reverberate in the text. In these transcribed encounters, it is impossible to overlook the voices of the marginalized.

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[7] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 22.

[8] Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Volume 3 (Power).* James D. Faubion ed. and translated by Robert Hurley and Others (New York: New Press, 2001), p. 14.

Before returning to the question of archival knowledge production, a first sections presents the research question of this doctoral thesis and introduces theoretical frameworks and concepts. It explains how historiographic concepts such as microhistory and historic biography are applied to productively dismantle some of the problems created by the sources, as well as how their implementation allows me to engage critically with the historic realities of non-elite South Asian migrants in Germany and beyond. A second section discusses the relevant historiography. It delineates the historic trajectories of colonial migration to the European continent as my major geographic point of reference, including the well-researched South Asian migration to Great Britain and the presence of colonial subjects in Germany. The latter group includes the African diaspora before the First World War and the South Asian migration to Germany in the interwar period. This section also includes a discussion on the historiography of non-colonial African and Asian presence in interwar Germany to provide a wider comparative framework.

Research question

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion for non-elite South Asian migrants in European port cities in the interwar period through the lens of two historic biographies. The main spatial focus is on Hamburg, and, even more specifically, on the Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood, although the narrative follows the newcomers to other port cities like Antwerp and London. Despite not being a major port of arrival for South Asian migrants in the interwar period, Hamburg nevertheless had long-standing trading connections to India and a small Chinese and African diaspora. The social composition alongside economic and political incentives attracted a small number of South Asian migrants to the port city, as I will elaborate in more detail in Chapter 1 and 2. The city as a governmental and spatial unit provides an important analytical framework, since the agency of migrants is best captured in the local sphere, especially when looking at singular cases.[9] Moreover, it is in the administrative realm of the city where the directives of the state government are put into practice, often with significant room for manoeuvre for the city state authorities.[10]

[9] Maria Alexopoulou, „Vom Nationalen zum Lokalen zurück? Zur Geschichtsschreibung in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft Deutschland“, in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* (2016, Volume 56), p. 478.
[10] Ibid.

The life stories of Hardas Singh, a Punjabi *sepoy* in the British Indian army, and Henry Obed, a *lascar* in the British merchant marine, are at the heart of this study. It seeks to explore the limits and possibilities of their migration in conjunction with the socio-economic background against which they made their choices. In order to position my subjects of inquiry in the complex web of representation and self-perception, the political, social, economic and legal fields in which they interacted are fleshed out in separate chapters but also always inform the analysis of their life trajectories. These fields influenced the way in which the Indians negotiated their migration, but they also determined how the authors of my archival sources perceived them.

To approximate the limits and possibilities of non-elite South Asian migration, this thesis especially focussed on the socio-economic, political, and occupational networks and infrastructures within which the migrants operated. Migrants carried histories, attachments, experience, and legal and social statuses that linked them to a variety of places and people. These networks often increased their prospects of staying but could also amplify their marginalisation. The term "networks" is understood in the broadest sense as the voluntary cooperation or collaboration of different social actors in a certain setting. Since these settings range from smuggling routes, matrimonial relations and romantic partnerships to communist activities, a narrower definition would not apply. To add another layer of complexity, this thesis also examines the role of arrival infrastructures. Following Meeus *at al*, arrival infrastructures can be defined as *"those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled upon arrival, and where their future local or translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated."*[11] While infrastructures are regarded as governmental practice to funnel migration, networks are here regarded as platforms for the interaction of human beings which operate without the intervention of the (city) state. Hence, if the Hamburg port is an arrival infrastructure, the favours, information, and goods exchanged between seafarers form a network.

[11] Bruno Meeus, Bas van Heur, and Karel Arnaut, "Migration and the Infrastructural Politics of Urban Arrival" in Arrival Infrastructures. Migration and Urban Social Mobilities ed. Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut, and Bas van Heur (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 1.

The concept of "migrant possibility", demarcates another cornerstone of my analysis. It is understood as the range of action open to a non-elite[12] South Asian migrant within which he[13] can shape his own experience. The ability to lead a self-determined life, to possess certain legal rights, enjoy freedom of movement, and make use of the liberty to pursue a career or form a (romantic) partnership are but a few markers of migrant possibility. To acknowledge the ubiquitous presence of marginalization and discrimination, to trace the migrants' room for manoeuvre but also to acknowledge the limitations of their agency, the historiographic concept of "liminality" is helpful. Since the understanding of the term differs profoundly in academia depending on which school of thought applies it, a clear demarcation of my usage vis-á-vis others is necessary. In some academic fields, the concept is used analogously to the popular notion of "hybridity", especially in migration and diaspora studies. Authors like Virinder Kalra refer to the "*process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or 'hybrid identities'*", when talking about hybridity or liminality.[14]

Other scholars of migration have employed the term "liminality" either interchangeably with "marginalization" or to describe a prolonged process of social exclusion by policy makers.[15] This stands in contrast to my understanding of the concept, which foregrounds the transitional and temporary character of a *liminal period, moment, or space.*

Homi K. Bhabha's or Stuart Hall's descriptions of hybridity as "*the triumph of the postcolonial or the subaltern over the hegemonic*"[16] or more generally "*as the history of interracial identity*" are also unsuitable for the research project at hand.[17] This thesis does not require a celebration of the multi-cultural lifestyles but instead a tool to examine moments or periods of transitions during which social or cultural rules and limitations are suspended, leaving room for new ideas, courses of action, or identity formations. In agreement with Bjørn Thomassen's

[12] The concept of 'non-elite' is equally broad and loosely describes people from a comparatively lower educational or financial background who have at least temporarily worked in classical 'working-class' professions.

[13] The South Asian migrants studied here are exclusively male.

[14] Virinder S. Kalra, Raminder Kaur, and John Hutnyk. *Diaspora and Hybridity* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 71.

[15] Patricia Hynes, *The Dispersal and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seekers. Between Liminality and Belonging* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011), p. 23.

[16] Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity. Limits, Transformation, Prospects* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. 12.

[17] Ibid.

programmatic essay on the concept, I investigate how human reactions to these instances of liminality can "*shape their personality, suddenly foreground agency, and (sometimes dramatically) bind thought to experience*."[18]

Non-elite South Asian migrants often found themselves in these periods, moments, or spaces, either by chance, compulsion, or choice. Migration itself can be a liminal experience, as one is leaving one place for another, exchanging the familiar for the unknown. The journey, a spatial separation from one's known world, is marked by uncertainty and danger but also anticipation and excitement. Indians who travelled from India to Europe during the First World War were confronted with an event that had arguably shaken the socio-political order. Obed crossed the oceans as a *lascar* between 1915 and 1922, whereas Singh underwent the journey from Bombay to Marseilles in the capacity of a *sepoy* in the British Indian army in 1914, entering alien territory during wartime. According to Thomassen, liminality can be both social and personal, and it becomes particularly intense when these two converge.[19] The war allowed the migrants to abandon societal constraints and family obligations, cross the frontline, change allegiances, turn from farmer to *sepoy* to informer or from proof-reader to *lascar* to trader, in short: start a new life. Within this in-between space, the migrant finds room for manoeuvring to challenge power structures, pursue professional goals, and secure personal liberties.

While the concept of liminality rightfully foregrounds agency, the migrant subjects are confronted with oppressive power structures resulting in their perpetual marginalization. The German post-war society was marked by the wholesale collapse of the socio-economic order and thereby formed another liminal period. This instability enabled social reorientations, but it also facilitated the emergence of more sinister forces which would take a grip on society. Symbolized in the figure of the "trickster", the Weimar period gave rise to a racism on an unprecedented scale.[20] The ethnically homogenous nation state produced all kinds of

[18] Bjørn Thomassen, "Thinking with Liminality: To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept," in *Breaking Boundaries. Varieties of Liminality*, ed. Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 46.

[19] Ibid., p. 50.

[20] According to Thomassen, the trickster has particular affinities with liminal situations. He is perceived to present a solution to a crisis, but, as an outsider, is not actually interested in solving the liminal crisis. See Thomassen, *Thinking with Liminality*, p. 53.

exclusions. So-called foreigners were driven from the national labour market and from the access to citizenship rights.

Other scholars have engaged a concept of liminality similar to the one favoured here, without making their theorization explicit. Andrew Macdonald, in his doctoral thesis on the making of the South African international border between 1900 and 1950, examines how resourceful Indian merchants manipulated the notoriously porous border and ineffective migration regime to realize their own ends.[21] With a special focus on diasporic economic cultures, creolity, and critical biography, he tries to understand the influence these migrants brought to bear on 20th-century South African politics.[22] Another monograph employing a similar approach is the seminal work by Vivek Bald on the Indian diaspora in Harlem, New York, in the first half of the 20th century.[23] He looks at the settling strategies of Indian Muslims from East Bengal, most of whom had a seafaring background. After deserting their ships in one of the north Atlantic ports, they settled in the multi-ethnic neighbourhoods of East and lower Central Harlem, where they joined immigrants from Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the West Indies.[24] Occupying economic niches, they worked as street food vendors or opened small restaurants, serving traditional Pakistani or Bangladeshi dishes as well as American food such as steak and chicken wings, drawing from their experience as cooks on European ships.[25]

However, there are limits to the explanatory potential of the concept. Whereas it can illuminate periods of change in a single personality as well as social change and transition in large-scale settings, it cannot *explain* anything as such. Following Thomassen, human beings react to liminal experiences in different ways, which cannot easily be predicted.[26] Hence, other historiographical tools are required to make sense of the migrant experience and to determine the possibilities and limitations of their chances of settlement and for their social advancement. The following critical engagement with microhistory and historic biography is

[21] Andrew Mcdonald, "Colonial Trespassers in the Making of South Africa's International Borders 1900 to c. 1950", Doctoral thesis, St. John's College, Cambridge, August 2012.
[22] Macdonald, Colonial Trespassers, p. 26.
[23] Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013)
[24] Ibid., p. 166.
[25] Ibid., p. 174.
[26] Bjørn Thomassen, Liminality *and the Modern. Living Through the In-Between* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), p. 7.

therefore a prerequisite for a substantial expansion of my methodological tool kit. The suitability for, and the application of these concepts to my source material is discussed below.

Theoretical frameworks and concepts

Microhistory

Besides consulting concepts like liminality, the development of a historiographical method was crucial for a proper analysis of South Asian non-elite migration. A perspective was required, which allowed for the study of migrant lives in general in the absence of quantifiable data. A preliminary survey of the archival sources revealed a myriad of seemingly unreasonable, sometimes unintelligible but always enterprising and resourceful human actions. However, this thesis was not supposed to be about retrieving rare or exceptional cases of agency from the historical records – agency was omnipresent – but to investigate the rules and mechanisms which stimulated or contained it. To do justice to the diverse archival sources, the desired method needed to foreground individual actions, thoughts, and practices but, at the same, time take the historic background into account as a potential explanatory force of the individuals' behaviour. To complicate things further, it also needed to enable me to penetrate the semantic distortion and systematic silencing of the (western) archive, a structural problem known to many historians.

In the light of these challenges, certain concepts appeared more suitable than others. Firstly, microhistory proved to be a helpful tool to represent the experience of marginalized groups and individuals. Established by the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg in his seminal book "The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller" in the late 1970s and popularized in the following decades by scholars of cultural and colonial history, the concept seeks to analyse historic events, however small, in their wider context.[27] The monograph narrates the story of a 16th-century miller from a village in north-eastern Italy, who was tried before the Roman inquisition for his deviant religious beliefs and outrageous cosmology. Taking the heavily judgemental documents of his prosecutors as the vantage point of his investigation, Ginzburg meticulously reconstructs the world view of Domenico Scandella, called Menocchio. Ginzburg traced the trajectories of Menocchio's idiosyncratic thoughts.

[27] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

From the documents of his trial, the historian gathered the entire body of writings from which the miller claimed to have drawn his inspiration and connected the printed material to his ideas and theories. Taking these books as a conjuncture, Ginzburg reconstructed the miller's entire social network and exposed the amazing story of a highly connected miller who had preached his beliefs among his contemporaries for many years. Ginzburg's microhistorical analysis generated a great variety of results. From the world view and agency of an exceptional (or maybe not so exceptional) individual from the lower strata of society to the books circulating during that time, to the existence of a hybrid oral-written culture, to situating modern high culture in the oral tradition of peasant popular culture, the monograph draws a vivid picture of rural Italy in the 16th century viewed from below.

Ginzburg and Carlo Poni attempt a definition of the concept in a joint essay called "The Name and the Game. Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace."[28] Microhistory, in their opinion, allows for an intensive historical investigation "*at extremely close range*" of a relatively well defined smaller object, most often a single event, or "*a village community, group of families, even an individual person.*"[29] Much more than a methodological tool, microhistory is a theory, even a paradigm, which lends importance to the historical detail, illuminating the often-obscured realities of people facing marginalization. It was developed in opposition to the macroscopic and quantitative models, primarily adopted by the protagonists of the 'Annales school', that dominated the international historiographical scene between the mid-1950s and mid-1970.

Microhistory brought micro-level analysis to the centre of historiography. Without abandoning the commitment to social history, it expanded the latter's scope by incorporating the study of cultural relations. Through a comprehensive analysis of all material available about a single individual, a group, or a small-scale unit, the entire network of a subject's social relationships becomes tangible. The researcher is thereby able to go beyond the discursive level of a source and reveal what was or was not possible in a given age for a human being or a social group.

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[28] Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and the Game. Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace," in *Microhistory and the Lost People of Europe*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 1–10.

[29] Ibid., p. 3.

Some of the tools and concepts Ginzburg developed or borrowed for his undertaking are applicable to my own project. The oxymoron "normal exception", coined by Edoardo Grendi, is one of the conceptual tools, which helped me to make sense of the seemingly paradoxical actions of my lower-class subjects. According to Ginzburg, unusual life choices were much more common among the subordinated classes than the sources suggest. This has to do with our expectation of what 'normal behaviour' constitutes, as we tend to regard the marginalized as docile, submissive and preoccupied with survival. Ginzburg traces these transgressions back to the 18th century: as can be deduced from criminal statistics, a certain degree of deviation constituted the norm for non-elite individuals in preindustrial societies.[30] The "normal exception", inverted into "exceptional normal", points towards another benefit of the concept of liminality. It justifies the qualitative analysis of an exceptional case against the accusation of its statistical irrelevance:

> If the sources are silent about or systematically distort the social reality of the lower classes, then a truly exceptional […] document can be much more revealing than a thousand stereotypical documents.[31]

Often, the stories of exceptional people or communities function as clues towards the historic reality of the non-elite strata of society, which is often lost in the documentation of the elites. This allows the researcher to tap into a hidden world and to disclose the intentions of lower-class people, giving them the attention otherwise reserved for more upper-class protagonists. This notion reverberates strongly with the findings of my own research project. As Giovanni Levi has put it, looking at 'extreme' cases makes it possible to define the preconditions of liminal agency (popular culture, a biography, etc.), which is usually covered by a fragmentary and deformed archival record.[32] Following this understanding of theorizing the marginalized, this thesis explores the life trajectories of non-elite South Asian migrants to Northern Europe in the interwar period.

Historic Biography

[30] Ginzburg and Poni, *The Name and the Game*, p. 8.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Giovanni Levi, "The Uses of Biography," in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 70.

A second historiographical tool to make sense of my sources is "historic biography". The rich archival documentation of Hardas Singh and Henry Obed not only needed a close-range analysis of their migrant limits and possibilities but also an appropriate narrative form. The seemingly chaotic and incoherent succession of biographic episodes, events, moments, and snapshots as retrieved from the sources required a framework which would also emphasise the underlying structural patterns informing the migrants' choices and actions. It also needed to be able to showcase the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of South Asian non-elite migrants through the lens of individual protagonists.

Historic biography seemed the most suitable narrative as well as analytical form for these endeavours. Like microhistory, it has the objective to take a small entity, like an individual life or a singular event, to understand the workings of larger society. Carlo Ginzburg not only did a microhistory of 16th-century peasant society but also wrote the historic biography of one of its inhabitants. Menocchio's life story was taken as a token for a larger yet unknown structure of a wider totality.[33] Shahid Amin, to give another example, has famously analysed the events leading up to burning of the Chauri Chaura *thana* in 1922 as a demonstration of the multiple and sometimes contradictory strands within the seemingly monolithic Gandhian nationalist discourse.[34]

This narrative form is also particularly equipped to give voice to the marginalized. In recent years, historians have increasingly turned to historic biographies in their concern "*to explore the lives of marginal people who lived between cultures, or who transgressed the racial, ethnic and religious expectations of their societies*", as Barbara Caine has phrased it eloquently.[35] They have proven to be especially insightful in the studies of the Atlantic slave trade. Shifting the focus from numbers and structures to people and their experiences, the contributors of the edited volume "Biography and the Black Atlantic" have closed a long-standing void in this field of research. From their vantage point, slavery diversifies from being a singular, capitalist institution to multiple and diverse experiences of being enslaved.[36] By distancing themselves

[33] Matti Peltonen, "What is Micro in Microhistory?" In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, pp. 105–118 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 106.

[34] Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory. Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1995).

[35] Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), p. 24.

[36] Joseph C. Miller, "A Historical Appreciation of the Biographical Turn," in *Biography and the*

from the notion of a unanimous experience of domination and subordination, the authors re-defined the dynamic and unstable relationship between master and slave. Instead of converting any signs of vitality from enslaved people into markers of 'resistance', they focused on the infinite particularities of human perception. To sum up their argument:

> Biography bypasses generic 'slavery' and inherently contextualizes specific experiences of slaving in, both as results of and as contributors to, the varying compound historical processes of which they were part.[37]

Accordingly, my own research is not reduced to the objective of finding traces of 'resistance' in the behaviour of the marginalized. Without decentralizing their liminal status as migrant South Asians in an alien environment, I foreground their unique experiences in a particular space and time. Resistance, even if the most miniscule defiance of authority can retrospectively be interpreted in that sense, was seldomly the prime mover of migrants' social interactions. Historic biographies highlight the specific, flexibly changing strategies of the subordinated as they moved through the experiences of migration.

Although the exploration of the lives of little-known people has been on the agenda of historic biographers and microhistorians for some time now, the notion prevails that their subjects – political and social dissidents, petty criminals, humble workers, enslaved people, women – actually had little impact on the world around them.[38] This assumption is a relic of the long-standing tradition of biographical writing, which has, for decades, centred on influential figures of the public spheres. The intensive scrutiny of their thoughts and actions has shaped our understanding of what we consider impactful, often locating it in the political domain. The objective is to overcome this idea and show how marginal lives not only affected the world of those around them but also shaped socio-political events and developments to a considerable extent.

Another historiographic work which has productively made use of a biographical approach is Clare Andersons's monograph "Subaltern Lives. Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian

Black Atlantic, ed. Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 22.

[37] Miller, *A Historical Appreciation,* p. 28.

[38] Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 111.

Ocean World."[39] It looks at the transport of convicts across the Indian Ocean to penal settlements in the 19th century. Albeit different in geographical and temporal outlook, it shares with my thesis the objective of mapping the lives of marginalized people in a wider colonial framework. Similar to what Anderson calls a "life-writing" approach, *"weaving together the biographical snapshots of convicts […] with the lives of sailors, indigenous peoples and the 'poor whites' of Empire",*[40] my thesis explores the life histories of South Asian migrants to Europe with reference to the background of the various networks and social relations they were part of and contributed to.

We both reject the assumption, which is propagated by the theoretical underpinnings of *Orientalism,*[41] that it is methodologically impossible to write marginal life histories.[42] It seems to me that historic biography and microhistory are, in this respect, the ideal methodological tools to probe the extent of freedom an individual was able to exert in a specific setting despite the omnipresence of an overarching system of repressive norms, rules, and traditions. As mentioned above, the inevitable extraction of information about colonial and other marginalized subjects from sources created by their former masters and the consequent risk of reifying dominant stereotypes and oppressive frameworks are among the major challenges of this thesis. How these potentials pitfalls can be turned into a source of scientific insight is outlined in the following paragraphs, bringing the first section to a close.

Western archives and the history of the marginalized

Since this thesis relies heavily on British colonial records but also assesses German, Belgian, and Irish governmental, police, and judicial sources, to name just a few, a reflection on the usage of sources originating from such diverse geographical and political settings is necessary. This reflection must go beyond a discussion of "colonial knowledge" or "imperial archives", as the sources are not exclusively located in the colonial or imperial realm. Although my

[39] Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives. Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World*, *1790–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[40] Ibid., p. 1.

[41] According to Felix Wiedemann's understanding of Edward Said's definition of the concept, Orientalism is a system of representations originating in Europe in which 'Orient' and 'Occident' are juxtaposed against each other as opposites. The former is considered as the exotic, backward, ahistorical, static *Other* of the latter. By this representation of the Orient, the West defines itself as superior and legitimizes its rule over the world. Felix Wiedemann, "Orientalismus, Version: 1.0", *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, (19.4.2012), http://docupedia.de/zg/, (13.5.2021).

[42] Anderson, *Subaltern Lives*, p. 15.

subjects often found themselves outside the jurisdiction of the colonial state, the latter was never fully absent. Intelligence services and police authorities chased the migrants around the globe, carrying out interventions, which left long paper trails in the archives. In mainland Europe, colonial migrants were regarded with suspicion because of their presumed loyalty to the British Empire. As they crossed the borders of different nation states and subsequently shifted ideologies and affiliations, they contested the legal and social constructs of citizenship and national identity emerging in the late 19th and early 20th century and altered the ways in which they were perceived by contemporaries but also the state.

Non-elite colonial subjects who operated outside of the colonial world challenged European notions of belonging and otherness. European observers found it difficult to categorize the migrants, especially if they had no intention of returning to their countries of origin but settled in Europe on their own terms. The inability to assign them a place in their classification system collided with the imperative to deliver 'accurate' and meaningful reports to friends, audiences, or employers. If the popular image of a lower-class colonial subject (usually considered to be a revolutionary, an exotic performer, a smuggler, a molester of women, a medicine man, etc.) was at odds with what clerks, journalists, or police officers experienced in their actual encounters with the migrants, the perceptions were changed in hindsight to fit their ideological frameworks. To uncover potential additions, omissions, and framings is an important objective of this thesis.

For the interpretation of the life trajectories of South Asian seafarers in Northern Europe from a historically informed perspective, the juxtaposition of the historical with the absolute truth becomes important. We know that some events of the past, such as the acceleration of the anti-colonial movement in India or the transition from Kaiserreich to Republic in Germany after the First World War have actually happened. The role of the marginalized in these processes, however, is far from certain. This has to do with the way they are presented in the sources. More often than not, they appear as objects, numbers or quantities instead of subjects of a social history.[43] This presentation speaks to the historic truth, a discourse shaped by the limits of what could be said in a specific historic constellation about a certain topic. The rules of enunciation were defined by the expectations, the demands and routines of the

[43] Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery. A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 2.

authors, and the target audience of these documents, mostly police, immigration, military or intelligence officials. As Stephanie E. Smallwood has argued in her history of the transatlantic slave trade, these discourses never remained unchallenged. She sees the slavery archive as a contested site of knowledge production:

> […] one whose representational strategies support the daily practices of the slave ship and authorize an "accountable" history of slave trading that makes good satisfying sense to its intended readers, but which can never fully conceal the counter-history it seeks to disavow.[44]

In the myriad of supplementary words required to contextualize the numbers of a slave-trading ledger, Smallwood recognizes the "epistemological instability" or "epistemological anxiety" expressed in the failure to fully attain a seemingly disinterested transparency and matter-of-fact "mercantile writing."[45]

To approximate the historic realities of non-elite migrants, Smallwood's theorization that the story of the marginalized is already contained in the archive's rhetorical strategies of silencing and concealing other historical truths serves as a model. As mentioned before, I do not dismiss ideologically biased information as misguided western representations of a pristine indigenous reality. Without disregarding the unequal power relations woven into these documents, archival sources are considered as products of an encounter rather than a monologue of the powerful. A dominant agenda was constantly undermined by unexpected interventions, which can be taken as cues for a contingent reality by the researcher. As Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner argue in their introduction to the edited volume "Engaging Colonial Knowledge. Reading European Archives in World History":

> Regardless of the extent of their preconceptions and pre-acquired knowledge, even the most well-read Europeans would in many instances have been unprepared for what awaited them.[46]

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[44] Stephanie E. Smallwood, "The Politics of the Archive and History's Accountability to the Enslaved," *History of the Present* 6 No. 2 (2016): p. 118.

[45] Ibid., p. 125.

[46] Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner, "Introduction," ed. Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner, *Engaging Colonial Knowledge. Reading EuropeanArchives in World History*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 11.

The authors claim that all colonial narrations, images and classifications were embedded in actual cross-cultural encounters. Therefore, even the most purpose-driven documentations of these confrontations, such as police interrogation reports, surveillance reports and court protocols, contain voices of the marginalized. This holds true as well for archival material outside the immediate colonial historical context. All instances of knowledge-production, including representations of British Indian subjects by non-British European officials, have more than only one story to tell.

Notwithstanding the centrality of knowledge to power and governance, one should not overestimate the status of every document as a manifestation of European dominance. Some publications, reports, or minutes had very little influence, catered to a small audience and perhaps never left their production site. Moreover, knowledge created by western authorities was not always expressive of a misguided representation of the subordinated classes. Their perception and understanding of their object of inquiry was informed by personal, real-life experience and could change over time. Some accounts, as Wagner and Roque emphasize, "*could be sympathetic or even potentially 'accurate', according to current standards, in their description of non-Western societies*."[47]

Similarly, the historian Jürgen Osterhammel cautions against research projects, which investigate rhetoric strategies and semantic procedures involved in the production of otherness or alterity exclusively on a textual basis. According to him, it does make a difference whether a discourse is grounded in reality, depicts an approximation of it or completely departs from the researcher's understanding of the absolute truth. He reminds us of the coherence of certain mid-18th-century travellers' reports, intended to observe and describe their surroundings in a balanced way and as accurately as possible.[48] Likewise, texts authored by the British Secret Service or the Indian Political Intelligence [IPI] pooled a large amount of information into a conclusive picture of the situation at hand. They needed to be precise within their own logic because they laid the cognitive groundwork for clandestine operations.

[47] Ibid., p. 22.

[48] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013), pp. 24–5.

Since the colonized or marginalized are still objectified in these accounts, Roque and Wagner suggest studying colonial records "*in their biographical specificity, as things with singular trajectories."*[49] They should be approached as:

> artefacts, which entail particular epistemologies, imaginaries, political strategies, and cultural conventions, as well as being the product of specific material circumstances, bodily experiences, and sensory engagements with a concrete world.[50]

This argument reverberates in Ann Laura Stoler's reflections on knowledge and power. The anthropologist refuses to reject western archives as unworthy vessels of the past and advises scholars to regard them *"as cultural artifacts of fact production, of taxonomies in the making, and of disparate notions of what made up colonial authority."*[51]

Evoking Foucault, she cautions researchers to regard the archive as merely a sum of all texts preserved about a culture, or as an expression of the self-perception of those institutions responsible for this preservation.[52] Instead, she suggests using the repository as an abstract measure of what can and cannot be said in a specific political, cultural, or social framework. Within this system, certain rules determine, often by repetitions and cross-referencing, who is regarded as an authority and is therefore equipped with the faculties to generate truth. In order to reveal the mechanisms that legitimize certain forms of knowledge and delegitimize or silence others, it is pivotal to understand the genesis of these sources. In a reversion of what has become a standard practice among students of colonialism in the last twenty years, Stoler asks us to read the material "*along the archival grain*."[53] The inscription of differentiating categories and hierarchisations is linked to the moral and cultural principles that underlie the dominant culture. She advises:

> We need to read for its regularities, for its logics of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake – along the archival grain.[54]

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[49] Roque, *Introduction,* p. 14.

[50] Ibid., pp. 4–5.

[51] Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): pp. 87–109.

[52] Ibid., p. 96.

[53] Ibid., p. 100.

[54] Ibid.

This thesis follows the above scholars' recommendation to treat any source as a contested site of knowledge production. It examines the circumstances leading to a source's conception and considers the agenda of those who fight over its meaning. For example, a proposal of a solicitors' agency to members of the court, on the one hand, represents the position of the client but, on the other hand, also contains the agency's understanding of the situation. To give another example, an analysis of letters from prisoners in the Second World War must keep in mind both the rules of censorship as well as the writers' strategies to circumvent the censor.

No matter how carefully the context of a source is considered, a certain amount of ambiguity prevails. These moments of doubt must be articulated in any hypothesis or argument, which is built on a foundation of archival material. One of the most promising techniques to avoid premature conclusions is to back up the findings with corroborating evidence. More specifically, this means working with different kinds of archives and different types of sources. In the research process, the life stories of Hardas Singh and Henry Obed were traced in archives as diverse as states archives in Germany, India and Belgium, public archives in England, a military archive in Ireland, and the archives of institutions such as the International Center on Nazi Persecution in Bad Arolsen, Germany, just to name a few. To complicate the picture, the nature of the source material ranges across (contemporary) newspaper and journal articles, memoires, letters, court files, government records including police and intelligence sources, crew lists, patient files, and gravestone inscriptions. Knowledge produced by a state or a government institution can hence be juxtaposed with knowledge derived from interest groups, collectives, or private actors. The validity of one source can be interrogated by another one covering the same issue but whose authorship, timing, agenda, and audience differ to a significant extent. For example, Obed's self-proclaimed social advancement by means of a successful transnational exotic animal business was supported by the description of an article in a Catholic youth magazine lamenting the escape of his expensive monkeys from their cages.[55] Conversely, his allegedly habitual criminality promoted by the Hamburg police before his expulsion from the city was challenged by the

[55] IOR/L/PJ/12/477; Documentatiecentrum van de Antwerpse Noorderpolders, Jaarboek Katholieke Arbeidersjeugd Ekeren, 5.3.1939, „Een apenhistorie te Ekeren".

observations of the Antwerp immigration authorities, who found him a perfectly law-abiding citizen.[56]

Discussion of historiography

South Asian migration to Great Britain

South Asian migration to Great Britain started to gain momentum in the mid-19th century. A significant contribution to the history of the settlement of South Asians on the island is the pioneering and comprehensive study by Rozina Visram titled "Asians in Britain. 400 Years of History".[57] Among the first permanent residents were male and female dependents of British citizens returning to England from their service in the colony, as well as students, members of the Indian nobility, and *lascars*. Susheila Nasta observes that despite the higher visibility of the Indian elite, comprising of students, politicians, writers, lawyers and princes, the biggest section was made up of working-class and other non-elite migrants.[58] The group included *ayahs*, housemaids who accompanied their employers back to England, many thousand *sepoys,* who fought in Europe during the First World War and subsequently were a common sight in the streets of Brighton and Bournemouth; and *lascars,* colonial seafarers, who roamed the docklands of London, Bristol, Liverpool, Cardiff, and Glasgow while their ships berthed in the harbour. This acknowledgement of the numerical importance of working-class migrants aside, the book deals almost exclusively with the Indian elites' travels and encounters in Britain. One chapter is devoted to the experience of South Asian soldiers in the First World War, but other lower-class diasporas are completely missing.

Lower-class migration to Great Britain picked up in the late 19th century. The most comprehensive account of early Indian migration to Britain, both elite and subaltern, is provided by Michael H. Fisher's monograph titled "Counterflows to Colonialism. Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600 – 1857". In this volume, the historian devotes an entire chapter to *lascar* migration to London. In the early 19th century, a considerable floating population of Indian seamen inhabited the docklands, peaking in 1810 with over 1,400

[56] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196.

[57] Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain. 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

[58] Nasta, Susheila ed. *India in Britain. South Asian Networks and Connections* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 4.

individuals living there temporarily.[59] Back then, the sailors were not allowed to work the return voyage to India and hence had to be shipped back as passengers at the expense of the East India Company. Most of them lodged in a depot run by Abraham Gole in Shadwell until the winds were favourable for a sailing ship to leave for India.[60] After 1834, when the Company lost its monopoly over the East India trade, they were also no longer legally responsible for unemployed Indian seamen. Hence, an Indian community developed in Poplar and Limehouse, where entrepreneurial countrymen joined Britons in opening boarding houses.[61] Although they were now allowed to work their passage home, some *lascars* ventured into other professions and became artists' models, crossing-sweepers or petty traders.[62] Deportation was the preferred method to return Indians if they became homeless or financially destitute, but their legal status as "British subjects", which entitled them to move freely within the Empire, hampered their involuntary removal.

In the late 19th century, a new legislation precluded discharge except at ports in British India on the grounds that *lascars* discharged at foreign ports might turn destitute and become a burden to the state.[63] Subsequently, their presence in British ports stagnated despite rising employment figures in the British Merchant Marine due to the introduction of steam.[64] By 1914, small settlements of Indian sailors had been established in the dock neighbourhoods of major British port cities such as London, Glasgow, Cardiff and Liverpool.[65] Others followed suit. In the beginning, most of them lived in boarding houses especially designed to accommodate colonial seafarers. Financed by Christian missions or local philanthropists, some of whom were wealthy resident Indians, the migrants were exposed to the teachings of the Christian faith and suffered the impediment of their mobility by their so-called benefactors. The most famous institution of that sort was "The Strangers' House for Asiatics,

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[59] Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism. Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600–1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 140.

[60] Ibid., p. 151.

[61] Ibid., p. 390.

[62] Ibid., pp. 386–7.

[63] Gopalan Balachandran, "Cultures of Protests in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886–1945," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, no. 2 (November 2008): p. 48.

[64] Gopalan Balachandran, "Crossing the Last Frontier: Transatlantic Movements of Asian Maritime Workers, c. 1900-1945," in *The Connections between Maritime and Migration Networks*, ed. Torsten Freys, Lewis R. Fisher, Stéphane Hoste, and Stephan Vanfraechem (Newfoundland: St John's, 2007), p. 99.

[65] Nasta, *India in Britain*, p. 57.

Africans, and South Sea Islanders". Established in 1856 in Limehouse, the boarding house simultaneously served as a repatriation centre.

By the 1920s, desertion rates rose significantly.[66] The deserters mainly came from the Sylhet region in present-day Bangladesh. As they intended to return to India on European articles, they initially regarded their stay in Britain as only of temporary nature. From the 1930s onwards, more Indians began to migrate permanently.[67] They often lived on the margins of society, mingling with the English working class, surviving on a below-average income. Apart from begging and stealing, they made ends meet by selling religious tracts or "lucifer" matches, showcasing 'native' street performances, or sweeping the crossings of broad avenues. Those who lived a little less precariously worked in the domestic service, as casual labourers or as hawkers of 'Indian' articles.

Like the Chinese migrants, non-elite Indians opened cafés and boarding houses for their seafaring compatriots, often in joint ventures with their working-class English wives or girlfriends.[68] Such partnerships proved to be mutually beneficial. While the resident women, through their access to local networks, were able to help overcome language barriers and legalize the immigrants' status via marriage, the Indian breadwinners provided financial security and social mobility. These women were often pejoratively referred to as "Lascar Sally" or "Calcutta Louise", indicating that such liaisons were not only advantageous but were also subjected to disrespect and racism. Notwithstanding these challenges, some English wives became fluent in Indian languages and acted as interpreters for their Indian husbands.[69] This alliance was common in other destinations for African and Asian migrant seamen such as Liverpool, South Shields, and New York. Diane Frost mentions frequent intermarriages between West African seafarers and local women in Liverpool in the interwar period without, however, going into the details of these arrangements.[70] In fact, the article, apart from alluding to racism, racial violence, and high unemployment rates among the West African community, does little to illuminate migration experiences with respect to breadwinning and

[66] Balachandran, "Crossing the Last Frontier", p. 100.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Nasta, *India in Britain*, pp. 65–6.

[69] Ibid., p. 68.

[70] Diane Frost, "Racism, Work and Unemployment: West African Seamen in Liverpool 1880s – 1960s," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade. A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK*, ed. Diane Frost (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 30– 1.

socio-cultural practices. In the case of South Shields, David Byrne illustrates how Arab seamen became a sizeable minority in the 1920s and 1930s.[71] They mostly stayed in an area called Holborn where they inhabited lodging houses run by compatriots. Byrne argues that the appeal of Arab seamen, to local women, was their sobriety and overall good reputation as husbands and fathers. The surplus of women of marriageable age after the First World War might have worked as a catalyst for such unions.[72] These women, to some extent, bridged the gap between the newcomers and local society by making their partners eligible for welfare goods and citizenship rights through marriage.

Similar patterns of mutual aid are observable in the *lascar* community in Harlem in the same time period, as discussed below. They are also a feature of diasporic life in Hamburg, for the Chinese and South Asian new arrivals as well as for the marginally older African community. While the context of their migration is provided below, it is worth mentioning here that out of 82 Cameroonians who stayed in Germany after 1918, 41 are documented to have lived in partnerships with White women, most of which were eventually converted into marriages.[73] While the case of the Chinese community is looked at in detail in Chapter 1, the relationship of Indian migrants to German women is a common theme frequently taken up during the analysis of the historic biographies in Chapter 5 and 6.

South Asian migrants in Britain did not only occupy the lower strata of British society. The late 19th century witnessed the influx of Indian elites to the imperial centre. They came as physicians, barristers, engineers, merchants, traders, journalists, and students, some of whom made a reputation for themselves in their respective occupational fields. The most prominent representative was Frederick Akbar Mahomed, a pioneer of clinical research on high blood pressure.[74] Born in Brighton and privately educated, he won several prizes during his student years, gained membership of the Royal College of Physicians, and eventually secured a position as medical tutor and pathologist at St Mary's Hospital in 1875, aged only 24.

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[71] David Byrne, "Class, Race and Nation: The Politics of the 'Arab Issue' in South Shields 1919-39," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade. A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK*, ed. Diane Frost (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 91.

[72] Ibid., p. 97.

[73] Ibid., p. 88.

[74] Nasta, *India in Britain*, p. 74.

By the turn of the 20th century, the first Indian restaurants opened, a development observable in New York and Hamburg as well. Other migrants ran import-export businesses or tobacco shops. If their financial situation was sufficiently stable, the newcomers participated in the cultural life of their neighbourhood or town by setting up centres for social and cultural exchange or intellectual and political discussions.

The First World War was a catalyst for broader South Asian migration to Britain. Soldiers and non-combatant military workers crossed the ocean during the hostilities, opening the gates for other social groups. The movement gained momentum after the war, despite increasingly exclusionist measures introduced by the British government, conjured up to reverse the trend and meet the demands of those calling for an ethnically homogenous nation state.

During the war, the shortage of unskilled and semi-skilled labour was counterbalanced by the recruitment of colonial workers. Modern industrial warfare required the production of arms and ammunition, and the English workers who had been drafted into military service had to be replaced urgently. The demand for maritime labour rose simultaneously, since the distant theatres of war needed to be equipped with fighters and rations. In order to man the royal navy and maintain the supply chain, the *lascar* workforce was expanded. Contracts were extended up to 18 months, compared to a maximum of 12 months before the war.[75]

Those who jumped ship or singed off legally in the ports found employment in the various industries in and around London, Merseyside, and Clydeside. British employers who had previously been reluctant to hire non-White labour now enticed BAME[76] seafarers by offering higher wages than were available under ships' articles. Many seafarers worked in the Tate sugar refinery at Silvertown and at Lever Bros in Merseyside as well as in shipbuilding and engineering firms. However, not all Indians employed in English factories were former seamen. At least 200 trained artisans and mechanics from Bombay and the Punjab, earning their passage as sailors, worked in munition factories and other industries.[77]

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, many discharged Indian industrial labourers and surplus *lascars* refused to return to India having settled in Britain. Offers for voluntary repatriation were rejected and deportations were legally difficult due to their status

[75] Ibid., p. 196.

[76] Black Asian Minority Ethnic.

[77] Visram, *Asians in Britain,* p. 198.

as imperial citizens. Thus, there soon emerged a pool of unemployed Indian labourers in Britain.

The competitive job market, exacerbated by the return of the demobilised White soldiers, in combination with general racial prejudice, led to a series of race riots and attacks against the South Asian population between 1919 and 1921.[78] The hostilities eventually found expression in the notorious Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order in 1925, which required Asian, African and South Asian seamen to register with the police as "aliens", whether or not they had been in Britain for more than two months since their initial arrival.[79] If they could not produce the papers proving their belonging to the British Empire, meaning that they were born in one of the colonies, they were liable for exclusion from the job and housing market and threatened with deportation.[80] For colonial seamen, proving their British nationality was difficult, because they generally only carried a Seamen's Certificate of Discharge in lieu of a passport, but that certificate was not considered a valid identity document under the Order. As Laura Tabili argues, rather than being a manifestation of racial hostility promoted by the White maritime labour unions against their Black co-workers, the legislation was an attempt to restrict colonial labourers' access to the British labour market.[81] The seamen were to be confined to labour contracts negotiated in the colonies in order to undermine their efforts at finding shore employment or maritime work under European articles. Government attempts to regulate the labour market by reifying contested notions of racial difference into pieces of legislation were observable during the same time in Germany as well, affecting the migration prospects for non-elite Indian migrants, seafarers or not. The thesis deals with this issue extensively in Chapter 2.

Indian upper-class migration was less affected by these mechanisms of exclusion. Upper-class migrants occupied the positions of civil servants at the India House in London, functioned as program organisers at the BBC, or came as students, doctors, and civil engineers. Economic

[78] See, for example, Neil Evans, "Across the Universe: Racial Violence and the Post-War Crisis in Imperial Britain, 1919 – 25," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade. A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK*, ed. Diane Frost (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[79] Visram, *Asians in Britain*, p. 198.

[80] Laura Tabili, "The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925," *Journal of British Studies* 33, no. 1 (1994): p. 56.

[81] Ibid., p. 86.

opportunities in the commercial exchange with their native country attracted merchants and businessmen.[82]

Despite these government initiatives aimed at its restriction, non-elite Indian migration continued between 1919 and 1947. In this period, the diaspora expanded beyond the United Kingdom, with the first Indians arriving in Hamburg in the 1920s. While they tentatively explored the possibilities of permanent settlement in Germany, South Asians had already been established in Britain for generations. According to data from the Indian National Congress survey of all "Indians outside India" in 1932, an estimated 7,128 Indians resided in Britain.[83] Besides the industrial labourers and dock workers, new distinct groups of working-class migrants arrived after the First World War. They occupied professional fields, which came to shape migrant life in Hamburg as well. For example, young men, largely from the Punjab, described as agriculturalists in their passports, entered the scene as itinerant traders, selling ready-made clothes from door to door.

The global institutionalization of the passport regime and the proliferation of "citizenship" as the defining category of affiliation to a nation state are but two examples of a paradigm shift in the early 20th century. With the mechanisms of exclusion becoming more technological and bureaucratic, enhanced by new surveillance technologies and rise of the visa- and passport system, fostered by the deprivation of access to fundamental rights and social participation after the migrant's arrival, people on the margins started to interact more and more with these vectors of power.[84] The universalization of these concepts simultaneously provoked their contestation. The migrants eluded the state's access to their bodies and identities by crossing borders illegally, by unremittingly claiming their rights to passport documents and by challenging the notions of belonging and otherness by making use of the inherent inconsistencies and impracticalities of these exclusionary ideologies and legislations.

The situation of the South Asian migrants to Great Britain was, to some extent, similar to that of the South Asian settlers in Hamburg. Given that financial destitution often meant repatriation, a correlation Chapter 2 unfolds, Indian seamen and itinerant traders with limited monetary means resumed paid work quickly. In the dock neighbourhoods of the major

[82] Visram, Asians in Britain, p. 255.

[83] Ibid., p. 254.

[84] John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport. Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 108–17.

European port cities, a pre-existing social infrastructure facilitated the start to a new life. In Britain, lodging houses and cafés run by Arabs, Indians, Malays, Chinese, and Maltese migrants were important anchoring points, while, in Hamburg, newcomers followed the example of the Chinese migrant population and sought employment in economic niches. Some newly opened shops, bars, and restaurants catered explicitly to the floating seafaring population.[85] Unlike in England, there were no kinship ties or village bonds to support the newly arrived. However, the depreciated value of the German currency in the early 1920s incited a small number of South Asians to move from Britain to Hamburg.[86]

In the interwar years, jobs were scarce even for the local population. Therefore, so-called 'foreigners' had to be extremely resourceful and flexible in their choice of occupation if they wanted to sustain themselves, earning their living in experimental ways. Since English and German nationals were given preference in the allocation of wage labour in their respective countries, and jobs were only given to non-nationals in the absence of a local worker to take the job, Indians usually resorted to self-employment. In England, the slightly more inclusive labour market allowed them to take up casual work in the hospitality business, as dock labourers, as firemen in the flour mills, or as porters.[87] Former seafarers often became sellers of 'oriental fragrances', herbal medicines, or clothes. Others opened Indian restaurants serving 'curry and rice' to Indian *lascars*.[88] In Hamburg, those who did not open shops or cafés ventured into the import-export business with India.[89] Reduced chances for casual employment, for example as hawkers or port workers, forced the Indian migrants in Hamburg to either occupy extremely small niches such as the *lascar*-oriented businesses or to monetize their trade networks to India. Perhaps as a result of these limitations, some operated in the semi-legal realm of the shadow economy, smuggling contraband or selling drugs.[90]

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the lives of working-class Indians changed significantly. In Britain, some seafarers quit their precarious work on shore to take up their old profession under improved conditions. Others gave up peddling for a more secure and remunerative employment in factories and other war-related industries in London, Glasgow,

[85] For example, Hardas Singh (Chapter 5), Henry Obed (Chapter 6) and Mubarak Ali (Chapter 2).

[86] For example, Henry Obed (Chapter 6) and Syed Amir Hasan Mirza (Chapter 5).

[87] Visram, *Asians in Britain*, pp. 258–9.

[88] Ibid., p. 280.

[89] For example, Syed Amir Hasan Mirza (Chapter 6) and B. B. Eranee (Introduction).

[90] For example, Henry Obed (Chapter 6) and Mubarak Ali (Chapter 2).

and in the Midlands. Overall, the Indian government and its subjects contributed hugely to sustaining Britain in the war, manning the military and the merchant marine but also supplying the Imperial army with raw materials.[91]

On the European mainland, the rise of fascism throttled South Asian immigration, and many Indian residents were pushed out of their professions. Even most of the elite political activists such as A.C.N. Nambiar and V. N. Chattopadhyay left Germany to escape racial violence and persecution.[92] The "Indian Information Bureau" in Berlin was broken up by the Nazis in 1933[93] and vibrant spaces of cross-cultural and religious encounters, such as the Ahmadiyya mosque in Berlin ceased operations as the Muslim missionaries were expelled.[94] Contrary to this trend, the shipping industry hired South Asian and Chinese seafarers in increasing numbers after a short decline caused by the global economic crisis. The shipping companies had asserted their demands for cheap foreign labour against the protests of White unions and the rationale of national socialist employment policy.[95]

Black and colonial migration to Germany

As outlined in the paragraphs above, there was no significant South Asian presence in Germany prior to the First World War. There emerged, however, a small African diaspora in the colonial period between 1885 and 1914. Although they later came to share a geographical space, the two communities barely mingled. The conditions for their respective diasporas were so fundamentally different that a comparison is useful to demarcate important pillars of the South Asian experience. Therefore, the wider migration from the German colonies is incorporated into the narrative.

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[91] Visram, *Asians in Britain*, p. 341.

[92] Benjamin Zachariach, "Indian Political Activities in Germany, 1914–1945," in *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India. Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander, and Douglas T. McGetchin (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 146.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Gerdien Jonker, "Das Moscheearchiv in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. Zwischen muslimischer Moderne und deutscher Lebensreform," *MIDA Archival Reflexicon*, 2019, https://www.projekt-mida.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Jonker-Gerdien-Das-Moscheearchiv-in-Berlin-Wilmersdorf.pdf.

[95] Hartmut Rübner „Ausländer nach Möglichkeit sofort aus der Schifffahrt ausmerzen...". Konflikte um die Beschäftigung chinesischer und indischer Seeleute auf den Schiffen der Bremer Ostasienlinien vom Kaiserreich bis in den NS-Staat, " in *Passagen nach Fernost. Menschen zwischen Bremen und Ostasien*, ed. Peter Kuckuk (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2004), pp. 82–3.

The majority of the early African arrivals were from the Cameroonian elite, who chose to send their children to Germany for vocational training. These children came in the hundreds to undertake formal schooling or apprenticeships, which would make them eligible for a position in the administration of the 'protectorate'. Their skills included carpentry, joinery, masonry, metal working, tailoring, cooking, and shoe making.[96] They enjoyed full compensation of their expenses by the colonial administration, including travel costs, accommodation in smaller towns in the care of host families, and clothing. Once their education or vocational training was completed, they were expected to return to Cameroon and put their skills to work. In this period, colonial migration was temporary and scattered across Germany. Community building in the metropoles of Berlin and Hamburg only started during the war, as we will see below.

A second migrant group included personal servants of colonial officials or Christian missionaries and participants in ethnological exhibitions. Usually, they returned after the termination of their professional contracts. Out of the 103 Africans who took part in the first German Colonial Exhibition in Berlin in 1886, only 21 were granted permission to stay in Germany.[97] One Togolese entrepreneur set up his own performance group, which included two of his wives, while the others were taken on as apprentices in different industrial occupations. Not all of them returned to their respective countries of origin after the completion of their training. Half of them remained in Germany during the 1920s. The authorities had probably lost track of them or were not too concerned about a few Africans in Germany.

A third group came as part of the increasingly international labour force of the German merchant fleet. The biggest employer of African labour was the Woermann Line, a Hamburg-based shipping company specialized in the Africa trade and heavily involved in the German colonial project. They hired so-called "Kru-boys" off the west African coast during voyages to the company-owned trading houses. During the violent suppression of the uprising of the Herero and Nama 1904–1907 in German Southwest-Africa, present day Namibia, Woermann ships manned by Black sailors were chartered by the German government to supply troops

[96] Robbie Aitken, "Education and Migration: Cameroonian Schoolchildren and Apprentices in Germany, 1884–1914," in *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250–1914*, ed. Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne-Kuhlmann, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 217.

[97] Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black Germany. The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 23; p. 56.

and rations to the colony.[98] However, Black sailors only accounted for a small proportion of Germany's merchant personnel, and their presence in the ports was therefore negligible compared to Chinese or South Asian crew members.[99]

As the First World War terminated German colonial ambitions, passage from the former 'protectorates' was closed. While the first Chinese and South Asian migrants started arriving in the port cities, African migration almost came to a complete standstill. Those who were still in Germany by 1914 found themselves stranded in a country which now regarded them as enemy aliens. Their return required the permission of the new rulers of the former 'protectorate', either England or France, which was often not granted. Hence, the formerly transient population, moving between colony and metropole, settled into small clusters of permanent residents.[100] The migrants formed communities along kin and friendship lines tracing back to their African roots or built new networks based on their experience in Germany.[101] When migrants had lost their status as colonial subjects and the concomitant access to German nationality and citizenship rights, these support networks became crucial for their survival in Germany, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Diasporic communities emerged in various parts of Germany, the largest being in the metropolitan cities of Berlin and Hamburg. Whereas in Berlin migrant communities spread across the city, with some concentration in Schöneberg and Wilmersdorf, in Hamburg they conglomerated in Sankt Pauli and Altona.[102] They shared a physical space with the Chinese and South Asian migrants, sometimes living on the same street or the same block. As Chapter 3 analyses in further detail, their paths intersected on a regular basis, either on their way to work or during evening recreation in Hardas Singh's "Indian Bar". Despite these crossovers, the African community remained rather separate from the other migrant groups as well as from the ethnic German population, forming their own networks and associations.

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[98] Sybille Küttner, *Farbige Seeleute im Kaiserreich. Asiaten und Afrikaner im Dienst der deutschen Handelsmarine* (Erfurt: Edition Tempus, 2000), pp. 27–8.

[99] Robbie Aitken, "A Transient Presence: Black Visitors and Sojourners in Imperial Germany, 1884–1914," *Immigrants and Minorities* 34, no.3 (2016): p. 248.

[100] Robbie Aitken. "Germany's Black Diaspora. The Emergence and Struggles of a Community, 1880s–1945," in *The Black Diaspora and Germany. Deutschland und die Schwarze Diaspora*, ed. BDG Network, (Münster: Edition Assemblage, 2018), pp. 91–3.

[101] Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, p. 64.

[102] Ibid., p. 121; p. 125.

What set the different ethnicities apart, firstly, were the reasons for their migration. Whereas most Chinese and South Asian migrants shared a seafaring heritage, the Cameroonians came as colonial subjects under the patronage of the German state. They were barred from those economic niches appropriated by the Asians, such as the hospitality busines or retail, but they created their own exclusive occupational spaces in the capacity of performing artists, language teachers, and artisans after their training or educational contracts had ended.[103] Some worked in a more working-class milieu as doormen, waiters, or porters, while others took advantage of their colonial background to venture into the import and export business. Secondly, economic opportunities were to some extent determined by the prejudices and presuppositions the German 'audience' or 'customers' had of the respective migrant group. Whereas the Indian and Chinese businesses catered to a wider clientele, including seafarers from all nationalities as well as the local working class, the African stores and cultural centres were reserved for members of their own community by design. Chinese dance venues and laundry services held an important place in the cultural representations of the Sankt Pauli neighbourhood and added to its perceived cosmopolitan atmosphere, sought after by tourists and journalists. References to African presence were much less frequent and often infused with negative and derogatory evaluations. Racist ideas about their 'rightful' place in society pushed Black people into economic niches in which they were accepted by the White German population. Aitken and Rosenhaft analyse how these ideas shaped their working experience:

> The multifarious ways in which they made a living are characterized by a central paradox: getting on in Germany often depended on exploiting the things that made them different from other Germans.[104]

Their skin colour rendered Black migrants attractive as 'exotic' performers, for example in jazz bands on the Reeperbahn. As they capitalized on stereotypes about their culture and traditions, turning their perceived 'otherness' into a commodity, they also reinforced their liminal status.

Racism against people of colour was omnipresent in German society even before the rise of Nazism turned resentment into policy. An instructive example of cross-partisan discrimination

[103] Aitken, *Germany's Black Diaspora*, pp. 92–3.

[104] Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, p. 119.

is the media campaign against the occupation of the Rhineland by African colonial soldiers. In its enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles, the French government stationed Black troops from Tunisia, Morocco, Madagascar, Algeria and Senegal in the industrial area west of the Rhine River. Protests against the occupation culminated in a massive scandalization of the presence of Black soldiers in a 'White' country, with protestors defaming the Africans as instinct-driven brutes who excessively molested and raped German women and thereby racially contaminated the German people.[105] With the help of modern mass media and the support of German authorities, politicians from all parties (except the USPD), and a wide range of organizations created in the course of the protests, the campaign accused the non-White soldiers of gruesome atrocities and represented them as violent beasts.

While early scholarly debates surrounding the "Black Shame" interpret it as a strategic propaganda campaign against the French occupation and the Treaty of Versailles in general, more recent works have dissected the racist, nationalist, and gendered dimensions of the phenomenon. Gisela Lebzelter, for example, argues that the arrival of colonial troops intensified Germany's feelings of national humiliation and threatened to overthrow established racial and gender hierarchies.[106] The first English-language monograph on the subject, titled "The Propaganda War in the Rhineland" by Peter Collar, looks at the different players and their divergent, sometimes contradictory agendas in the campaign.[107] Under scrutiny are actors and institutions as diverse as women's organizations, publicly funded propaganda outlets and private initiatives. In Collar's assessment, the tensions in the political activism against the Black troops mirror the fractures and fissures of a divided Weimar society. This division determined the experiences of Black people and people of colour in general, leaving them susceptible to the goodwill or aversion of their White counterparts, as this thesis will demonstrate.

In her recent contribution to the "Black Shame" debate, Iris Wigger combines the various perspectives treated separately by Collar by looking at the intersections of race, nation, gender and class in the context of the campaign. She understands the protests, which were

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[105] Iris Wigger, *The 'Black Horror on the Rhine.' Intersections of Race, Nation, Gender and Class in 1920s Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 3.

[106] Gisela Lebzelter, "Die „Schwarze Schmach." Vorurteile-Propaganda-Mythos", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 11, no.1 (1985): pp. 39–41.

[107] Peter Collar, *The Propaganda War in the Rhinelan. Weimar Germany, Race and Occupation after World War I* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2013).

not limited to Germany but spread to England and the United States, in the context of a universalized belief system, which constructed Black people as racially inferior by attributing to them animalistic as well as infantile traits. She explores how this system was instrumentalized to call for the cohesion of all ethnic Germans and to unite White people across class boundaries against the "national humiliation" of the French occupation.[108]

The campaign reverberated into the everyday personal life of Black people living in Germany. It reinforced existing racist sentiments in the White German population. The debate concerning the civic status of children fathered by the occupying forces, derogatorily called "Rheinlandbastarde" (Rhineland bastards), also affected mixed-race children born to civilians.[109] Since it was legally impossible to deny German citizenship to children of foreign Black soldiers and German women (unlike the offspring of former German colonial subjects who could be more easily disenfranchised because of a special legislation in the 'protectorates'), their exclusion was enforced by stressing the alleged moral and physical (even pathological), inferiority of mixed-race children in general and the consequent 'degeneration' of the White German "Volkskörper" (body of German people).[110] In 1937, drawing on data collected as early as 1923, national socialist functionaries started the sterilization of all the Afro–German children they were able to locate, including those whose parents had migrated from the colonies.[111] The operation, which was illegal at the time, was carried out in local hospitals under the auspices of the resident medical personnel. It can be regarded as an ideological continuation and direct consequence of the racist campaign against the Rhineland occupation and the social exclusion of Black migrants from the colonies in the early 1920s.

Although the foreign office, in the early years of the national socialist regime, was eager to maintain friendly diplomatic relations with foreign powers, the rise of fascism had a catastrophic impact on the African and South Asian diasporas. Little comfort was gained from the fact that the National Socialist regime never had an explicit policy to physically exterminate Black or Asian people, as they still suffered from social exclusion, legal

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[108] Wigger, '*The Black Horror on the Rhine*', p. 217.

[109] Fatima El-Tayeb, *Schwarze Deutsche. Der Diskurs um „Rasse" und nationale Identität 1890 –1933* (Frankfurt/ Main: Campus, 2001), pp. 170–1.

[110] Ibid., pp. 167–71.

[111] Ibid., pp. 188–90.

discrimination, and physical violence. In their political agenda towards the Afro–German population, the Nazi regime was in a cynical dilemma. Black people, on the one hand, were regarded as racially inferior and therefore to be excluded from the German "Volksgemeinschaft".[112] On the other hand, party officials feared that openly discriminatory measures would have negative consequences for the desired reclamation of the former German colonies. They needed the symbolic endorsement of their former African 'subjects' to make this claim appear credible.[113] Eventually, race hatred trumped colonial ambitions, and many Afro–Germans, Black migrants, and soldiers died in German concentration camps.[114]

The South Asian population was probably too insignificant numerically to attract the attention of the racist state. Certain interpretations of the Nazi ideology regarded people from the Indian subcontinent as members of the 'Aryan' race, even if of a degenerated kind.[115] This led to strategic alliances and favourable treatment of elite Indians in Germany. Especially within the circles of higher education and politics, the cooperation intensified if the migrants complied with Hitler's regime, as discussed below.

These exemptions should not deflect from the fact that African, Afro–German, and (South) Asian residents, especially from the lower echelons of society, suffered excruciating discrimination the 1930s and 1940s. Many had to exchange their German identity cards for a "Fremdenpass" (alien's ID-card), which could render its owner stateless and hence less eligible for social benefits. The residents and their families were increasingly excluded from schools, universities, and employment opportunities. They regularly had to report their whereabouts the local police, making international travel almost impossible, and were not allowed to marry.[116] In Hamburg, the small Chinese community was destroyed in one single raid in May 1944, when the Gestapo arrested and displaced all Asian-looking people and friends in what they called the "Chinesenaktion".[117]

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[112] This can roughly be translated into "the community of ethnic Germans".

[113] Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, *Treu bis in den Tod. Von Deutsch-Ostafrika nach Sachsenhausen-Eine Lebensgeschichte* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2008), pp. 74–5.

[114] Ibid., pp. 154–5.

[115] Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van de Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 83–6.

[116] El-Tayeb, *Schwarze Deutsche*, p. 197.

[117] Lars Amenda, *Fremde, Hafen, Stadt. Chinesische Migration und ihre Wahrnehmung in*

South Asian elite migration to Germany

As compared to the working-class migration from South Asia, China, and Africa to Britain and Germany, Indian upper-class migration was less affected by exclusionist practices. They came as academics, physicians, political activist, travellers, merchants, or industrialists and settled under completely different auspices than their non-elite compatriots. Looking at this parallel development with its own dynamics helps us understand the framework for non-elite South Asian migration. Their example serves as a foil for the perceptions of more marginalized migrants, as the elite established the norm against which all other groups were measured.

Eminent historians such as Kris Manjapra, Heike Liebau, Joachim Oesterheld, Elija Horn, Razak Khan and others have studied academic, religious, political, and high-cultural Indo–German relations.[118] Manjapra's book "Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire"[119] traces the various schools of thought that brought Indian thinkers into conversation with German-speaking scholars on an intellectual level, but Manjapra only peripherally acknowledges the impact of physical encounters between these groups. Other pioneering contributions in this field of research are Joachim Oesterheld's work on Zakir Husain, a PhD student in Berlin between 1925 and 1927 who later became the third president of India, and, more recently, Razak Khan's theorizations on South Asian Muslim students in Germany.[120]

Hamburg 1897–1972 (Munich: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 2006), pp. 270–1.

[118] Kris Manjapra, "The Illusions of Encounter: Muslim 'Minds' and Hindu Revolutionaries in First World War Germany and After," *Journal of Global History* 1, no.3 (2006): pp. 363–382; Heike Liebau, "Networks of Knowledge Production. South Asian Muslims and German Scholars in Berlin (1915-1930)," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no.2 (2020): pp. 309–21; Joachim Oesterheld, "Zum Spektrum der indischen Präsenz in Deutschland von Beginn bis Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Fremde Erfahrungen: Asiaten und Afrikaner in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Schweiz bis 1945*, ed. Gerhard Höpp. (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1994): Elija Horn, "New Education, Indophilia and Women's Activism: Indo-German Entanglements, 1920s to 1940s," *Südasien-Chronik –South Asia Chronicle* 8 (2018): pp. 79–109.

[119] Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement. German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[120] Joachim Oesterheld, "Zakir Husain. Begegnungen und Erfahrungen bei der Suche nach moderner Bildung für ein freies Indien," in *Akteure des Wandels: Lebensläufe und Gruppenbilder an Schnittstellen von Kulturen*, ed. Petra Heidrich and Heike Liebau, pp. 105–30., (Berlin: Verlag Das Arabische Buch, 2001); Razak Khan, "Entangled Institutional and Affective Archives of South Asian Muslim Students in Germany," *Mida Archival Reflexicon,* 2019. https://www.projekt-mida.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RKhan_Archivfuehrer_South-Asian-Muslim-Students-in-Germany.pdf; Razak Khan, "Entanglements of Translation: Psychology, Pedagogy, and Youth Reform in German and Urdu," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 2 (2020): pp. 295–308.

South Asian elites were initially only marginally affected by the outbreak of the First World War. Although they were officially deemed "enemies of the state" when Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, most students and businessmen only had to report to the police occasionally and were otherwise undisturbed.[121] If necessary, they could rely on patronage networks and longstanding business relations. For example, the Hamburg-based Parsi merchant B. B. Eranee, an importer of chemical dyes to Bombay from Germany, asked the Prussian government in 1915 to grant him permission to leave Germany in order to be able to continue his operations from India. The petition was strongly endorsed by his German partner and supplier, Chemische Fabriken vorm. Weiler-ter Meer, and a positive decision followed.[122]

During the war, Indian nationalists, as well as anti-imperialists of different political persuasions, who had immigrated to Germany to avoid persecution in India or to connect with like-minded people in Europe, were courted by the German authorities to collaborate with them against the British. Under the assurance of financial and military support in liberating India from colonial rule, some emigrants were organised in the Indian Independence Committee [IIC] in Berlin in mid-1915. They were recruited from the entire German-speaking area, including Austria-Hungary and Switzerland, and they worked closely together with the German Foreign Office.[123] Their main task was to carry out propaganda activities among the South Asian prisoners of war with the objective of recruiting them for military operations to Turkey and the Persian Gulf or simply breaking their loyalty to England.[124] The Indians' commitment to the German ambitions in the Middle East secured them favourable treatment in post-war Germany, at least for a while. Unable to return to their country of origin, many settled in Berlin. The city became a centre of anti-imperial agitation and intellectual exchange in the early years of the Weimar Republic.

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[121] Franziska Roy, "South Asian Civilian Prisoners of War," in *'When the war began we heard of several kings.' South Asian prisoners of World War I Germany*, ed. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, and Ravi Ahuja (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011), p. 58.

[122] StAHH, 132-1 I, 3816, Behandlung der in Hamburg befindlichen Inder.

[123] Frank Oesterheld, „Der Feind meines Feindes ist mein Freund" – Zur Tätigkeit des Indian Independence Committee (IIC) während des Ersten Weltkrieges in Berlin," Magisterarbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades Magister Artium im Fach Neuere/Neueste Geschichte, Berlin, den 6. September 2004, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, pp. 27–8.

[124] Roy, "South Asian Civilian Prisoners", pp. 53–95.

The period of the Weimar Republic was marked by a comparatively liberal and open-minded attitude towards South Asia in bourgeois circles. As the exchange was considered culturally enriching and intellectually stimulating, many reached out to Indian artists or scholars. The early 1920s saw an extraordinary increase in Indo–German entanglement in the context of a globally felt internationalism. Although the decidedly anti-imperialist outlook of some student circles concerned the Weimar government, the authorities were reluctant to break up these networks. Since many of them had supported Germany during the war and had garnered deepened affection on an intellectual and spiritual level in the aftermath, they were tolerated by the regime. Still, many former IIC members lived precariously. In the absence of passports and working permits, their residential status was at the mercy of the German police.[125]

The entanglement was perhaps most visible in interwar academia. Indian scholars and students taught and studied at German universities, most prominently in Berlin. Two famous examples of long-lasting Indo–German intellectual exchange are the Kheiri brothers. In the early 1920s, the Islamic scholars Abdul Jabbar Kheiri and Abdul Sattar Kheiri enrolled at Berlin University.[126] They belonged to the Muslim educated middle class in Delhi and had studied in Beirut and Istanbul before the First World War forced them to seek refuge in Germany. As part of their extracurricular activities, Jabbar founded the Academic Muslim Society "Islamia" (Akademisch-Islamische Vereinigung "Islamia") in 1924, a vibrant space of cross-cultural interaction for Muslim students from different countries, while Sattar participated in the "Indian Association" (Verein für Inder) in Berlin-Halensee, organising sports events for young students from India.[127] Both completed their doctoral dissertations in Germany (Jabbar studied state sciences and law, Sattar arts) and returned to India in 1929 and 1930 respectively. Upon his return to Muslim University in Aligarh, where both brothers had studied 30 years before, Sattar promoted National Socialist ideas he had come to endorse in Germany.[128]

Not all Indian scholars, however, were enamored by fascism. The Indian nationalist Muslim, translator, and educationalist Sayyid Abid Husain, who enrolled as a PhD candidate with the well-known German educationalist and psychologist Eduard Spranger in 1922, was never a

[125] Oesterheld, „Der Feind meines Feindes ist mein Freund", p. 99.
[126] Liebau, *Networks of Knowledge Production*, p. 314.
[127] Ibid., p. 315; p. 317.
[128] Ibid., p. 316.

firm political spokesman.[129] In addition to other Indian Muslim students in Berlin, he also befriended the Jewish women Gerda Philipsborn.[130] Husain translated many of Spranger's influential writings on youth psychology and education long after leaving Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin in 1926 for Jamia Milia Islamia in Delhi, and he saw his work in the tradition of progressive intellectual exchange between India and Germany.[131]

When fascist opinions gained momentum, even the Indian elite's presence in Germany was viewed more critically. Ideological proximity to fascist ideas and political collaboration became a prerequisite for acceptance. Some Indians enjoyed temporary privileges and were able to further their careers under the conditions that they at least appeared to embrace fascism. Most prominently, the Indian revolutionary Subhash Chandra Bose cooperated with the Nationl Socialist regime between 1941 and 1943. He was hoping to forge an anti-British alliance between Indian residents in Germany and the German government.[132] His presence at the inauguration of the Indo-German friendship society in Hamburg's town hall in 1942, accompanied by mayor Krogmann and twenty-two SS officials, shows how deeply he was involved with Nazi circles.[133] He actively broadcasted a successful radio program directed at the Indian population of Germany and founded the "Indian Legion". The latter was comprised of Indian prisoners of war in Germany, who were trained by the Waffen SS for a potential invasion of British-India via Iran.[134]

Indian academic and professional careers could also thrive under National Socialism. Abdul Quddus Faroqui, the father of the famous Indo–German filmmaker Harun Farocki and the equally famous historian Suraiya Faroqui, was able to study medicine and aeroplane engineering in Berlin and Hamburg during the war years undisturbed. Abdul Quddus seemed to have broadcasted for the Nazis in English and Hindustani and participated in propaganda directed at Indian prisoners of war, mirroring the German strategy of psychological warfare during the First World War.[135] After 1945, he practiced medicine in Hamburg and stayed there

[129] Khan, *Entanglements of Translation*, p. 304.
[130] Ibid., p. 297.
[131] Ibid., pp. 300–1.
[132] Jan Kuhlmann, "Die Indische Legion im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Interkulturelle Menschenführung zwischen Atlantikwall und Wehrmachtsgefängnis," *Südasien-Chronik – South Asia Chronicle* 5 (2015): p. 93.
[133] *Mittagsblatt, Hamburger Illustrierte Zeitung* „Bose beim Hamburger Festakt," 12 September 1942, p. 1.
[134] Kuhlmann, *Die Indische Legion*, p. 96.
[135] IOR/L/PJ/12/659 - Indian civilians and prisoners of war suspected of collaboration with Nazis; treatment and welfare, p. 59.

until his death in 1968, with a brief interlude in India and Indonesia between 1946 and 1950.[136]

Likewise, the Indian scholar Devendra Nath Bannerjea was able to teach Indian Languages at Berlin University throughout the war. Although he was denied his desired position as a professor for Indian ethnology and regional studies in favour of a German colleague, he nevertheless received a substantial salary and support from the German Foreign Office.[137] The Nazis had hoped to make use of knowledge produced in 'Oriental' seminaries at German universities for wartime purposes and therefore had been willing to be more lenient in their human resources policy, if the candidate was compliant.[138]

In summary, upper-class Indian presence in interwar Germany was met with little resistance. The internationalist atmosphere paved the way for Indo–German entanglements on various levels. While activists and professionals were allowed to express themselves rather openly during the 1920s, their freedom decreased with the rise of more authoritarian political outfits. Affirmation became the precondition for acceptance; the value of migrant knowledge and skill was measured by their utility for the regime.

[136] I was kindly provided with this piece of biographical information by Suraiya Faroqui in a telephone interview in August 2019.

[137] Maria Framke, "Die Rolle der Berliner Indologie und Indienkunde im „Dritten Reich" in *Indologie und Südasienstudien in Berlin. Geschichte und Positionsbestimmungen.*, ed. Maria Framke, Hannelore Bauhaus-Lötzke, and Ingo Strauch (Berlin: Trafo Wissenschaftsverlag, 2014), pp. 121–2.

[138] Ibid., pp. 110–1.

1. Spaces of South Asian migration: The Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood

The docklands of Sankt Pauli have always fascinated contemporary observers because of their twin character as an amusement district and a multi-ethnic working-class neighbourhood. Drawn in by the neon lights, bars, casinos, and restaurants with foreign cuisines and unfamiliar faces, visitors to Hamburg were known to spend at least one evening on the Reeperbahn and its adjacent streets. This international atmosphere is the subject of many travel reports, framed in various ways. As early as 1892, the writer August Trinius compared Sankt Pauli to the multilingual biblical city of Babel, with its audible presence of alien languages and 'strange-looking' people.[139]

Forty years later, the sensation of strangeness was expressed in racist terms representative of the time. Heinz Liepman, despite being an antifascist, did not refrain from choosing exoticizing and racializing language when describing his experience in Sank Pauli in 1932/33:

> However, between Reeperbahn and the docks one finds a maze of dark allies, crooked streets, there is the Blue Star Diele, where Antwerp diamond merchants are located, or the Puppenstübchen, where merry, cigar smoking 'ladies' have romantic encounters. Or don't you have enough phantasy to imagine that in the 'Indian Bar' not Indians, but negroes meet, because there are two sweet negro waitresses serving 'Köhm'?[140]

Like many of his contemporaries, Liepman was attracted by the obscure, mysterious nature of the dock neighbourhood, where anything could happen, from 'deviant' sexual encounters to semi-legal monetary transactions. His compatriot Hans Leip – a writer like Liepman but with clear sympathies for the Nazis – contributed his own account to the many descriptions of Sankt Pauli:

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[139] Lars Amenda, „Welthafenstadt". Globalisierung, Migration und Alltagskultur in Hamburg 1880-1930," in *Andocken. Hamburgs Kulturgeschichte 1948 bis 1933*, ed. Dirk Hempel and Ingrid Schröder (Hamburg: Dobu, 2012), p. 404.

[140] Heinz Liepman, "Häfen, Mädchen und Seeleute," *Velhagen & Klasings Monatshefte* 47 (1) (1932/33): p. 285. The original German version reads: „Aber zwischen Reeperbahn und dem Hafen gibt es noch ein Gewirr dunkler Gassen, ganz verzwickte Straßen, da gibt es die Blue Star Diele, wo die Antwerpener Diamantenhändler sitzen, oder das Puppenstübchen, wo sich vergnügte, Zigarren rauchende "Damen" Stelldicheine geben. Oder haben Sie nicht genug Phantasie, um sich vorzustellen, daß sich in der "Indian Bar" die Neger treffen und keine Inder, weil dort zwei sehr süße Negerinnen "Köhm" ausschenken?" The translation is min.

> All nations gather here, where Low German is spoken just as much as English. Under the masked ball of advertising signs, the lanterns of lure, the noise of street bands, pouring out of every door, there emerges on busy evenings an astonishingly unanimous jumble of dark, blonde, black, white, and yellow races. There is a hippodrome in a basement, female boxing fights, bars, hot-dog stands, cabarets, and a restaurant where the Chinese meet. (There is a strange Chinese quarter emerging around the corner). In another spot, there is a restaurant for black Muslims.[141]

Keeping in mind the imprecision and prejudice with which people from what was then called the 'Orient' were and still are perceived, one cannot refrain from thinking that the "restaurant for black Muslims" was actually the "Indian Bar". Its clientele, comprising of Muslim Indian *lascars* and seafarers from Africa and the Arabic peninsula must have merged in Leip's perception into a singular ethnic group. At the focal point of Leip's observation, however, stands the so-called Chinese quarter, situated amidst the amusement venues and contributing to the district's formation. Its presence also had a lasting impression on another well-known German author, Kurt Tucholsky, who visited one of the Chinese restaurants:

> In the Chinese restaurant they sang and danced, the entire staff, in one tune and from the top of their voices – a little blonde had a voice like sheet metal – it sounded like a children's trumpet. South Americans were dancing there as well as Siamese and Negros. They were smiling when the little girls screamed.[142]

Whereas Leip emphasized the strangeness of the Chinese presence, alluding to the alleged exclusiveness of the Chinese community, Tucholsky paints a different picture, stressing the multi-ethnic character of the gatherings in the Chinese venues. Only a few years later, Sankt Pauli caught the attention of an international visitor, the Black American lawyer and publisher Robert S. Abbott. Although written in 1929, his descriptions of the area will sound familiar to everyone who has ever been to this part of Hamburg:

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[141] Hans Liep, "Geleitwort," in *Hamburg*, ed. August Rupp (Berlin: Augustus, 1927), p. xiv. The original German version reads: „Da verkehren alle Nationen, plattdeutsch und englisch ist die Umgangssprache. Unter dem Maskenball der Reklameschilder, der Locklaternen, dem Radau der Bandenmusik, der aus allen Türen birst, flutet an guten Abenden ein bemerkenswert einhelliges Gemisch dunkler, blonder, schwarzer, weißer und gelber Rassen. Da gibt es ein Hippodrom im Keller, Damenboxkämpfe, Bars, Wurstbuden, Kabarette und ein Restaurant, wo die Chinesen verkehren. (Um die Ecke beginnt sich ein seltsames Chinesenviertel zu bilden.) An anderer Stelle gibt es ein Lokal für mohammedanische Neger." The translation is mine.

[142] Kurt Tucholsky, Mary Gerold-Tucholsky, and Fritz J. Raddatz eds., *Gesammelte Werke, Band 5 1927* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt), 1975, p. 282. The German original reads: „Im chinesischen Restaurant sangen sie beim Tanzen, die ganze Belegschaft, einstimmig und brausend – eine kleine Blonde hatte eine Kehle aus Blech – es klang wie eine Kindertrompete. Südamerikaner tanzten da und Siamesen und Neger. Die lächelten, wenn kleine Mädchen kreischten." The translation is mine.

> Most of all of the amusements of Hamburg seemed to center at the Reeperbahn, an avenue almost in the heart of the city. Great crowds are to be seen here at night. In a park in this neighborhood also stands a colossal stone figure of Bismarck, the iron chancellor, the real founder of the German empire.[143]

Curiously, the "Indian Bar" mentioned in Liepmann's report (and probably in Leip's, as well) also figures in Abbott's account. After noticing the ethnic diversity of the seafaring men who crowded the waterfront, he reveals how some of them spent their spare time:

> Many of them are Negroes, mostly Africans, and are chiefly to be found along Bernhard Nochtstrasse not far from the ferry. They meet mostly at the Indisch bar [sic!], run by H. Singh at No. 6a, this same street.
> Some few Negroes have also made their homes here and have children by the German women. We met one bright Colored lad, born in Hamburg who had been to sea and had visited America. He was now studying engineering.[144]

As we shall see in this chapter, marrying German women was common not only among Black migrants but also among the small Indian population of Hamburg. Abbott probably met one of the Cameroonian migrants who came to Germany as part of the education program for people from the former German colony.

Leaving behind the published accounts and travellers' descriptions of the Sankt Pauli neighbourhood, migrant lives in the dock area can also be understood from primary sources. Fusing contemporaneous perceptions with material from the archive, the principal aim of this chapter is to investigate the possibilities and limitations of the Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood as a physical space for South Asian non-elite migration. Several locations and localities such as bars, cultural centres, or homes facilitated the migrants' arrival and settlement as they provided diversion, social encounters, accommodation, or business opportunities. These spaces form the geographic web into which the migrant biographies, the central piece of this thesis, are deeply interwoven. Since they provide the physical base for migrants' trajectories, the preconditions of their existence need to be looked at closely. Before going into the details of these localities, which are called "migrant spaces", the

[143] Robert S. Abbot, "My Trip Abroad. VII: Sojourning in Germany," *Chicago Defender,* December 21, 1929, p. 10.
[144] Ibid.

narrative traces the socio-political development of Hamburg and Sankt Pauli in the interwar period. In order to be able to demonstrate how the city produced spaces catering to the needs of non-elite migrants, one needs to understand the influence of the city's main employer, the shipping industry. The impact of shipping and trade on South Asian migration can be approached from two different angles.

First, the employment sectors of predominantly manual and industrial labour, with individuals working in the docks, on ships, and in port-related industries, created a significant working-class presence in Hamburg. Politically inclined to the left, Hamburg became a stronghold of the communist movement in Germany. In the late 1920s, communist members increasingly influenced the politics of the Deutsche Verkehrsbund [DVB], the main maritime trade union. This political climate lay the basis for the political agenda pushed by Moscow-affiliated activists who sought to establish a network of organized seafarers of all ethnicities in every major port city along the Atlantic coast.

Second, the employment of Indian seamen, so-called *lascars*, on British, Dutch, French, Norwegian, Italian, American and also German steamships resulted in a floating South Asian population in the port area. For a small number of South Asian migrants, coming from a *lascar* background, these people were potential customers. Small shops and restaurants catering to the needs of Indian seamen emerged, building the economic basis for those who intended to settle permanently in the port city. Others entered into the import and export business, tapping into long-standing Indo–German trade relations.

Whereas the port, in its double function as the producer of a working-class milieu and a node for South Asian seafarers, definitely played a major role in stimulating the emergence of "migrant spaces", there were also limitations on the extent to which migrants were able to inhabit these spaces. The workers in the port and hence the members of the maritime union were almost exclusively German, and large sections opposed the employment of Asian labour on German ships and in the docks. Unable to find employment in the port and port-related industries, migrants were forced to occupy economic niches, sometimes having to compete with other migrant groups. The communist agitation, a potential support structure for the South Asian presence, failed to attract enough *lascars* to be deemed successful by the Comintern and shifted their headquarters out of Germany. The failure of the experiment had to do with the comparatively lower number of Indian seamen in the Hamburg port compared to their British and Dutch competitors.

This analysis does not include the regulations the German state imposed on non-elite migration, as Chapter 2 is devoted exclusively to this issue. Hence, socio-political developments, which go beyond the interest of the Hamburg city state but might also have affected migration, such as the employment policy and migration regime of the Weimar Republic, as well as questions of citizenship and nationality, are under scrutiny in chapter 2.

1.1 The economic development of the Hamburg port

Before venturing into the analysis of non-elite migrant spaces, an investigation of the socio-economic developments which allowed Hamburg to become a hub of transnational entanglement in the 1920s is necessary. Before the outbreak of the First World War shut down all trade relations, Hamburg had one of the largest throughputs of goods in the world, only surpassed by London and New York.[145] The merchant elite used the destruction of the city after the great fire of 1842 to modernize and recreate its urban landscape according to their needs. The port was extended to accommodate modern steamships, and the inner city was divided into specialized, single-purpose districts for warehouses, office buildings, and separate quarters for workers and the mercantile class.[146] This functional separation intensified gradually, accompanied by the demolition and eviction of working-class residential areas in favour of monofunctional commercial units such as the duty-free warehouse district (Speicherstadt) and a business district in the old, densely-populated working-class areas after the cholera epidemic in 1892.[147] Only a small section of the so-called "Gängeviertel" survived the modernization project until the late 1930s. It became a stronghold of the Communist Party of Germany and had a reputation of housing criminals and social 'deviants.'

As Lars Amenda argues, the port owed its advancement to the increasing volume of the global trade and the rising importance of the transatlantic exchange of commodities. With a state-of-the-art dock built in 1866, suitable for anchoring large steamships, as well as the establishment of a tax-free harbour in 1888, Hamburg was able to surpass Lübeck, the leading port during the Hanse era.[148] Many shipping companies and trading firms built their

[145] Amenda, *Welthafenstadt*, p. 397.

[146] Carola Hein, "Hamburg's Port Cityscape: Large-scale Urban Transformation and the Exchange of Planning Ideas," in *Port Cities. Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks*, ed. Carloa Hein (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 184.

[147] Ibid., pp. 184–6.

[148] Amenda, *Welthafenstadt*, p. 400.

headquarters in Hamburg, among them the famous "Hamburg-America-Line" (HAPAG). Their iconic office building, constructed at the shores of the Alster Lake in 1903, soon became a symbol of the city's self-conception as a global player and metropolitan commercial centre. The economic success of the Hamburg port was further stimulated by the great exodus of impoverished and/or politically persecuted people from Europe to the Americas. Between 1871 and 1914, around 2.3 million migrants, often from Eastern Europe departed from Hamburg to the "New World", among them many Orthodox Jews.[149]

After the First World War, the German shipping industry recovered relatively quickly. Despite being stripped of almost its entire fleet, cargo throughput in the port had already surpassed pre-war levels in 1925. The state subsidized the reconstruction of the industry with taxpayer money, and the currency reform soon showed its first results. One of Hamburg's main competitors after the war was the port of Antwerp.[150] Whereas the volume of Antwerp's imports stagnated at around 10 million gross registered tons [GRT] between 1925 and 1929, Hamburg's exports reached an unprecedented peak of approximately 14 million GRT per annum.[151] The increase resulted from the French-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 and the British miners' strikes in 1921 and 1925, which stimulated Belgian coal exports.[152] Although Antwerp and Hamburg shared the same hinterland, the former remained a regional port, trading mainly with other European nations. Exports to Africa and Asia stayed outside its reach and remained in the colonial grip.

In 1925, the first year in which trade and shipping statistics were published for Hamburg after the war, 14,000 ships arrived and 16,000 left from Hamburg, respectively carrying 16 and 17 million GRT. In 1926, 16,000 ships arrived and 18,000 left, with a combined throughput of 34 million GRT.[153] In 1927, throughput again rose slightly to 38 million GRT. Hamburg's advancement can be partially attributed to its heavy involvement in transcontinental trade. Despite Germany's being stripped of its colonial holdings during the First World War, Hamburg's merchant elite had managed to successfully revive its global pre-war trade

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[149] Ibid., p. 399.

[150] Reginald Loyen, "Throughput in the Port of Antwerp (1901-2000). An Integrated Functional Approach," in *Struggling for Leadership: Antwerp-Rotterdam Port Competition between 1870-2000*, ed. Reginald Loyen, Erik Buyst, and Greta Devos (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2003), pp. 29–61.

[151] Ibid., p. 39.

[152] Ibid., p. 45.

[153] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1926, p. 10.

relations, and the emigration business accelerated the developments. In 1930, one year after the great depression, 20,000 ships importing 21 million GRT still arrived at the docks, and 22,000 carrying 22 million GRT left through the Elbe River towards its various destinations.[154] In 1936, throughput had decreased to the 1927 level, standing at a combined 38 million GRT.[155]

Although Hamburg was more involved in the trans-oceanic trade than Antwerp, the Belgian competitor saw a greater influx of colonial seafarers. As Great Britain was a main trade partner, many Asian and African sailors crowded the Antwerp shores. Neither city witnessed a numerically significant Indian diaspora in the interwar period as compared to London or New York. Nevertheless, the relatively liberal migration regime paired with favourable socio-economic conditions in the 1920s allowed for the settlement of non-elite maritime migrants in the multi-national docklands of both Hamburg and Antwerp, as Chapter 2 investigates.

1.2 Employment in the Hamburg port

By the end of the 19th century, around 25,000 people were employed in the harbour compared to only around 2,000 in 2011.[156] After the First World War, employment figures recovered quickly, totalling 25,678 in 1922 and 27.880 one year later.[157] The maritime labour market was organized by the Hafenbetriebsverein (harbour employment bureau), a private association of companies and firms controlling the allocation of workers among each other. Workers had to apply for a work permit, which came in three different categories. The most privileged category was that of the permanent worker, indefinitely employed by one company or factory, with a regular income and protection against dismissal. Second came the non-permanent workers, who were hired on a daily or weekly basis in a sector or industry. They had neither a right to work every day nor protection against dismissal. The most marginalized were the casual workers. They were only hired in cases there was demand for workers beyond the capacity of the first and second group.[158] After 1920, the casual workers' permits were

[154] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1930, pp. 4–5.

[155] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1936, pp. 4–5.

[156] Holmer Stahnke. *Der Hamburger Hafen. Von 1820 bis heute* (Hamburg: Hamburger Stadtillustrierten-Verlag, 2011), p. 29.

[157] Klaus Weinhauer, *Alltag und Arbeitskampf im Hamburger Hafen. Sozialgeschichte der Hamburger Hafenabeiter 1914–1933* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), p. 47.

[158] Ibid., pp. 38–41.

registered and distributed by the public employment office. Apart from the official channels, workers were commonly hired off the streets throughout the 1920s and 1930s.[159]

There are no indicators in the sources or secondary literature which suggest that there was a significant share of non-German nationals among the harbour work force. The main reason was their exclusion from the labour market, since German nationals were given preference in the employment process. Nevertheless, the presence of a working-class milieu paired with the maritime infrastructure allowed the existence of certain economic niches, such as the amusement industry and the smuggling business, which were open to foreign labour. Moreover, certain left-wing associations reached out to migrant groups and provided them with employment opportunities, as shown below.

At the turn of the 20th century, the work in the harbour was much more diverse than it is today. Since the 1950s, containerization and automatization have steadily decreased the number of professions and workers necessary to organize the turnover of goods and repair the ships berthed at Hamburg's port. The substitution of people by machines, however, has started much earlier. Before the introduction of the electric crane in 1896, the loading and unloading of a ship was operated manually. Different specialized professions guaranteed the efficient turnover of cargo and tried to reduce the layover to a minimum. After the pilots had guided a steamer safely to its anchoring spot and the mooring service had roped the vessel, the stevedores and crane operators would be ready and waiting to take action. The goods were not only unloaded and brought to the warehouses, but they were also counted and checked for quality by another professional group, the quay workers.[160] After the handling of piece-cargo for which Hamburg was particularly well equipped as compared to other European ports, the coal and grain workers took over. The coal worker emptied a ship of its coal cargo and supplied the outgoing vessel with new coals to run its steam engine. Per hour, one worker could carry 1.5 tons of coal on his shoulders and balance it on small planks and ladders on and off the ship. The boilers also needed a thorough washing to ensure their seamless functioning at sea. Workers had to climb into the still hot and pitch-dark boiler and scrub it clean. Wheat and other grains were unloaded manually with the help of small boats called barges. In 1905, when the first pneumatic grain elevator was put into operation, many

[159] Ibid., p. 41.

[160] Stahnke, *Der Hamburger Hafen*, p. 30.

grain workers lost their jobs. The mechanization of turnover gradually made the port more profitable and less labour intensive.[161]

Another important professional group comprised the shipyard workers. Iron workers riveted the hulls of the ships, machine workers fixed broken engines, carpenters built the interior and attached the planks to the decks, and painters gave the outside a shiny new cover. Except for the boiler and hull cleaners, these were highly skilled, well paid permanent jobs. However, when the wood workers were gradually replaced by the metal workers around 1900, discord arose among the different designations of shipyard workers.

In spite of these challenges, all port workers joined hands in the 1910 strike, demanding fewer working hours and higher wages. They achieved the introduction of a 55-hour week. This success was particularly remarkable given that in 1896–97, 5,000 harbour workers had lost their job during a general strike. The shipping companies had employed strike breakers to ensure the continuation of work.[162]

1.3 Housing and political affiliations of the working class

Most dock and shipyard workers did not live in the dock neighbourhood. In 1925, out of the 94,702 people employed in the Hamburg harbour, including shipyard and dock workers but also those employed in the port-related service sector, transportation, administration, and management, only 9,286 lived in the docklands.[163] After their expulsion from the city centre to make space for new office buildings and warehouses, most of the workers lived in the working-class areas situated in the suburbs. Typical working-class areas with over 50 per cent working-class residents were Neustadt, Sankt Georg, Sankt Pauli, Winterhude, Barmbek, Uhlenhorst, and Billwerder.[164] To reconnect the inhabitants to their workplaces, the city built the first public transportation railway lines to Barmbek and Rothenburgsort between 1912 and 1915, linking the town hall and the central station to the new housing districts.[165] Port-related industries gradually expanded into these areas. Apart from the tax-free harbour,

[161] Ibid., p. 33.

[162] Ibid., p. 37.

[163] Ludwig Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Hansestadt Hamburg in den Jahren 1929 bis 1939. Werftarbeiter, Hafenarbeiter und Seeleute: Konformität, Opposition, Widerstand* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 74.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Hein, *Hamburg's Port Cityscape*, p. 189.

Hammerbrook, Barmbek, and Eimsbüttel emerged as industrial hubs.[166] In 1883 for instance, the "Norddeutsche Jute-Spinnerei und Weberei" opened its gates in Billstedt and Harburg, processing raw jute from India.[167] In 1929, the company employed about 5.000 workers, speaking to the importance of the commodity.[168] Other import-export-related industries were the mill and oil-industries, processing raw materials from overseas for redistribution to the German hinterland and abroad.

The Communist Party of Germany [KPD] and the Social Democratic Party dominated in the working-class neighbourhoods. The KPD had its stronghold in the old "Gängeviertel", where casually employed stevedores, daily-wage labourers, and sailors shared a sense of community, perhaps even class consciousness. The living conditions in those quarters with its dilapidated wooden infrastructure and unventilated, narrow alleys were prone to fires and the spread of diseases. Most inhabitants preferred those branches of the communist organization which were less integrated into the main party structure, such as the illegal "Roter Frontkämpferbund" (Red Front Fighting Unit) or the radical "Einheitsverband der Seeleute, Hafenarbeiter und Binnenschiffer" (United Federation of Seamen, Dockers and Inland Waterway Transport Workers). The union was known for its participation in strikes and anti-fascist agitation.[169]

1.4 Trade and shipping relations with India

Trade relations with British India increased significantly in the last decades of the 19th century. Goods from the subcontinent made up 10 per cent of all overseas imports.[170] In 1912, 276 ships from "East-India" called at the Hamburg harbour, carrying 806,742 GRT of cargo,[171] and 146 ships left in the direction of India, carrying 451,794 GRT.[172] They hailed from ports all

[166] Among those industries situated in the tax-free harbour were chemical and pharmaceutical companies, a coffee factory, a rice mill, oil-processing factories, and different storage production companies. See Mareike-Christin Bues, Hamburg. Die Entstehung einer globalen Hafenstadt im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1871-1914, Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie an der Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität München, 2017, p. 75.

[167] Julius Eckstein, „Norddeutsche Jute-Spinnerei und Weberei," Julius Eckstein ed. *Historisch-biographische Blätter. Der Staat Hamburg* (Berlin: Ecksteins Biographischer Verlag, 1905).

[168] Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 89.

[169] Ibid., p. 76.

[170] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1903, p. I. 8.

[171] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1912, p. I. 8.

[172] Ibid., p. I. 9.

along the Indian coast, including major industrial centres such as Bombay (44 ships), Calcutta (71 ships), and Karachi (58 ships) but also minor ports like Cochin (47 ships), Calicut (34 ships) and Madras (24 ships).[173] Imports mainly consisted of rice and other agricultural products, skins and hides, copper, cotton, and jute.[174] In return, Germany exported metal and iron wares, lightbulbs, asbestos and other building materials, steel plates and bars, glassware, paper and cardboards, cotton ware, oilcakes, aniline dyes, different variations of salt, and beer.[175]

Although the trade with British India was dominated by British shipping companies, the Bremen-based shipping company Deutsche Dampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft Hansa [DDG "Hansa"], in a joint venture with the HAPAG of Hamburg, established the first profitable shipping service with Colombo, Madras, Calcutta, Karachi, and Bombay in 1911.[176] Between April and September 1912, one ship would leave every fortnight for one of the above-mentioned destinations from Hamburg via Antwerp, carrying an average of around 3,000 BRT per voyage.[177]

Like their British and Dutch competitors, German shipping companies hired foreign seamen. In 1902, 4,828 so-called "coloured seamen" (10.1 per cent of all seamen hired) were employed on German steamers.[178] Whereas companies such as Rickmers Reismühlen, Rhederei und Schiffbau AG, and Norddeutscher Lloyd mainly employed Chinese labour, the DDG "Hansa" was the first to massively recruit its workforce from Calcutta and Bombay. By 1903, they employed 2,315 lascars (as compared to 3,497 in 1902), making them the world's third largest employer of Indian seamen after the two large British shipping companies, the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company and the British Indian Steam Navigation Company.[179] In the first half of the 20th century, the latter two companies employed around 50,000 *lascars*, accounting for about 25 per cent of the British maritime workforce.[180] In the

[173] Ibid., p. I. 47.

[174] Ibid., pp. I. 41–2.

[175] Ibid., pp. IIb. 90–174.

[176] Fahrplan der regelmäßigen Dampfschiffs-Verbindungen nach Indien der Hamburg-Amerika-Linie, kindly provided to me by the archive of the Hapag-Lloyd AG, Hamburg.

[177] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1912, p. I. 55.

[178] Rübner, „Ausländer nach Möglichkeit sofort aus der Schiffahrt ausmerzen...", p. 66.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ravi Ahuja, "Die „Lenksamkeit" des „Lascars". Regulierungsszenarien eines transterritorialen Arbeitsmarktes in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 31, no. 3, Südasien in der Welt (Jul.-Sep., 2005): p. 324.

Germany industry, they almost exclusively worked in the engine room as trimmers or stokers, supplying the furnace with coal. In this line of work, the DDG "Hansa" replaced its European workforce by almost 100 per cent.[181]

The outbreak of the First World War put an end not only to all trade relations but also to the employment of *lascar* labour. Those seamen who happened to be on a ship bound for Hamburg or Bremen in 1914 were interned upon arrival. In her study on the internment conditions of South Asian civilian prisoners of war in Germany, Franziska Roy describes how the *lascars* had to perform various forms of manual or factory labour over the course of their imprisonment. One group was reported to have worked in the docks of Bremen and Hamburg port for over two years. During this time, they were not given suitable accommodation but had to sleep on the ships they were repairing during the day.[182] The internees were visited regularly by Indian exiles, probably members of the IIC in Berlin, which did not, however, lead to the betterment of their conditions. Around 1916/17, the Indian seamen were transferred to a camp for Indian prisoners at Havelberg where they suffered from insufficient food, damp housing and corporal punishment for minor offences by the German officers.[183] They were eventually transferred to the Halfmoon Camp in Zossen-Wünsdorf, erected especially for South Asian prisoners of war, from which they were sent on labour assignments in various German factories, for example at the steel works Hahnsche Werke at Grossenbaum or the potash salt mine at Steinförde.[184] After the armistice, most of them were repatriated via England.

Germany's shipping industry was on its knees after the war. The capacity of the Germany fleet had been reduced from 5.6 million to 500,000 GRT according to the agreement of the Versailles treaty.[185] In a slow but steady recovery process, the Bremen based shipping company DDG "Hansa" was able to re-establish itself on the shipping market and focused even more than before on trade with British India. In 1922, one ship departed weekly from Bremen/Hamburg via Rotterdam/Antwerp to Bombay and Karachi, every ten days to

[181] Rübner, *„Ausländer nach Möglichkeit sofort aus der Schiffahrt ausmerzen..."*, p. 66.

[182] Franziska Roy, "Indian Seamen in World War I Prison Camps in Germany," *Südasien-Chronik - South Asia Chronicle* 5 (2015): p. 66.

[183] Ibid., p. 67.

[184] Ibid., pp. 79–80.

[185] Weinhauer, *Alltag und Arbeitskampf*, p. 34.

Colombo, Madras, and Calcutta, every three weeks to Rangoon, and monthly to the small ports of Okha and Jamnagar.[186]

In 1926, they had one ship going from Hamburg to Madras three times a month, one ship to Rangoon and Calcutta via Bremen and Antwerp, and another ship going three times a month to Karachi and Bombay.[187] In 1928, they had four regular services: one going twice a month to Rangoon via Liverpool, Antwerp, and Marseilles, one which went three times a month to Colombo, Madras, and Calcutta; one going to Karachi and Bombay three times a month; and another one that went to Okha, Jamnagar, and the Malabar coast once a month.[188] In 1936, they had expanded their destinations significantly. In a joint venture with the Dutch N. V. Vereenigde Nederlandsche Scheepvart Mij Haag, they went eight times a month to Karachi, Okha, Cutch, Mandvi, Bombay, Marmagao, and the Malabar coast via Antwerp, three times a month to Colombo, Madras, Coconda, Vizagapatam, and Calcutta via Rotterdam, Antwerp and Genoa and twice a month to Colombo, Tuticorin, and Rangoon.[189]

The DDG "Hansa" was also the first company to re-hire Indian crews after they had all been laid off and/or imprisoned due to the hostilities. In 1923, they illegally replaced the entire European crew of two steamers going to Asia with *lascars*. The protests of the "Verkehrsbund" union against this intervention were unable to stop the gradual re-introduction of foreign labour. The process was slow, however, since the so-called "Inländerprimat" gave preference to German nationals in the hiring practices. In 1924/25, still only 200 Indian and 200 Chinese seamen were working on German ships. A few months later, this figure had already doubled.[190]

The re-emerging international workforce at sea also changed the social fabric of the dock area in a manner unforeseen by the urban planners. Chinese seamen set up a segregated quarter in the Sankt Pauli district in the 1920s, purchasing shops and restaurants right next to the newly developed waterfront area called Landungsbrücken.[191] In comparison, the Indian presence, both transient and permanent, was significantly less. Since the port infrastructure

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[186] Hartmut Rübner, *Konzentration und Krise der deutschen Schiffahrt. Maritime Wirtschaft und Politik im Kaiserreich, in der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus* (Bremen: Hauschild, 2005), p. 234.

[187] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1926, p. 99.

[188] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1928, p. 111.

[189] Hamburgs Handel und Schiffahrt im Jahre 1936, p. 35.

[190] Rübner, *„Ausländer nach Möglichkeit sofort aus der Schiffahrt ausmerzen..."*, p. 81.

[191] Hein, *Hamburg's Port Cityscape*, p. 188.

and the maritime labour market on the subcontinent were controlled by the colonial government, British shipping companies dominated the trade. Indian seafarers had to be employed under the Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1859, which required foreign companies to pay a recruitment fee to the British authorities. Moreover, *lascars* were not allowed to terminate their contracts outside of India, and their employers had to ensure their return.[192] Unfortunately, recruitment statistics are completely missing for the second half of the 1920s and the 1930s. According to an estimation of Albert Walter, a German communist who calculated the prospects of success of working among "colonial seafarers" from the party's Hamburg Port Bureau in 1929, 600 to 800 Indian seamen called the port monthly.[193] During the great depression and with the takeover of fascism in Germany, their numbers dropped significantly. After 1935, when the highly subsidized urban industry had drawn many German sailors away from their seaborne profession, the share of foreign seamen increased again. Samplings of ships' articles suggest that their numbers surpassed those recorded during the Weimar Republic.[194]

In 1939, around 15 per cent of the workforce on Bremen-based ships still consisted of Chinese or Indian sailors.[195] Officially, they enjoyed the same rights and protection as German workers. Unlike in Great Britain, there was no legislation allowing for the separate treatment of the non-national maritime workforce. Nevertheless, to reduce wage costs, German companies stopped listing the sailors on the official register, exempting them from tariff and insurance agreements. This circumvention of labour law allowed the shipping companies to hire a *lascar* crew twice the size for only half the salary of a European one.[196]

1.5 Migrant spaces

The presence of a vibrant working-class community, the employment of Indian labour in the German shipping industry, and the industrial development of the port and the related industries created an environment in which migrant spaces were able to emerge. The

[192] Küttner, *Farbige Seeleute*, pp. 28–9.

[193] Holger Weiss, *A Global Radical Waterfront. The International Propaganda Committee of Transport Workers and the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, 1921–1937* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 173.

[194] Rübner, *„Ausländer nach Möglichkeit sofort aus der Schiffahrt ausmerzen...“*, p. 91.

[195] Thomas Siemon, *Ausbüxen, Vorwärtskommen, Pflicht erfüllen. Bremer Seeleute am Ende der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus 1930–1939* (Bremen: Staatsarchiv Bremen, 2002), p. 403.

[196] Ibid., pp. 397–9.

following paragraphs discuss the South Asian presence in the context of the socio-economic transformation of the docklands in the interwar period. This transformation, intrinsically linked to the demographics of the city as outlined in the first part, called into existence different physical spaces which determined the possibilities and limitations of non-elite South Asian migration. Perhaps the most crucial connection was the clandestine infrastructure of the communist agitation. In their endeavour to link their global agenda with local support networks, Indian seafarers-turned-immigrants were the perfect intermediaries between activists on land and at sea. The following analysis of migrant spaces hence starts with the communist circles before looking at other networks and entanglements.

1.5.1 The "Interclub"

As mentioned above, the dock and shipyard workers were politically inclined towards the Social Democratic Party and the KPD, including its militant organisations. The majority of the unionized workers was organized in the moderate Deutsche Verkehrsbund [DVB], a free trade union, which fought for the betterment of the working conditions through arbitration with the main employer, the Hafenbetriebsverein [HBV]. More radical rival unions remained marginal or were short-lived. After 1926, the KPD changed their strategy and attempted to influence the politics of the free union from within the organisation instead of forming their own separate collectives.[197] Thereby, they were able to expand their power within the opposition faction of the union throughout the 1920s and came to dominate the organization in the final years of the decade. The communists were particularly anchored among the stevedores and bargemen who were often elected to the union committees.[198] Moreover, seafarers were particularly active in pushing the communist agenda from within the union. They build up clandestine cells among the crews on ships and were also given the task of recruiting as many co-workers as possible into the DVB. In 1926, for example, the 95 members of the seafaring section of the Hamburg branch enlisted 650 new members into their ranks.[199] The official policy of the DVB did not, however, include the welfare, support, or recruitment of Asian seafarers. On the contrary, in their official statements, the union opposed the

[197] Weinhauer, *Alltag und Arbeitskampf*, p. 267.

[198] Ibid., p. 280.

[199] Hartmut Rübner, "Interklub, Bordzelle, revolutionärer Seeleutestreik: Die „Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition" in der Seeschiffahrrt während der Weltwirtschaftskrise," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit* Germinal Verlag Fernwald (2003): p. 106.

employment of so-called coloured seafarers on German steamers and made them the scapegoat for the low wages in the shipping industry. They made allegations that their Asian colleagues were generally incompetent, unhygienic, and unfit to handle emergency situations.[200]

Whereas the DVB mainly regarded Asian seamen as low-wage competition and potential strike breakers, members of the Hamburg KPD tried to incorporate the international workforce into their agitational networks. In 1930, following the instructions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU], the "International of Seamen and Harbour Workers" [ISH] was founded with headquarters in Hamburg. Communist attempts to organize sailors pre-dated this effort. In 1921, the "International seamen's conference" in Moscow decided that communist trade unions should establish so-called Port Bureaus and International Seamen Clubs [Interclubs] at every major European and American port.[201] The main objective of the agitation was to create clandestine cells among ship crews and harbour workers, which were to serve as the core action units in case of a strike or other revolutionary activity. In addition, the Comintern wanted to build up a network of emissaries, usually cell leaders, whose task was to maintain a secure communication infrastructure through which secret messages, banned literature, financial transactions and even agents could bypass the surveillance of the police and military intelligence anywhere in the world.[202]

The Interclubs were popular among the seafaring population because, apart from making available a place to meet and socialize, they offered cultural programs such as book readings, sports competitions, concerts, and discussion groups, and they provided legal support in labour disputes.

In the light of the strong communist presence in the DVB, it is not surprising that the Hamburg branch was given a special position within the network of Port Bureaus. Alongside Bremen and Stettin, they were supposed to engage extensively in propaganda and intelligence work, mainly involving the smuggling of illegal literature.[203] In 1924, Albert Walter, the ex-seaman and former leader of the syndicalist German maritime union prior to its absorption into the

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[200] Rübner, *„Ausländer nach Möglichkeit sofort aus der Schiffahrt ausmerzen..."*, p. 76.

[201] Rübner, *Interklub, Bordzelle*, p. 111.

[202] Holger Weiss, "The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers – A Radical Labour Union of the Waterfront or a Subversive World Wide Web?" *Comintern Working Paper* 29 (2013): p. 2.

[203] Rübner, *Interklub, Bordzelle*, p. 112.

DVB, bought a house at Rothesoodstraße 8 in Hamburg Neustadt, close to the waterfront. There, he established the first Port Bureau in Germany, which was supposed to function as a rallying point for radical seamen and communist agitators. The strategy was to establish personal contact between activists and seamen whenever a ship arrived in Hamburg. The agitators would enter the deck to distribute leaflets and pamphlets among the crew. The goal was to win at least some of the sailors for the cause of radical politics, arousing discontent among the men against their working conditions, treatment, and wages.[204]

By nature of their profession, the activist seafarers had a more internationalist orientation than their colleagues on land. In the illegalized journal of the board cells, the members were instructed to contact the Interclubs in every port and to exchange communication with the cells of other ships, regardless of their national and ethnic composition.[205] In Hamburg, the so-called "Colonial Section" of the club focused on work among Chinese, Indian, Caribbean, and African seamen. Initially, it was headed by the Chinese activist Liao Chengzhi and the Black American James W. Ford. Their success, however, was limited. Even though Hamburg was one of the largest ports in the world, comparatively few colonial seamen called there, and even fewer had the city as their permanent place of residence. Those fleets which hired the most African and Asian seafarers, namely the British, Dutch, and American, preferred to call at British ports. Unlike in London, Liverpool, or Rotterdam, ethnic quarters in Hamburg were small and short-lived.[206]

Despite these limitations, attempts were made to reach out to the Indian crews. Albert Walter, head of the Hamburg section, declared to his superiors that work among Chinese and Indian maritime workers was usually easy as they had their own sub-groups and restaurants where the communists could reach them and distribute propaganda material.[207]

The attempts to organize colonial seafarers must be understood against the backdrop of the ideological framework termed the "internationalist moment" by the historians Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, and Benjamin Zachariah in their eponymous edited volume.[208] In the aftermath of the First World War, there existed a short-lived euphoria about the vastness and diversity

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[204] Weiss, *The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers*, p. 11.

[205] Rübner, *Interklub, Bordzelle*, p. 114.

[206] Weiss, The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, p. 11.

[207] Weiss, *A Global Radical Waterfront*, p. 171.

[208] Franziska Roy, Ali Raza, and Benjamin Zachariah eds., *The Internationalist Moment South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39* (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2015).

of humanity, which led to a series of cross-national collaborations in the political and social field. Kris Manjapra affirms that the political climate in post-war Germany allowed for encounters between Germans and Indian exiles in the realm of the radical left but also among more conservative ideological outfits.[209] Some of the Indians who had lived and worked in Berlin during the First World War associated themselves with the Communist International in the interwar period, although this was only one out of several possible trajectories. For example, one of the founding members of the IIC, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya visited Moscow from Stockholm in early 1921.[210] Preceding his visit, the revolutionary had written a letter to some former IIC colleagues who had already arrived in the Soviet Union from Afghanistan in which he suggested a collaboration against the British. The effort failed due to the protest of the Marxist Indian M. N. Roy, who branded the Berlin Indians as *"a set of bourgeois who had extracted money earlier from Germany and now wished to do so from Russia."*[211] Roy had already set the tone for the Comintern's approach to the 'colonial question' in a thesis presented at the Second World Congress in 1921, which was considered binding for the time being.[212]

When the demise of realistic prospects for a Bolshevik revolution in Europe became apparent to the communist leaders after the failure of the final German attempt in 1923, many turned their attention towards the east. The conceptual frameworks used to make sense of modern Asia differed widely within the communist intelligentsia, and the irreconcilable approaches eventually lead to a rift in the movement. Whereas Lenin wanted the proletarian transformation to succeed the fall of imperialism in the colonized countries, Roy stressed the importance of building up socialist forces before rising up against the colonial powers. Lenin considered the native capitalist classes an important if temporary ally in the struggle of what he called the *"colonial and backward countries."*[213] Roy, especially regarding India, cautioned

[209] Manjapra, *The Illusions of Encounter*, pp. 378–9.

[210] Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto. The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 159.

[211] Ibid., p. 160.

[212] Ibid., p. 162.

[213] V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Thesis on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International, July 5, 1920." in *Lenin's Collected Works 31* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 144–151.

that the "liberal bourgeoise" would turn against the working class after the abolition of imperial rule in order to establish their own domination over the exploited masses.[214]

Indian anti-imperialists instrumentalized the increased attention of the Moscow leaders after the First World War to sustain their fight against British rule, using Soviet funding to establish their own clandestine networks. One of the main protagonists of the Indo–German communist encounter was the aforementioned M. N. Roy. During a short visit to Berlin *en route* to Moscow in 1919, he made the acquaintance of several members of the communist circle in favour of Rosa Luxemburg's theories. These activists, who subsequently helped Roy to build his European base, distinguished themselves from the orthodox version of Marxism propagated by Moscow, opposing the top-down autocratic approach and stressing the importance of spontaneous working-class involvement in the revolutionary process. Their approach to the 'colonial question' also resonated with Roy's ideas. They did not regard the Asian countries as backward and in need of European tutelage but instead emphasized the potential for a 'spontaneous revolution' in India, led by the increasingly class-conscious workers and peasants themselves.[215]

Although the headquarters of Indo–German communist entanglements were undoubtedly in Berlin, Hamburg, for a period of a few years, became the testing ground for one of Roy's schemes. In 1924, he got involved in the activities of the ISH, founded and run by a member of Hamburg parliament for the KPD, Albert Walter. Roy's main goal was to agitate Indian seamen to smuggle banned literature to the subcontinent: for example, "The Vanguard of Indian Independence", as well as copies of his own writings such the pamphlet "What do we want?". Moreover, he wanted to channel arms and ammunition to support the revolutionary fight in his home country.

Through personal contacts, he directed money from the Soviet Union to the Warburg Bank in Hamburg to finance his activities.[216] "The Vanguard" was printed in the office of Carly Hoym & Co, located at Admiralitätsstraße 19 in Hamburg. According to the IPI, 1,500 copies of each issue were sent fortnightly to India through various channels[217] Roy coordinated the

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[214] Manabendra Nath Roy, "Third Congress of the Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question. July 12, 1921," in *To the Masses. Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International*, ed. and trans. John Riddell (Brill: Leiden, 2015), pp. 1181–1187.

[215] Manjapra, *The Illusions of Encounter*, p. 379.

[216] IOR/L/PJ/12/46, Indian Communist Party; intelligence reports.

[217] Ibid.

distribution of the literature in India with Subhash Chandra Bose, who ensured their undetected arrival in the ports.

In 1923, Roy sent an emissary named Ibrahim to Hamburg to oversee the Indian branch of the Interclub. He even came to the port city personally to supervise the smooth kick-off of the operation. The way in which he and his comrades approached the *lascar* seamen is described in an unusually dense account from Sheik Abdul Khalique, a steward on the SS "Matiana" in Calcutta. He vividly depicts the scene at the Hamburg port:

> During the first trip I did not land at Hamburg and go to the town. But during the last trip one Mubarek Ali an order supplier came to our ship to get orders from us. In course of conversation he informed us that they had started an Indian Club for the seamen at Hamburg and requested us to go there. Accordingly, myself, Keromat, Sher Ali, Felu and the third cook (a Christian) accompanied Mubarek Ali to the Club. This Club is located in two pucca rooms. One of the rooms was utilised as office and the other was meant for the members. Here Mubarek Ali introduced us to one Mr Ibrahim who was in European dress. Mr Ibrahim informed us that for removing the grievances of the Indian Seamen in foreign countries they had organised a Union and requested us to become members. He also told us that he would open branches of the Association in London, Plymouth and other important foreign ports. He then took down our names and addresses. I gave my Calcutta address as No. 1. Aga Mehdi Street. I also took down his address as Ibrahim, c/o Mr Howei, No. 15 Sampoli, Hamburg. He then invited us the next day. Accordingly we visited the Club the next day when Mr Ibrahim brought 10 or 12 copies of books of different kinds and placed them on a table there. At his request we took the books. I myself took only one copy entitled "What do we want". He wanted us to go through the books and to distribute the same to our friends. At the time of parting he assured us that they were working for the welfare of seamen. We then came away.[218]

Sheik Abdul Khalique's story is corroborated by one of his workmate's testimonies. Sheik Fella, a saloon boy on the same ship, remembers his visit to Hamburg as follows:

> During our stay in Hamburg for about 8 or 10 days, after 2 or three days Abid Hussain and a shop keeper of Hamburg came to our ship and took the following persons down: - Abdul Gafur, Sher Ali, Sheik Korban of Karya, Neamat, Keramat, Sheik Abdul Khalique, Abdul Latif, Kazem Hussain, Marua, Gholam Rasul of Manicktola, Nazoo of Karava, Simon.
> In the afternoon I came to learn from Abid Hussein that a meeting of seamen would be held at a place called Sampoli at Hamburg. The place is about 10 minutes walk from the place where we got down from ferry steamer. […] The meeting was held in two ground floors of a big pucca building. These two buildings were occupied by a Club known as

[218] IOR/L/PJ/12/52, Indian Communist Party: conveyance of seditious literature into India; correspondence with shipping companies, p. 43.

> Bolshevik Club. I heard from Abid Hussein that it was a Bolshevik Club. […] Besides the above persons I saw there Abid Hussein, Ali, Ibrahim, Manandra Nath and another up-country man called Khan who is a Pathan. This Pathan said that he was a member of some British regiment and deserted it during the last great war. Manandra Nath was the only Hindu among them. […] Ibrahim is an up-country Mohammedan. He addressed us in Hindustani and said that Indian seamen were poorly paid and there was no place in Hamburg where they could meet together so they wanted to organise a seamen's union which would arrange a club where they could sit together and read newspapers and books and also arrange with the authority to increase their pay and improve their prospects. […]
> While the meeting was going on 10 or 12 Germans were noticed in the room. But they were not attending meetings. Two policemen in uniform armed with rifles were standing at the gate of this club who were directing us that Indian's meeting were going to be held inside. […]
> The Pathan, Abid and Ali used to come to our ship for selling clothes and stationary goods. The name of Ali may be Mubarek Ali. When we came out of the meeting Ibrahim told us that revolvers and cartridges were very cheap there and if we purchased them they would be very useful in Calcutta. […][219]

These two accounts illuminate how South Asian migrants played a vital role in the communists' efforts to organize Indian seamen. In their double position as "order suppliers" and members of the Interclub, they approached their countrymen first in their capacity as vendors. Gaining their trust by approaching them at eye level and speaking their own language, they bridged the cultural gap between the *lascars* and the revolutionaries, whose "European dress" attracted attention and possibly also intimidated the sailors. Having acquainted the *lascars* with the welfare goals of the "Indian Club", it was easier for the revolutionaries to subsequently address more delicate matters like the distribution of literature and the smuggling of revolvers and cartridges. Hence, the migrants contributed substantially to the running of the club and were able to network with sympathetic local activists, whose presence in the meetings is indicated in Sheik Fella's story.

Despite these dedicated efforts, which apparently happened under the radar of the German police, the "Indian Club" was a short-lived endeavour. Roy soon deemed Hamburg unsuitable for his cause since cargo boats from Hamburg never went directly to India but called at British ports on the way, causing considerable delays. Therefore, he devoted his attention to other European ports and was especially interested in Marseille. Ibrahim, Mubarak Ali, and Abid

[219] Ibid., p. 44.

Hussein (Henry Obed) all left Hamburg in 1924, lending further probability to the assumption that the Indian section of the "Bolshevik Club" only existed for a very brief period around 1923/24.

The Interclub itself kept on operating without the Indian section. As mentioned before, in 1930, Hamburg even became the headquarters of the ISH before they had to move their office to Copenhagen in February 1933, just in time to avoid the Nazi police raid of their premises in March of that year.[220]

1.5.2 The "Indian Bar"

The Interclub and the adjacent docks were not the only places visited by Indians, resident or non-resident. Sankt Pauli contained several localities, which were of great importance for both the floating and migrant South Asian populations. Among the many bars of the amusement district, one clearly stood out as a meeting space for Indian seamen. Opened in 1924, the "Indian Bar" in Bernhard-Nocht-Straße 63 became the principal meeting point for Asian and African seafarers. Its owner, Hardas Singh, a Sikh man from the Punjab, had served in the British Indian army during the First World War and did not return to his home country afterwards. Since an entire chapter of this thesis is devoted to his life story, the following paragraphs focus less on his personal trajectory and more on the importance of his bar as a migrant space.

In the interwar period, the bar became a focal point for various transnational networks. One of them linked up the aforementioned revolutionary circles, which operated from Hamburg under the aegis of M. N. Roy. After the Interclub's Indian section had stopped operations, it appears as if the bar had stepped into its place, albeit on a much smaller and less organized scale.

In 1928, the Indian communist Amir Haider Khan was stranded in the port city on his way from Moscow to Bombay. Hoping to find a passage to India without being detected by the British Secret Service, he spent a lot of time in Singh's bar. In his memoirs, he described the atmosphere of the place:

> Whenever ships with Indian crews would arrive at the docks he [Hardas Singh, SvJ] would go aboard and distribute his address cards and advertising hand bills. Thus many Indian

[220] Weiss, The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, p. 34.

> seafaring men would visit his café for various purposes, some just to exchange Indian money for German currency in order to buy something in the ships or purchase German postage stamps, some to have a few drinks, and a few of the more nondescript ones to satisfy their sexual cravings. There could usually be found in the café some young woman who, after luring their customers, would take them to other places where they had rooms in which to carry out their tawdry transactions.[221]

Eager to not attract the attention of the authorities, Khan had initially disguised himself as a common deck hand in search for employment. Sensing the masquerade, Singh exposed the revolutionary one night when the owner was working the evening shift. Khan remembers the incident:

> One evening by chance I had stayed late into the night. There were no strangers around until a slightly intoxicated Russian crewman sauntered in and asked for a drink in Russian. Hardit Singh himself was behind the counter and asked me to translate the order. I hesitated but Hardit Singh said it was all okay since there were no outsiders presents. I approached the Russian and asked him in his own language what he wanted to which he replied some cognac or brandy. After being given his order the Russian invited me to have a few drinks with him which I declined with thanks. But he insisted in carrying on the conversation and the women in the café silently watched me as we talked.[222]

In assuring Khan of the absence of 'outsiders', most likely referring to police authorities, secret service and right-wing sailors, Singh signalled to the revolutionary that he should consider the bar as a safe space for these kinds of clandestine operations. Being a host to male and female sex workers, most of whom were politically inclined towards the left and had no interest in cooperating with the police, the bar catered to a sympathetic but also cautious clientele. Strangers who acted conspicuously, like Khan himself, alerted the watchful customers and hence provided a safety net against spies and informers.

Eventually, Khan was able to negotiate a job on a ship with the help of a Bengali comrade based in Hamburg:

> One day an East Bengali engine room Sarong from a German ship, the Trautonfels, happened into the café. He took an interest in one of the women and also had a chat, in Bengali, with Mr. Gupta, a Bengali comrade who lived in Hamburg. Mr. Gupta, who was posing as a doctor, asked whether his crew was in need of a man. The Sarong said that

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[221] Hasan N. Gardezi ed., *Chains to Lose, Life and Struggles of a Revolutionary: Memoirs of Dada Amir Haider Khan, Volume II* (Karachi: Pakistan Study Centre, 2007), p. 627.
[222] Ibid., p. 634.

> they were short a coal passer. […] After passing the medicine on to the Sarong along with the instructions on how to use it, they negotiated a deal to get me on his ship.[223]

The hospitality he experienced in Singh's bar left a lasting impression on Khan, so that six years later, in 1934, he visited the place again during a trip to the city. Perhaps being more suitable for the requirements at the intersection between the maritime world, the communist networks, and the Indian migration to Hamburg, the bar lasted longer than the Interclub. For political activists as well as sex workers, the bar was a safe haven, shielding them from the grasp of the state authorities.

The bar was not only a meeting place for the aforementioned social groups but also for the homosexual community. In the records of court cases against men who were accused of 'unnatural' sexual encounters and commercial prostitution under §175 and §175a of the penal code, the "Indian Bar" is mentioned as one of the places where they met their lovers or waited for clients. Because homosexual intercourse was illegal during Nazi rule and sanctioned with extensive imprisonment and, later, deportation to concentration camps, gay people searched for partners in the shadow of the Sankt Pauli milieu. Just like the bar was a refuge for other marginalized social groups, it became a focal point in the gay scene.

The seventeen-year-old Hermann von Appen, who was on trial for commercial prostitution in 1938, met his clients in the "Indian Bar". In the interrogation report of the Hamburg police, the minor described his first homosexual experience:

> The man in question is the writer Gert Gang, living in Altona, Eggersallee 12. He is today between 28 and 30 years old. In Hardas Singh's bar in Bernhard Nochtstraße, I met him in November of 1937. On this day, I went with my fellow apprentice Herbert Gribsky, living in Große Freiheit Nr. 23, I., to the bar as a guest. It seemed to me as if Gribsky was known there, because he was greeting individual guests. We then were both invited by Gang. He bought us several rounds of beer.[224]

[223] Ibid., p. 636.

[224] StAHH, 213-11, 65024, pp. 2–3. The original text reads: "Bei dem betr. Manne handelt es sich um den Schriftsteller Gert Gang, wohnt in Altona, Eggersallee 12. Er ist heute etwas 28 bis 30 Jahre alt. Im Lokal von Hardas Singh, in der Bernhard Nochtstraße, habe ich ihn im Monat November 1937 kennengelernt. An dem betr. Tage war ich mit meinem Lehrkameraden Herbert Gribsky, wohnh. Große Freiheit Nr. 23, I., in dem Lokal als Gast. Mir kam es so vor, als wenn Gribsky dort bekannt war, da er einzelne Gäste begrüßte. Wir wurden dann beide von Gang eingeladen." The translation is mine.

Von Appen explained how Gang persuaded him to walk him home. On their way to Altona, they passed a public toilet, where they, according to the statement, engaged in manual sex.[225] Afterwards, Gang paid him three Marks in exchange for the 'service'. Around a fortnight later, they met again in Hardas Singh's bar and repeated the sexual interaction in the public toilet. The apprentice also offered his services to other men whom he approached in the "Indian Bar" until his arrest in November 1938.

Singh himself, of course, was no stranger to Sankt Pauli's nocturnal scene. In 1940, when he had already been forced to close his bar by the Nazi authorities, he was accused of having robbed a man's coat at night, together with two accomplices. In his defence statement to the Hamburg police, he described his activities on the night in question:

> In the afternoon hours I was at the snooker hall, Gr. Neumarkt. There, I didn't play but only passed the time. The other people there were not known to me. I watched them play. At around 9:30pm I left. I went alone to Nordmann, Zeughausmarkt. On the way I did not meet any acquaintance. The Nordmann bar I also visited alone. I didn't have any cash, the 1,30 marks I still had I kept because I wanted to eat later. At Nordmann I didn't order anything. I sat on a bench by the oven. It is true that at this bar I sang once that night. However, I must fiercely deny that I collected any cash for it. In the Nordmann bar I stayed until the beginning of the police curfew. Then I left. […]
> After leaving the Nordmann bar I left towards Reeperbahn. I went on the right-hand sidewalk. […] From Thalstraße I went to Schmuckstraße, to the venue "Chinarestaurant". There I had food for which I paid 0,90 marks. At around 2am, I was at my flat and went to bed.[226]

[225] The accused in such cases usually only admitted to mutual masturbation and not to any other sexual practices, since the punishment for the former was much less severe than for the latter.

[226] Singh, Hardas u.a. wegen Diebstahl, Hehlerei, StAHH, 213-11, 60547, pp. 4–5. The original text reads: „In den Nachmittagsstunden hielt ich mich im Billardsaal, Gr. Neumarkt auf. Dort habe ich aber nicht gespielt, sondern habe mich dort nur aufgehalten. Die Personen, die sich dort aufhalten, sind mir nicht bekannt. Ich habe beim Spiel zugesehen. Gegen 21:30 Uhr ging ich fort. Ich ging allein fort und zwar ging ich nach Nordmann, Zeughausmarkt. Auf dem Weg dorthin habe ich auch keine Bekannten getroffen. Die Wirtschaft von Nordmann suchte ich auch alleine auf. Geld hatte ich nicht mehr, denn den RM. 1,30, die ich noch besaß, habe ich nicht ausgegeben, weil ich dafür noch essen wollte. Bei Nordmann habe ich nicht verzehrt. Ich habe dort am Ofen auf der Bank gesessen. Es ist richtig, daß ich in dem Lokal einmal an diesem Abend gesungen habe. Ich muss aber entschieden bestreiten, dafür Geld kassiert zu haben. In dem Lokal von Nordmann hielt ich mich bis zum Eintritt der Polizeistunde auf. Als Feierabend geboten wurde, verließ ich die Wirtschaft. […] Nach Verlassen der Wirtschaft von Nordmann ging ich in Richtung Reeperbahn fort. Ich ging auf dem rechten Bürgersteig. […] Von der Tahlstraße ging ich zur Schmuckstraße, in das Lokal „Chinarestaurant". Dort habe ich noch gegessen, wofür ich RM. 0,90 bezahlt habe. Etwa gegen 2:00 Uhr war ich in meiner Wohnung und legte mich schlafen." The translation is mine.

The bar owner displayed an intimate knowledge of the area between Neustadt and Sankt Pauli, including street names and localities, suggesting that he was a regular visitor to these establishments and often roamed the streets of the dock neighbourhood in order to pass the time or buy something to eat. The fact that he even performed songs at the Nordmann bar lends credibility to the assumption that he was known to the other guests and the bar owners, permitting him to stay for some time without ordering anything.

In the area between Sankt Pauli and Neustadt, entertainment, hospitality, and gastronomy were closely interlinked. The daily lives of the Indian migrants intermingled with those of the Hamburg working class and the Chinese community, who had their shops and restaurants in the same district. Singh saved some of his weekly unemployment allowance so that he could dine at one of the Chinese restaurants, which were open until late and served affordable meals.

1.5.3 "Heinestraße"

Right next to Schmuckstraße, where the Chinese residents lived in the basements of the houses, the adjacent Hamburger Berg was another important locality for the South Asian migrants. In June 1922, Henry Obed, a Lucknow-born Indian ex-seafarer, arrived in Hamburg from London and rented an apartment in Heinestraße, as the Hamburger Berg was called in the 1920s. He was joined by his compatriot Mubarak Ali, another former *lascar* who had settled in the port city. Another inhabitant of the apartment was the aforementioned associate of M.N. Roy Ibrahim, who presumably convinced Ali and Obed to participate in the agitation of *lascars* through the Interclub. The house owner, the English-speaking Mrs Howe, might have been a migrant herself and upheld cordial relations with her Indian tenants.

Hardas Singh, likewise, cohabitated with a European woman. He lived in Brüderstraße 20 IV.b in the Neustadt in a flat rented to him by one Mrs Greim, presumably from Germany. To get from his home to work, Hardas Singh had to cover a distance of 1.5 kilometres, which he usually walked. He had to cross the entire amusement district of Sankt Pauli on his way back home during which he presumably often stopped for a beer, to have dinner, or seeking diversion. Whether he ever visited his compatriots in Heinestraße remains the subject of speculation. We know from IPI sources that Singh and Obed had met around 1923. In a statement given in front of a jury at a trial against him in Calcutta in 1935, Obed mentioned an unfriendly encounter with the bar owner:

> [...] in 1923 during his stay in Hamburg petitioner [Obed, SvJ] met an Indian there named Hardas Singh alias Mita Singh who was a deserter from the British Army during the War. Subsequently this man became petitioner's bitter enemy owing to both having serious disputes over a German girl for months in 1923. This man threatened petitioner with revenge and it is possible he might have been responsible for some of the false reports against petitioner.[227]

Since this statement is the only archival evidence of a meeting between the two migrants, it is hard to determine the real nature of their acquaintanceship. During his trial, in which Obed was accused of having violated the Bengal Arms Act by smuggling weapons into the presidency, he presented an elaborate conspiracy theory in which he accused business rivals and other enemies of having produced false information about himself in order to ruin his reputation However, the reference to Singh's military past corroborates various other sources available on the ex-*sepoy*. Presumably, the paths of these two individuals have crossed frequently during their stay in Hamburg. They were both known to advertise their businesses to Indian seamen at the docks. Moreover, they both were involved in the communist network, as elaborated above, and they might even have considered each other as comrades at one point of time.

1.5.4 The Chinese quarter

Another important space deeply entangled with the South Asian migration was the so-called Chinese quarter. How it came into existence in the early 1920s has been the subject of Chapter 1. Although there is no evidence suggesting that the Chinese and Indian inhabitants of Sankt Pauli shared much overlap in daily lives, there are some indicators that lend credibility to the assumption that they least lived alongside one another.

As mentioned above, Hardas Singh was probably a regular visitor to one of the many Chinese restaurants in the neighbourhood. Being no stranger to the nightlife and amusement business, he might also have visited Chinese bars and cafés occasionally. Both migrant populations had a seafaring background and inhabited economic niches in connection to the Asian seafaring population. They made their living by offering their shore-going countrymen various services and goods: for example, laundry, every-day supplies, and of course dining

[227] IOR/L/P&J/12/477, p. 77.

and drinking. The venues were all in close spatial proximity to one another. There existed a Chinese shop for seamen's supplies as well as a Chinese laundry service at Bernhard-Nocht-Straße 93, only a few houses away from Singh's "Indian bar" on the same street, and a Chinese restaurant in Heinestraße, where Obed and his Indian house mates lived.[228] Like members of the Chinese community, the Indian residents visited the docks regularly to personally advertise their services to the incoming seafarers.

Moreover, their legal status in Germany was equally precarious. As developed in Chapter 2, any breach of law, financial destitution, or even homelessness could result into expulsion from German territory. After being able to live relatively unperturbed during the 1920s, the Chinese community was eradicated during Nazi rule, and the "Indian Bar" had to close its doors.

Another migrant group which had settled in Sank Pauli in the interwar period was composed of Africans from Cameroon. Having arrived between 1885 and 1914 as dependents of returning German colonists or for educational purpose, the passage for migration had been closed after the loss of the colonies in the war. Like the Indians and Chinese migrants, the Cameroonians settled in the Hamburg dock area. Three households existed right next to Singh's bar and around 15 people inhabited the border area between Sankt Pauli and Altona.[229] Six men lived in or around Adolphstraße (now Bernstorffstraße), which was only a few blocks away from Heinestraße (now Hamburger Berg), where the Indian residents lived.

In the late 1920s, jazz bands playing on the Reeperbahn featured Black performers. Another source of income was temporary employment in unskilled professions as porters, doormen or waiters. Around a dozen Black migrants attempted to establish themselves as independent traders or entrepreneurs, often selling or trading products from or associated with the former protectorates. Others made a living as performers, skilfully exploiting their perceived otherness for economic purposes. Whether as musicians on the Reeperbahn, as actors in film or theatre in Berlin, or as itinerant dancers and circus entertainers, they earned money by performing contemporary stereotypes of Black people.[230] This is not to say that their performances had no artistic merit but that they were pushed into certain economic niches by the racist tastes of the ethnic German audiences.

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[228] Amenda, *Fremde, Hafen, Stadt*, pp. 118–9.

[229] Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, p. 121.

[230] Ibid., pp. 145–6.

Since few of them had a seafaring background, they had little or no relationship to the African sailors in the Hamburg port. Whereas the Indian and Chinese newcomers heavily depended on the seafarers as customers in their bars, cafés, restaurants, shops, and laundry services, the Africans did not venture into these businesses.

Whether there was contact between the different migrant groups is hard to determine. Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft's monograph on the Black diaspora in Germany argues that the Black community was rather tightly knit and exclusive, with their own welfare association and shared housing.[231] There is no mention of socio-economic exchange with other migrant groups. However, since they all inhabited a rather small geographic space (sometimes even living on the same street or block) and were further connected by their migration experience, it is unlikely that their communities never interacted. One possible point of contact was Hardas Singh's bar, which was visited by African and Asian nationals alike.

1.5.5 Housing and local women

Another commonality in the everyday practices of the different migrant groups was their relationship to local women. Like the Chinese and African migrants, Indian migrants often either cohabitated or entered romantic relationships with German or other European women. These women can be conceptualized as "arrival brokers" as they provided access to functional (housing), social (neighbourhood networks), and symbolic (partnership / marriage) resources.[232] After 1918, many war widows would sublet furnished rooms to newly arrived migrant men to make a living.[233] The services provided by the women also included the transfer of informal information or the provision of emotional support. Termed "weak ties" by Mark S. Granovetter, these recourses helped newcomers beyond just "getting-by" and should not be underestimated in their ability to help climb the social ladder.[234] As Diane Frost has explored in her study on Liverpool, being in a partnership with a non-white migrant often meant discrimination and social exclusion for these women. They were abused verbally and

[231] Ibid., p. 129.

[232] Heike Hanhörster and Susanne Wessendorf, "The Role of Arrival Areas for Migrant Integration and Resource Access" in *Urban Planning* (2020, Volume 5, Issue 3), p. 4.

[233] Aitken and Rosenhaft, *Black Germany*, pp. 127–8.

[234] Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties" in *American Journal of Sociology* (1973), Volume 78, Issue 6).

physically in the streets and sometimes even ostracized by their families and friends.[235] The constant harassment lead them to embrace the Black community and even to identify themselves as 'Black', partially de-constructing their other (white working-class) identities.[236] Within the Chinese migrant community inn Hamburg, extramarital relationships were much more common than marriages.[237] From the perspective of the German working-class women, partnering with a Chinese or Cameroonian migrant could mean moving up the social ladder, especially when the individual owned a café or restaurant. Adding to their popularity, Chinese men usually abstained from alcohol, which was a major issue in German working-class families, and did not consider cooking to be lowly or exclusively as female labour. For the women, however, marrying a foreigner also meant the automatic loss of their German citizenship, as they adopted the nationality of the husband, often without their knowledge.[238] This legislation excluded them from practicing professions including law, medicine, and teaching, made them ineligible for public financial assistance, and often prevented them from sending their children to public schools.

The Indians, similarly, shared accommodation with German or other European women. Both, Singh and Obed, had romantic partnerships with local White women, with whom they (temporarily or long-term) shared a house or a flat. Singh had two documented marriages and one engagement, the latter of which resulted in a son born in 1937.[239] He and the mother of his child, the Swiss dancer Antonie Meyer, briefly shared his flat in Brüderstraße before the couple seperated in 1938. Even after the breakup, Meyer only moved a few blocks away into a flat in Neustädterweg 14, only a five-minute walk from Brüderstraße. The two were estranged but stayed in touch for the sake of their child, for whom Singh was obliged to make support payments and whom he occasionally brought sweets.[240]

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[235] Diane Frost, "Ambiguous Identities. Constructing and De-Constructing Black and White 'Scouse' identities in twentieth century Liverpool", in Neville Kirk ed. *Northern Identities. Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'* (Burlington: Ashgate 2000), pp. 205–8.

[236] Ibid., p. 207–8.

[237] Amenda, *Fremde, Hafen, Stadt*, p. 131.

[238] Eli Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany: Ethnicity, Utility and Nationalism* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 209.

[239] Auszug aus dem Strafregister, StAHH, 213-11, 60547; StAHH, 376-2, Gewerbepolizei, VII C c 1.

[240] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 4.

Obed married his girlfriend Caroline Margaretta Homann in 1924,[241] whom he had met in Hamburg. The marriage lasted until Obed's death in 1952. Caroline was not only his romantic partner but also his business companion, and she joined him on his various trips to India. As I am going to dissect in detail in the biographic chapter on the Indian merchant, their partnership was intimate and characterized by mutual respect and adoration.

The liaison enabled Obed to start a business of his own and might have been the reason his migration to Europe was quite successful. His first shop was situated in the house of Caroline's father in Sternstraße, from which he sold cigarettes, contraband liquor, and other supplies to Indian *lascars*.[242]

The importance of local women for South Asian migrants to New York has been thoroughly scrutinized by Vivek Bald in his remarkable monograph "Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America".[243] He looks at the diaspora of Indian Muslims from East Bengal to New York in the 1930s and 1940s, most of whose members had a seafaring background. After deserting their ships in one of the north Atlantic ports, migrants settled in the multi-ethnic neighbourhoods of East and lower Central Harlem where they joined other immigrants.[244] One strategy to circumvent the restrictions of the American migration regime, which did not allow them to become US citizens, was to masquerade as Puerto Rican. Another way to increase one's prospects of staying in the United States was to marry a woman of West Indian, Puerto Rican, or Black American descent. As alluded to in the Introduction, a rising number of Indian Muslim ex-seamen were marrying within the local communities of colour. While roughly half of them were single men living in boarding houses or shared flats, one third had married or were living with their immigrant spouses.[245] Some Indian men actively sought the acquaintance of other migrant women. They went on special trips to the Bronx to attend parties where they could meet Puerto Rican and Black American women.[246] Others went to their friends' or relatives' shops to flirt with female customers or they threw their own parties where they served home-made food and played the latest Latin dance music.

[241] According to their marriage certificate, Obed married Carolina Margaretha Dora Homann on January 14, 1924, in Hamburg. See Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 9.

[242] IOR/L/P&J/12/78, Arms smuggling into India, p. 26.

[243] Bald, *Bengali Harlem.*

[244] Ibid., p. 166.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Ibid., p. 197.

In the 1940s, word had spread in the Puerto Rican community that Indian men made good husbands. As a result, women who had already married Bengalis were asked to introduce sisters and friends to other Indians or took it upon their own initiative to arrange such an introduction.

However, securing their immigrant status in the United States was not the only reason why ex-seamen chose to live with Puerto Rican or Black American women. The best way to escape factory work or work in the hotel or restaurant business was to find semi-independent work as a street food vendor or to open their own restaurants or other small businesses. Some Indian seamen sold hot dogs from pushcarts in the streets of East Harlem in the 1940s. Those who were able to raise enough capital moved a step further to small start-up businesses and restaurants. The latter was the most common venture, serving both traditional Pakistani or Bangladeshi dishes as well as American food like steaks and chicken wings.[247] Their success was often guaranteed by the division of labour among family members, as discussed before.

A similar pattern of family formation was characteristic for the Arab community in South Shields in the early 20thcentury.[248] Like in Hamburg, there was a surplus of young women in the aftermath of the First World War who appreciated the additional pool of potential husbands provided by the seafarers. Their sobriety appealed to the working-class women, who themselves sometimes had a migrant background, and the Arab men generally had a good reputation as husbands and fathers. In return, the relationship opened the door for Arabs into White British society. As Bald has observed for New York, David Byrnes argues that marriage was used as a lever to claim welfare benefits and citizenship rights to the state, which was denied for to the Black migrants although their status as migrant workers had been firmly established in the 1930s.[249]

In London, the situation was slightly different. Migration of former seamen, mainly from Sylhet, only really started from the 1930s onwards. They relied on community pioneers for support, who lodged them in boarding houses and gave them interest-free credits. As British subjects, many of them were eligible to a work permit. Since migration in the initial years was

[247] Ibid., p. 174.

[248] Byrne, Class, Race and Nation, pp. 97–8.

[249] Ibid., p. 99.

predominantly male, the ex-*lascars* involved themselves with British and Irish women.[250] Especially for the early pioneers, the help and generosity of these women was crucial for their settlement: they would get them jobs or help with the paperwork. It became common for the *lascars* to marry their European girlfriends, some of whom converted to Islam.[251]

Analogously, marriages between local working-class women and Kru seafarers from the west African coast were not uncommon early in 20th-century Liverpool. These women were often placed in an ambiguous position. Not only were they spatially confined by law to the areas of concentrated Black settlement, restricting the pubs and clubs they were allowed to visit, but they were also socially confined as they had to adopt their husband's legal status after marriage and lost their right to vote.[252]

1.6 Summary

Sankt Pauli docklands was a vibrant, multi-ethnic neighbourhood in the 1920s and 1930s. Visitors from around the world were fascinated by its nightlife, taking notice of the mixed-race customers, owners, and service providers in the various establishments. Chinese and African migrants lived alongside the German working-class population. The latter were predominantly employed in the harbour as pilots, stevedores, crane operators, coal or grain workers, dockers, or warehouse keepers and supported the social democratic or communist parties. The German working class was diversified by an Asian maritime workforce employed on European steam ships. Among the German companies, the DDG "Hansa" was at the forefront when it came to substituting German labour with Asian sailors who worked for lower wages. At the turn of the century, the company had replaced its enture engine room workers with Chinese or Indian seafarers. While the ships were docked for repairs and cargo turnover, the Indian seamen joined their German workmates in the amusement district Sankt Pauli to find distraction and recreation after the long weeks spent labouring at sea. At night, they went to the bars, restaurants, theatres, and gambling houses, where they mingled with the local population.

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[250] Carolin Adams eds. *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers. Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain* (London: Eastside Book, 1987), p. 48.

[251] Ibid.

[252] Frost, *Racism, Work and Unemployment*, p. 28.

At this historic conjuncture, a number of spaces came into existence which enabled the settlement of South Asian non-elite migrants. Apart from the docks and the amusement district, South Asians gathered at the "International Seamen's Club" in Neustadt run by members of the communist party in Hamburg. For a brief period around 1923/24, the club recruited *lascars* and urged them to take part in their revolutionary struggle, which included the smuggling of weapons and literature to India.

The seafarers were informed about the Interclub by their compatriots in Hamburg who visited their ships and invited them to join their meetings. This was also how they got to know about the "Indian Bar", run by the ex-*sepoy* Hardas Singh, and Henry Obed's seamen's supplies store. Just like the migrants depended on the maritime workforce as customers, the seafarers were fond of the recreational possibilities and shopping opportunities offered by their compatriots on land. It was here that their needs for supplies, employment, diversion, company, and even sexual interactions were met. It was therefore the synergy of this mutually beneficial arrangement that allowed for the survival of both the Indian migrants and the seafarers.

Another important aspect of the network of South Asian migrants was their relationships with local women. Many migrants lived with or even married German or other European women. These partnerships resembled to some extent the relationships Indian ex-seafarers formed with arrivant women in Harlem, Liverpool, London, or South Shields around the same time. Here again we find this arrangement mutually beneficial, as the women helped the Indians to increase their prospects of achieving legal immigrant status while the economic success of the Indian men often attracted the migrant or working-class females.

In spite of these advantages, there were limitations to the possibilities these spaces offered to Indian migrants. Whereas their economic pursuits were thriving in the "internationalist" atmosphere of the 1920s in general and the Sankt Pauli dock area in particular, the rise of National Socialism put an end to their prospects in Germany. The "Indian Bar" had to shut down under the pretence of mismanaged paperwork indicating tax evasion. However, it is safe to assume that any place with sympathies for the gay community would not be allowed to exist under Nazi rule.

Even before the onset of fascism, the migrant spaces were mostly enclaves in a frequently hostile environment. As contemporary observers' prosaic descriptions of Sankt Pauli have shown, racism was prevalent throughout the 1920s. Condescending notions about the

Chinese community but also the clientele and employees of the “Indian Bar” indicate that their presence was not welcomed by everyone. With employment opportunities limited by the “Inländerprimat”, migrants had to capitalize on their perceived ‘otherness’, reinforcing existing stereotypes. Circumstances pushed them into economic niches and precarious self-employment.

Their marginalization was further promoted by the exclusionist politics of the maritime trade union. Instead of showing solidarity with their workmates on the basis of their collective exploitation by the shipping companies, South Asian seafarers were regarded as low-wage competition and potential strike breakers. The communist branch of the union was an exception but even their willingness to alleviate the distress of the *lascars* diminished when the success of their clandestine operations did not live up to expectations. It is even possible that the smuggling of books and weapons via the Interclub got some of the Indian migrants in trouble. Henry Obed and Mubarak Ali, both involved in Roy’s scheme, had to leave the port city after being accused of drug smuggling by the Hamburg police.

The migrant spaces always remained liminal spaces with respect to migrant opportunity. They were a source of income but operated within the shadow economy of the port and were thus susceptible to police raids and closures. They were spaces of exchange with compatriots and sympathetic locals but only as long as the political power relations in the city were favourable. While the meetings of the “Bolshevik Club” apparently took place with the knowledge Hamburg police, the very same authorities issued the expulsion of some of its members only a few months later.

In order to be able to make a more substantiated claim about ‘migrant possibility’ as defined in the Introduction, we need to look at the migrant regime itself, meaning the judicial framework, which determined migration during the Weimar Republic. The following chapter analyses migrant strategies and practices against the background of the migrant regime and again locates moments of opportunity as well as limitations to migrant agency within that framework.

2. Migration and the labour market: Indians' economic strategies

In June 1922, Henry Obed arrived in Sankt Pauli. Previously, he had resided in London, where he had conducted an "agency" business on Queen Street.[253] After changing his domicile to Hamburg, the Indian ex-seafarer partnered in an Indo–German "import and export" company dealing with motor and bicycle accessories to India and Ceylon.[254] He also operated an "Indian store" from his rented apartment, selling "woollen, steel and fancy goods"[255] to *lascars*.
What compelled him to leave London, a metropolitan centre with a small Indian diaspora and few legal restrictions for immigration, for Hamburg, a porty city with almost no Indian presence and an exclusionist migration regime? Fourteen years later, in 1936, he explained his reasons for moving to Hamburg in his testimony in front of a jury at a trial[256] in Calcutta:

> While staying in London, petitioner [Henry Obed, SvJ] read in newspapers that living in Germany was very cheap. Those were the days of boom in German Marks. Reports of cheap living in Germany was very inviting to petitioner and he left London for Humburg [sic] with £ 300 /- in his pocket but was completely disillusioned when he found that he was left with only £ 30 /- in a few days time. […]. He immediately purchased a shop in Humburg [sic] for £ 20 /- and stocked it with Seamen's outfit, carried on his business for about a year upto the end of 1923 and made very good profits as seamen from India used to crowd his shop – being the only Indian Shop in the line – and make huge purchases, things being very cheap in Germany at the time.[257]

Given that he gave that statement at a trial in which he was the main person accused, he refrained from revealing compromising information about himself. Hence, if he had, in fact, left London because he was involved in criminal or incendiary activities in Hamburg, he would not admit to it in this context. We must keep in mind that the information he provides is biased and selective, aimed at presenting himself in a certain light to pursue a distinct agenda. Three points immediately attract the attention of the reader. First, he gives an *strategic reason* for moving to Germany. In the time of the ravaging hyperinflation of 1922/23, which

[253] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 50; TNA/KV/2/1296. There is no specification in the source as to what is meant by "agency" business. Judging from his later professional activities, it was either a seamen's supply store or a trading business with goods from overseas.
[254] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, Arrest of Germans at Cork; TNA/KV/2/1296; IOR/L/PJ/12/78, p. 26.
[255] TNA/KV/2/1296.
[256] In the trial, he was accused of having violated the Bengal Smuggling of Arms Act by smuggling arms and ammunitions from Europe to India.
[257] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 76.

he casually calls “the days of boom in German Marks”, the value of foreign currency rose significantly. Thus, living in Germany was relatively cheap for anyone in possession of foreign exchange. Second, Obed gives a *personal reason*. Having become financially destitute, he was forced to resume his business activity as soon as he settled in Hamburg. He bought a seamen’s supply shop and, as we learn from other sources, partnered in a trading company with India.[258] Third, he names the *Indian networks* as a reason for his successful settlement in Hamburg. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, the presence of Indian *lascars* was one of the key factors enabling South Asian working-class migration. According to Obed, his monopoly in the trade secured him a stable clientele and sufficient funds to make ends meet for the period of over a year.

In this chapter, all three reasons given by Henry Obed will be discussed as factors for non-elite[259] South Asian migration to Germany. Since Indian networks have already been scrutinized before, the focus will be on the socio-economic factors. The discussion delineates the functioning and changes in the German migration regime in the context of the Weimar regime’s political instability and economic crisis. The rising influence of those forces promoting an ethnically exclusive nationalism also impacted the prospects of settling in Germany. In order to appease labour unions and nationalist politicians agitating against the employment of foreign labour in factories and on plantations, the government formulated a quota system for the employment of non-German nationals.

Moreover, a rigid passport and visa system was on the rise not only in Germany but also in Europe more broadly and in the United States. Not without loopholes and shortcomings, it attempted to regulate and bureaucratize transnational migration. The police became a major player in the enforcement of the new laws and regulations, drawing their entitlement from their prerogative to carry out expulsions and deportations. In the absence of any other authority, the Hamburg police was in charge of the “Fremden-Meldewesen” (foreigners’ registration) since 1892.[260] Foreigners, legally defined as people without Hamburg citizenship,

[258] IE/MA/G2/X/0375; TNA/KV/2/1296; IOR/L/PJ/12/78, p. 26.

[259] I understand “non-elite” as not belonging to either the higher political, academic or wealthy strata of the Indian society upon their arrival in Europe. This definition includes people from an affluent or educated background who lost their privilege either through disinheritance or through their migration circumstances.

[260] Charlotte Räuchle, “Welcome to the City? Discursive and Administrative Dimensions of Hamburg’s Arrival Infrastructures Around 1900” in Arrival Infrastructures. Migration and Urban Social Mobilities ed. Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut, and Bas van Heur (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 45.

had to register their names within eight days of arriving in the city. The following paragraphs look at how the Indian migrants reacted to these (changing) circumstances and dissects the strategies they adopted to avoid the state's exclusionist drive as well as their marginalization in the national labour market.

South Asian migration to Hamburg in the interwar years has never been the subject of academic analysis. Admittedly, the Indian presence during that time was statistically negligible. The Hamburg population report of 1925 lists 25 people from "British-India" among the permanent and 50 among the non-permanent residents of the city, too few to attempt a quantitative socio-historical analysis.[261] However, Indian presence in the interwar period was more visible than the numbers suggest, especially near the docks, through the constant movement of *lascars*, who traversed back and forth between their ships and the amusement district of Sankt Pauli, as pointed out before. Adding to this visibility was a small number of South Asians, mostly former seamen or people with seafaring experience, who had permanently settled in Hamburg. They arrived in the early 1920s and experienced the hardships of the turbulent post-war years. This chapter situates the economic strategies of these migrants in the context of an exclusionist post-war nation state.

Settling in Hamburg was complicated by an increasingly hostile German attitude towards foreign nationals after the war. Putting an end to the rather liberal migration regime of the pre-war era, passports became compulsory for anyone crossing the borders of the geographically reduced German Reich in 1919. Within its boundaries, the rise of ethnocentric and racist notions of the nation reduced non-White, non-elite migrants' prospects of staying in the country. The preference for Germans in factories and plantations, the restrictions on the mobility of "foreigners", and the limited access to German nationality, residency rights and citizenship weighted heavily on the South Asian migrants' claim to a place in German society.

In the face of these limitations, I argue that it was crucial for non-elite South Asian migrants to succeed economically. As Charlotte Räuchle has shown by the example of German maids, the economic potential of a migrant worker was an important criterion for access to Hamburg society.[262] All foreigners needed to carry sufficient funds or find a job within the first days of

[261] Hamburg Statistischen Landesamt*, Statistisches Jahrbuch für die freie und Hansestadt Hamburg 1925* (Hamburg: Statistischen Landesamt, 1926), p. 363.
[262] Räuchle, Welcome tot he City?, p. 47.

their arrival. If they fancied a chance at a self-determined and dignified life in Hamburg, they had to avoid even the smallest indication of financial destitution, as this could be a legal reason for expulsion. Gaining financial independence was one strategy to resist the government's exclusionist agenda. Considering the preference for German nationals (for whom most jobs were reserved) in all industries, the service sector and the public sector due to the so-called "Inländerprimat", it was hard to attain permanent employment. Many migrants ventured into self-employment, preferably in a field where they could benefit from their transnational networks (for example, the foreign trade) and did not clash with German commercial ambitions.

Border crossing and settlement was determined by much more than monetary considerations. The social milieu of the space of arrival and the networks and relationships formed on the spot, as well as the personal choices of the migrant individual were, of course, important factors. However, the following investigation shows how certain practices of the German nation state, and the Hamburg city state, designed to nationalize the labour market, had an impact on non-elite South Asian migration.

The text is divided into two main sections, "Arriving" and "Staying". Each begins with a discussion of the state-sanctioned restrictions on migration to Germany situated within the context of the socio-political climate in Hamburg. Subsequently, the analysis highlights migrant reactions to these interventions at that specific historic conjuncture based on my findings from the archive. In the latter part of each section, the migrants' strategies take centre stage of the historic investigation. By exploring the possibilities but also the limits of their claims to the port city, another layer to the overall theme of this dissertation, the investigation of 'migrant possibility', is added.

2.1 Arriving

2.1.1 The German migration regime after the First World War

After the termination of the hostilities of the First World War, all belligerent nations maintained and institutionalized the protectionist measures introduced during the war years. Modern, interventionist states across the globe started categorizing populations and closed their borders against unwanted immigrants. As the notion of a homogenous nation gained legitimacy, people who were considered different from or inadaptable to the specific

imagination of a national identity were pushed to the margins of society. The constitutive elements of the national collective increasingly narrowed down from linguistic and cultural to ethnic and eventually racial markers. Homogeneity, as Julia Angster demonstrates, became a physical, biological feature from the 1890 onwards, even more so after the First World War.[263] Accordingly, nationality was awarded along ethnic and racial lines after the 1880s in order to create what Rogers Brubaker calls a "community of descent."[264] The institution of national belonging was crucially linked to the access to citizenship rights, social security and welfare programs, and civic duty and participation. Ethnic minorities in Germany, such as Poles, Danes, and Jews, were exempted from these rights and became second-class citizens.[265] The basis of citizenship thus, was defined by genealogy rather than territory, by descent rather than residence.

Although the state had not yet become the "Rassestaat" (racial state) of the National Socialist regime and was still bound to the principle of political equality among its citizens, "outsiders" were increasingly seen as lacking any claim to the territory and "protection" of the paternalistic state. The passport enabled the authorities to unambiguously determine a person's national identity and, by extension, his or her entitlements vis-à-vis the state without having to exclusively rely on more inconclusive markers of identity such as skin colour or language.[266] Given these underlying implications, the passport was never a neutral document but always a legal-technical mechanism to normalize difference based on socially constructed ideas of race and ethnicity. Its bureaucratic appearance concealed its discriminatory ideology. In the German Reich, the government order of June 1919 required anyone crossing its borders in either direction to carry a standardized passport or visa. This new regulation was first introduced in 1914 by almost all belligerent states because of an irrational fear of spies entering the country and to prevent their own citizens from evading military service.[267] Before the war, passports and visa documents were uncommon in the transatlantic realm and even

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[263] Julia Angster, Dieter Gosewinkel, and Christoph Gusy. *Staatsbürgerschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), p. 127.

[264] Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 115.

[265] Angster, Gosewinkel, and Gusy, *Staatsbürgerschaft*, p. 135.

[266] Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, p. 121.

[267] John Torpey, "The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Passport Systems in the Modern World," In *Documenting Individual Identity. The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 256–7.

deemed politically backward. Freedom of (labour) movement was considered as crucial for the successful advancement of industrialization, urbanization, and global market integration.[268] After the war, however, the passport regime, originally proclaimed as a temporary emergency measure, was made permanent by almost all European states. The pioneer of this development was the United States with its quota system that limited the number of visas granted to members of each nation. These visas were issued by their consular agencies in the respective countries before the travellers' departure for the US.[269]

In Germany, a newly formed border police enforced this emergent regime by denying entry to people without legitimate papers. Moreover, the 1919 order ruled that all foreign nationals already staying inside German territory had to own a passport or some other legitimate means of identification.[270]

However, the German ambitions towards documentary exclusion were contested and never fully realized. Especially in the immediate post-war years, intergovernmental efforts to implement the standardized passport requirements were hampered by insufficient institutional and administrative support.[271] For example, 900 officers installed to patrol the 2,000-kilometre eastern frontier were inadequate to seal it effectively.[272] Moreover, besides its financial and personnel limitations, the state had to bow down to international diplomacy to prevent further damage to its already damaged world image. Soon, bilateral agreements again started reducing the visa requirements for the uninterrupted flow of not only tourism and business interests but also permanent migration.

Despite these efforts to curtail migration, German was the most popular destination for refugees after the First World War, at least for those coming from Russia and the newly created eastern European states. Annemarie H. Sammartino gives five reasons for Germany's appeal. First, after the collapse of the Kaiserreich, the borders were only controlled in a perfunctionary manner, lacking manpower and infrastructure.[273] Second, due to inflation,

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[268] Jochen Oltmer, "Das Osnabrücker Abkommen von 1925 und die euroatlantischen Migrationsverhältnisse," in *Perspektiven der Landesgeschichte. Festschrift für Thomas Vogtherr* ed. Christine van den Heuvel, Henning Steinführer, and Gerd Steinwascher (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020), p. 505.

[269] Ibid., p. 511.

[270] Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, p. 116.

[271] Ibid., p. 115.

[272] Annemarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border. Germany and the East, 1914-1922* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 127.

[273] Ibid., p. 122.

foreigners with hard currency or items to sell could live relatively cheaply, an observation corroborated in my sources. This caused resentment among impoverished Germans throughout the country towards foreigners who had bought property during the economic crisis. Third, fearing retribution, the German state was eager to avoid an open confrontation with the Allied forces. Fourth, many Russian POWs refused to return to Russia after the war, and fifth, Germany was geographically the first western country that the refugees reached moving westward from Russia.

The first reason given by Sammartino deserves further attention. Despite efforts of the state to create a cohesive, dedicated immigration restriction regime, the continuous movement of people and goods in between the territories suggests that border control remained incomplete and ambiguous, a situation that enterprising migrants were able to manipulate. In his doctoral thesis, Andrew Macdonald has studied the permeability of the South African border between 1900 and 1950 and has come to some interesting results. From 1897 onwards, when the first Immigration Restriction Act required literacy in a European language, there followed a succession of exclusive laws that aimed to inhibit Asian immigration. Instead of arguing that immigration law enforcers progressively narrowed immigrants' opportunities by building procedural obstacles and armed border-posts, he suggests *"to see the torrent of restrictive modifications as evidence of a prolonged, difficult and unresolved struggle."*[274]

A chronically underequipped and underfunded staff found itself struggling to contain the sheer numbers of immigrants. To increase their low wages, officials accepted bribes or embezzled money. Through what Macdonald calls "strategic permissiveness", officials frequently exempted poor Whites, rich Asians and working or religious Africans from restrictions, detention, or deportation.[275]

Similar developments can be observed in the German post-war migration regime. New regulations and restrictions were enacted and withdrawn, enforced and broken at the same time. As a means of controlling the migrant population, regional and national officials made registration with the police mandatory for foreigners. In 1919, the Prussian administration obliged all foreign nationals to register with the police within forty-eight hours after their arrival. Subsequently, the foreigner received an identity card complete with a name,

[274] Macdonald, *Colonial Trespassers*, p. 40.

[275] Ibid., p. 41.

description, picture, and fingerprint. The local authorities would assign each applicant a tracking number so that they could be followed while moving through Germany.[276] This ideal of surveillance was far beyond the capacity of the state and the problem of "illegal" immigration remained unresolved. Gradually, the influx of refugees ebbed by itself due to a stabilized Soviet Union and economic turmoil peaking in Germany.

The institutionalization of passports and visas meant that citizenship status became vital for those wishing to settle in Germany. Most Germans across the political spectrum believed that citizenship should be available only to those who had proven their German "identity". According to the 1913 citizenship law, all applicants had to submit their applications to a local office, where they were reviewed and then approved by the state's interior ministry. The state was subsequently required to submit a list of potentially eligible applicants to be reviewed by the other German provinces. In cases of disagreement, the Reichsrat, a council made up of representatives from each of the states, decided the outcome through a majority vote.[277]

New naturalization regulations drawn up in 1921, while principally adhering to the 1913 procedure, facilitated the unspoken practice of denying citizenship to Jews and Poles but favoured the admission of so-called "Auslandsdeutsche" (foreigners of German descent). Ethnicity and culture, however ambiguous and contested categories those categories are, became the primary basis for citizenship claims.[278] To prevent the permanent settlement of ethnoculturally undesired migrants, it was essential to impede their naturalization. Most immigrants, however, did not bother with naturalization applications, as is essentially only included the right to vote. From 1920 onwards, all German federal states required non-ethnic Germans to have resided for at least ten years in Germany before they were eligible to apply for naturalization.[279] Access was further complicated by a high registration fee.[280] The fervent discussion about citizenship status and its enforcement must hence be regarded as of symbolic value with little tangible effect on the state or its citizens. Sammartino claims convincingly:

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[276] Sammartino, *The Impossible Border*, p. 127.

[277] Annemarie Sammartino, "Culture, Belonging, and the Law: Naturalization in the Weimar Republic," in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. Geoff Eley and Jan Pamowski (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 60.

[278] Sammartino, *The Impossible Border*, p. 158.

[279] Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship*, p. 204.

[280] Räuchle, Welcome to the City?, p. 44.

> "[…] citizenship policy was self-consciously not an attempt to control the number or types of foreigners living on German soil. Rather, citizenship policy functioned as a battleground on which German officials debated the meaning of the German nation."[281]

Generally, German descent was the most important criterion when it came to granting citizenship, albeit not the only one. Other factors, like "public utility", adaptation to German culture and customs, long-term residency, as well as military service, determined the status of an application. Even if formal citizenship could not be secured, as was the case for most non-elite migrants who were not ethnic Germans, their presence was often tolerated by the German population and did not necessarily impede their stay in the country. Acquiring a residency permit or a working permit could provide a functional form of citizenship, which secured freedom of movement, facilitated trade, property accumulation and employment. In fact, newcomers did often not primarily aspire for permanent citizenship but made claims for their right to be mobile, as migrations is not regarded as an end in itself but as a means to achieve their vision of a future.[282]

2.1.2 The Hamburg Harbour Act and expulsion practices

Most secondary literature focusses on the border control and naturalization policy of the two most powerful German federal states during the Weimar Republic: Prussia and Bavaria. Hamburg, being a small city state, has received very little attention. Indisputably, the port remained a gateway for migration, even after the war. According to figures collected by the Hamburg police, between April and September 1923, more than 400 seamen deserted or were irregularly signed off by their consular offices. Among those personnel were 54 Chinese men and 12 Indians and Arabs.[283] Although these numbers are not representative of seaborne migration, as most deserters only stayed temporarily, whether departing by choice or by force, they suggest a certain permeability of the border.

In the light of the undesired Chinese settlement of the early 1920s, the Hamburg state implemented stricter measures to control its borders. To undermine "illegal" seaborne

[281] Sammartino, *The Impossible Border*, p. 161.
[282] Meeus *et al*, *Arrival Infrastructures*, p. 6-7.
[283] Amenda, *Fremde. Hafen, Stadt*, p. 174. He refers to: Bericht der Polizeibehörde Hamburg, Ordnungspolizei, Hafen- und Schiffahrtspolizei (Bernau) vom 1.10.1923, StAHH, 311-1 I, 846, Bd 1.

migration of Chinese and so-called "coloured seamen", the Hamburg parliament, giving in to a long-standing demand from the Hamburg police, passed an amendment to the "Hafengesetz" (Harbour Act) of 1897 in 1925. Part of the act reorganized the relationship between the police, shipping companies, and the maritime workforce in the port. Now, ship captains had to provide a list of all crew members containing information about their 'racial' identity, which had to be sanctioned by the harbour police before the sailors were allowed to disembark from their vessel and enter the city.

Moreover, the shipping companies were held financially liable for the costs incurred due to desertion.[284] For every seaman, the company had to pay a "deposit" corresponding to the worker's "race" that was retained if the sailor failed to return to his ship. For a British sailor, the amount was 170 RM, for an Indian sailor it was 700 RM, a Chinese sailor it was 800 RM and the maximum amount was 1,200 RM for an Australian.[285] Presumably, the fines rose proportionally with the distance to the home port and the associated costs of repatriation. Whether this law had the desired effect is hard to say. Chinese migration to Hamburg continued far into the 1930s. Although the law was not aimed at a specific nationality but targeted desertions in general, in practice, it was designed to exclude Asian migration, since Asian presence was seen with increasing hostility. The law found resonance with the racist and exclusionist trend in the migration policies of European port cities during that time and reflected the anti-immigrant sentiment of considerable parts of the German population.[286]

A few historic examples demonstrate the importance of paper documentation for Indian migrants to Hamburg. Henry Obed and Syed Amir Hassan Mirza, two Indian Muslims, had received their passports from the British Indian consulate in London, as we discuss in more detail below. They were granted in May 1922 and June 1921,[287] respectively, prior to their departure to Hamburg. Both men came from relatively elite backgrounds but had lost the privileges connected to their status in their early adolescent years. Since Obed's father had died when he was still a teenager, he abandoned his hometown for Calcutta in search for work and eventually found employment as a saloon boy in the British merchant marine. Mirza

[284] Ibid, p. 175. Zur Verschärfung des Hafengesetztes 1925: Gesetz zur Änderung des Hafengesetzes. Besondere Vorschriften für Seeschiffe, StAHH, 331-1 I, 864, Bd. 2.

[285] Ibid.

[286] In the same year, Great Britain passed the infamous "Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order.

[287] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 7; IOR/L/PJ/12/489, Syed Amir Hassan Mirza or Meerza: activities in Europe and USA; deportation to India, p. 8.

had forsaken the goodwill of his family when he married a British woman and adopted Christianity.

Two Punjabi agriculturalists, referred to as Kishen Singh[288] and Banta in the sources, had been travelling through France and Germany in search of employment since 1921 and 1924, respectively, doing so on British passports issued in Karachi and Lahore. When they became financially destitute in 1931, they asked the British consul in Hamburg to arrange their repatriation to India.[289]

The *lascar* Mubarak Ali from Sultanpur, present-day Uttar Pradesh, reached Hamburg in 1922 on a British passport issued in Singapore in 1920, but he had allegedly lost it in 1924 when he applied for a new one with an endorsement for the United States. He only produced his seamen's certificate of discharge, a type of document whose authenticity was generally viewed with suspicion.[290] The sources remain silent about whether his request was granted or not.

A special case is the Punjabi ex-*sepoy* Hardas Singh, who fought in Europe during the First World War and voluntarily turned himself over to the Germans in 1915. Fearing persecution as a deserter, he was unable to return to India after the war and lost his British nationality in the process. He was allowed to settle in Germany but was rendered "stateless" as Hamburg records from 1927 document.[291] Although there is no evidence for an analogous procedure in Singh's case, some Indians who had assisted the Germans during the war received a stipend to help them finance a fresh start.[292] The absence of evidence does not mean, however, that Singh did not receive any financial benefits at all. The fact that he was able to open a grocery store in Berlin speaks in favour of some sort of support.[293] In 1940, when most 'foreigners' had already been forced to leave the country, Singh was still in possession of a "Fremdenpass" (aliens' ID card) and a "Meldeschein" (residency permit),[294] which allowed him to legally reside and work in Hamburg. The "Fremdenpass" was introduced in 1933 by the Foreign Office as an instrument to disenfranchise people who were considered racially inferior by the

[288] Probably spelled "Kishan Singh", referring to an inherited agricultural profession.

[289] NAI, Home (Public), 1931, File No. 23/4, Repatriation of Kishen Singh from Hamburg to India.

[290] IOR/L/E/7/1337, Economic and Overseas Department Papers.

[291] StAHH, 376-2, Gewerbepolizei, VII C c 1.

[292] Oesterheld, *„Der Feind meines Feindes ist mein Freund"*, p. 98.

[293] "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.

[294] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, pp. 11–3.

German regime.[295] It mostly applied to Afro-Germans who never officially had been naturalized but might as well have been given to Singh *in lieu* of proper papers.

Whether these passports and documents were all acquired legally is difficult to determine with certainty. That some South Asians in Europe carried pseudonyms hints towards the possibility of a black market for identity papers. Henry Obed, for example, was also known as Abid Hussain, Muhammad Hussain, Mujtaba Husain,[296] and even Bahour.[297] Whereas some of these names might be nicknames, many of those who carried pseudonyms were also associated with radical political movements and required a flexible identity for their clandestine operations.[298]

It was much more common for non-elite Indians to acquire the documents necessary for international travel through official channels. They confidently applied to one of the British diplomatic offices in Asia, the United States or Europe. If no serious allegations existed against the applicant, their request was generally granted. One reason for the issuance of passports to lower-class travellers was that it enabled the state to trace their journeys outside the jurisdiction of the British Empire.

Whereas most of these itinerants had received their passports from consular offices at home or *en route*, the Hamburg consulate general became an important contact point for South Asians once they had crossed the border. Whether it was to establish communication to relatives in India, ask for the issuance or extension of passports, or address a grievance, it was visited quite frequently by non-elite South Asians, resident or itinerant. The consulate general had resumed its activities after six years of closure during the war in 1920. Besides the *shipping office*, looking after the needs of British (colonial) seafarers, the *passport office* was its most rapidly expanding branch.[299] Although Tanja Drössel, who has worked on the history of the British in Hamburg, recites the acting consul's expectation in 1920 that the workload

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[295] Bechhaus-Gerst, *Treu bis in den Tod*, p. 71.

[296] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 32.

[297] Ibid.; IOR/L/PJ/12/91, Sub-Committee of Inter Departmental Committee on Eastern Unrest: arms smuggling into India; appointment of agent at Hamburg.

[298] „M. N. Roy", for example, was actually born as Narendra Nath Bhattacharjee and adopted his pseudonym in in 1916 in San Francisco to evade arrest. He further went by C. Martin, Hari Sing, Mr. White, D. Garcia, Dr. Mahmood and Mr. Banerjee. His emissary Ibrahim, who lived with Obed in Hamburg in 1924, used Kushi Muhammad and Muhammad Ali as pseudonyms and later changed his name to "Sepassi" when he worked for Roy in Marseille, see: Muhammad Ali alias Khushi Muhammad alias Mirza Abdul Muhammad Khan Sepassi, Indian Communist Party: activities in Europe, see IOR/L/PJ/12/194.

[299] Tanja Drössel, *Die Engländer in Hamburg 1914–1945*, (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2008), pp. 86–7.

of the *passport office* would massively increase in the years to come, she hardly elaborates on its field of competence. She merely states that the office registered residents and travellers, issued and extended passports and conveyed birth, death and insurance issues to the native place of the person concerned.[300] Conspicuously absent is any mention of British subjects from the colonies and dominions, and of British working-class cosmopolitans such as seafarers and traders, with whom the office must have dealt with regularly, reflecting a broader absence of the working classes and the marginalized in the written history of migration.

2.1.3 The economic crisis as incentive for migration

Having discussed how the possession of a passport opened the door for non-elite migrants, let us now turn to consider the Chinese labour migration to Hamburg, another striking example of the border's permeability. Since the Chinese migrants came from a similar socio-economic background, inhabited the same area, and arrived around the same time as their Indian counterparts, their settlement in Hamburg provides an interesting point of comparison. Drawing on Lars Amenda's comprehensive work on this theme, the following paragraphs outline their arrival conditions and migration strategies.

In contrast to the exclusionist practices barring lower-class migration stands the Chinese labour migration to Hamburg in the early 1920s. During the turbulent years of political upheaval and economic crisis, Chinese seamen started to settle in Sankt Pauli and the adjacent city of Altona, which, until 1937, administratively belonged to Prussia. Hamburg had witnessed a minor Chinese migration before the war: although business relations between the East Asian kingdom and the German territories had been firmly established since the beginning of the 19th century, it was not until a century later that a small Chinese community emerged in the port city.[301] In 1910, the census recorded 207 Chinese nationals, a number considerably higher than in the previous years.[302] They originated from the southern province of Guangzhou and had exchanged the rough seafaring profession on European vessels for a less physically demanding job in the dock area, mostly working for the laundry facilities of

[300] Ibid, p. 115.
[301] Amenda, *Fremde, Hafen, Stadt*, p. 59.
[302] Ibid, p. 61.

international shipping companies.[303] When the First World War disrupted international shipping and trade, these migrants, deprived of their means of income, preferred to be repatriated to their native places.[304]

After the armistice, both China and Germany felt disadvantaged by the new post-1918 international order.[305] China rejected the Versailles treaty because it resented the handover of the former German colony Qingdao (Kiautschou) to its enemy Japan. The increasingly cordial relations between China and the Reich, awakened by economic considerations, culminated in a separate, bilateral peace agreement in 1921. It guaranteed freedom of movement, settlement, and economic activity for its respective citizens.[306] Although this agreement did not translate into a direct right to residency, it set up a political framework favourable to Chinese migration.

Moreover, the economic recession following the transition from war to peacetime production, with thousands of returning soldiers in need of reintegration into the labour market while big industries such as the shipping industry were still counting their losses, ironically turned into a stimulant for migration. The destruction of vital transport nodes during the First World War isolated the hinterland from cities and interrupted international trade. The devaluation of the national currency to revive the export trade accelerated the already soaring inflation.[307] In Hamburg, the situation escalated in autumn 1923, with frequent strikes in shops and factories due to delays in payment and a massive shortage of food and other necessities. In October, the crisis climaxed in a general strike and revolutionary coup lead by the KPD.

A brief elaboration on the socio-economic crisis is useful here to enable a better understanding of the developments in Hamburg in 1923. The high reparation payments, enforced by the "London Ultimatum" in May 1921, drastically sped up the currency

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[303] Ibid, p. 64.

[304] Ibid, p. 93.

[305] Lars Amenda, *China in Hamburg* (Hamburg: Ellert & Richter Verlag, 2011), p. 51: Das Gesetz, betreffend die deutsch-chinesischen Vereinbarungen über die Wiederherstellung des Friedenszustandes vom 5.7.1921, in: *Reichgesetzblatt* 1921, pp. 829–38.

[306] Amenda, *Fremde, Hafen, Stadt*, pp. 108-110. See also Dagmar Yu-Dembski, "Cosmopolitan Lifestyles and "Yellow Quarters". Traces of Chinese Life in Germany, 1921–1941," in *Chinatowns in a Transnational World. Myths and Realities of an Urban Phenomenon*, ed. Vanessa Künnemann and Ruth Mayer (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 65.

[307] Jochen Oltmer, *Migration und Politik in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), p. 34.

devaluation.[308] After the assassination of the foreign minister, Walther Rathenau, on June 24, 1922, the economy went into a state of shock. Foreign businesses refused to accept the German Mark as means of payment. The fatal blow to the German economy occurred in January 1923, when the French government, with the help of Belgium and Italy, ordered a military occupation of the Ruhr, Germany's major industrial region. The official reason was to ensure the timely fulfilment of the reparation payments according to the Versailles Treaty.[309] The occupation deepened the economic crisis. Not only did the government have to compensate the passive resistance of the workers in the Ruhr factories and mines, who stopped work on government orders, but the production deadlock also caused a loss of tax revenue and coal supplies. The already scarce foreign exchange had to be used to import coal from abroad. The urgently needed financial requirements were met by the printing money on an excessive scale. In August 1923, one US-Dollar accounted for one million Marks.[310]

The economic catastrophe was accompanied by coup attempts on the fragile Weimar government. In central Germany, the KPD tried to stage a military revolutionary uprising analogous to the Russian October Revolution. The agitation was suppressed early, however, by the German government through emergency law. Due to a miscommunication, the Hamburg KPD started an isolated attempt to seize power in the city. Between October 23 and 25, a few hundred communists fought the police in a futile and bloody confrontation.[311] The uprising failed to gain the support of a wider working-class population and was suppressed after only a few days, causing major damage to the KPD's image.[312] Before this desolating defeat, from which the Hamburg KPD never really recovered, the radical left had held a strong position, in the parliamentary elections as well as the plant committees. For example, in 1921, the KPD won 59.000 votes in the Hamburg Bürgerschaft (city council) election.[313] On March 23 of that year, the Hamburg communists had called for a general strike, inviting workers to arm themselves and occupy the factories. Unemployed workers stormed the premises of the

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[308] Ursula Büttner, *Weimar. Die überforderte Republik 1918-1933. Leistung und Versagen in Staat, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Kultur* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), p. 170.

[309] Eberhard Kolb and Dirk Schumann, *Die Weimarer Republik* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), p. 51.

[310] Ibid., p. 52.

[311] Ibid., p. 54.

[312] Ursula Büttner, *Politische Gerechtigkeit und Sozialer Geist. Hamburg zur Zeit der Weimarer Republi*k (Hamburg: Hans Christians, 1985), p. 107.

[313] Richard A. Comfort, *Revolutionary Hamburg. Labor Politics in the Early Weimar Republic* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 114.

largest dockyard, Blohm and Voss, and demanded the workers on shift to join their action. Later that day, a shooting occurred during a mass meeting, causing the death of 19 workers and wounding 14.[314] Although the attempted insurrection hurt the KPD, the party managed to regain its strength on the shopfloor. By early 1922, the communists controlled several important work councils in the transportation and textile industries and were making broad gains everywhere in the harbour.

Following the assassination of the Jewish foreign minister Walther Rathenau by nationalist anti-Semitic forces, the Hamburg labour movement called a joint mass meeting at Heiligengeistfeld on June 27, 1922. Determined to defend the young Republic from right-wing forces, KPD, SPD, and the labour unions organised a united effort and took to the streets. However, this event remained an outlier in the story of the United Front, as no further common demonstrations were held in Hamburg throughout the Weimar period. The communist leadership proclaimed a fundamental antagonism between the Republic and the proletariat.[315]

One stimulating effect of the inflation was the revival of the manufacturing industry, now invigorated by low wages and taxes. Customers thronged restaurants and nightclubs, the export trade flourished, and foreign investment speculated on a quick recovery of the national currency.[316] These developments and rumours about low price levels and living expenses motivated Chinese seafarers to abandon ship work and settle in Hamburg in the early 1920s. Apart from the maritime settlers, the inflation also attracted a secondary migration of Chinese nationals from London to Hamburg. People with savings in foreign currencies such as the British Pound were comparatively wealthy and could acquire shops and restaurants at cheaper rates.[317] Immediately after arrival, taking advantage of their family networks established in the pre-war migration,[318] the Chinese migrants opened small seamen's supply shops, independent laundry services, boarding houses, restaurants, and

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[314] Ibid., p. 115.

[315] Ibid., p. 119.

[316] Eric D Weitz. *Weimar Germany. Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 2018, p. 133.

[317] Lars Amenda, "'Chinese Quarters.' Maritime Labor, Chinese Migration, and Local Imagination in Rotterdam and Hamburg, 1900–1950," in *Chinatowns in a Transnational World. Myths and Realities of an Urban Phenomenon*, ed. Vanessa Künnemann and Ruth Mayer (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 50.

[318] Büttner, *Politische Gerechtigkeit*, p. 111.

entertainment venues in the ethnically diverse but socially and economically homogenous dock neighbourhood. Unfortunately, their numbers can only be approximated. Their low count in the census of 1925, which lists 111 Chinese nationals,[319] stands in stark contrast with their high presence as perceived in local print media.[320]

Although most Chinese residents were former seafarers, some came as secondary migrants in the wake of the First World War. Amenda suggests that a share of the 3,000 Chinese contract labourers in the French army, who had stayed in France after the termination of their services went to other European countries. Chinese expellees from London and Liverpool, where they had fallen into poverty, might have added to this contingent.[321]

2.1.4 South Asian migration to Hamburg

Around the same time as the Chinese, a small number of non-elite South Asian migrants arrived in Hamburg. In the absence of a bilateral agreement like the Chinese–German peace treaty encouraging settlement, and without prior migratory networks directing them towards Hamburg, their numbers never reached greater significance. However, Indian presence was quite palpable in the port city. Apart from the floating seafaring population and political exiles (discussed in the previous chapter), there was a small presence of settled Indians with a seafaring or army background.

In the following section, I am going to argue that the prospects of quick economic success influenced their decision to settle in Hamburg. Whereas the reasons for migration cannot be reduced to economic incentives, there was an evident correlation between financial independence and the permanent settlement among South Asian arrivals.

The reasons Henry Obed gave for his movement from London to Hamburg have been analysed above. In another statement delivered in 1941 in custody in Ireland, he narrated a slightly deviating yet similar story about his incentives for going to the port city:

> About that time [1920, SvJ] I read in the paper that the cost of living was very cheap in Germany. I went from London to Hull and changed £ 100 to German Marks. I went from Hull to Hamburg where I stayed in a Hotel for about two months. I then rented a private

[319] Amenda, *Fremde, Hafen, Stadt,* p. 124.

[320] Lars Amenda explains the reasons for this discrepancy and the challenge of representing Chinese migration in numbers convincingly in: Amenda, *Fremde, Hafen, Stadt*, p. 124.

[321] Ibid., p. 111.

> house. While in Hamburg I exported and imported bicycles, motor cycles, gramophones, etc. to my brother in Lucknow.[322]

Like his other statement, this statement was again given under pressure to maintain a positive image about himself. In 1941, Obed was in Irish custody, convicted as a German agent in an espionage mission to Britain. In an attempt to improve his internment situation, he asked for an interview with the prison authorities. He asked Superintendent Carroll to use his influence on the other officers for a premature release. While the other inmates thought him to be with a tailor and hence did not suspect him to be with a prison official, he gave a lengthy assessment about their background, contacts, political affiliations and unlawful activities, and he also answered questions about his own contacts and correspondences. To distinguish himself from the other prisoners and present himself as a good tradesman with honest ambitions, Obed omitted instances of illegal activities or suspicious conduct from his autobiography.

Like in 1936, he claimed to have moved to Hamburg for economic reasons. Since he perceived the costs of living to be very cheap, he exchanged some British currency for German Marks, probably making a huge profit. As the inflation reduced the value of his assets rapidly, he started a trading business. In this endeavour, he profited from his Indian network and family relations, partnering with his brother in Lucknow who received the consignments.

Obed's claims about his arrival in Hamburg are mirrored in the documents on another Indian migrant. Syed Amir Hassan Mirza was born 1894 [1898][323] in Murshidabad (Bengal) and found the ruinous German economy equally beneficial for his aims. Entering either Bremen or Hamburg on a British passport issued to him in London in July 1921, he stayed in Germany for a period of 13 years, only interrupted by a one-year return to India in 1926.[324] In a profile created by the IPI in 1935, his reasons for choosing Germany are reported as follows:

> He returned to India [in 1926, SvJ] travelling as a deck hand, and started a firm called the Hassan Indian Company in partnership with a certain Herr Bohne, who was to manage the Bremen end of the business, the Calcutta Branch being established at 306, Bowbazar St., Calcutta. Mirza made no secret of his anti-British bias and avowed that his objective

[322] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, Arrest of Germans at Cork

[323] IOR/L/PJ/12/489, p. 49.

[324] Ibid., p. 8.

> was to obtain freedom for India by driving England from her markets, his contribution being the introduction of cheap German goods.[325]

He came back to Germany in 1927 and re-established his Hassan Indian Company in Hamburg, trading with *"all raw products of India, China and Africa"*, as he claimed in his deportation trial in Washington, D.C., in 1937.[326] Like Obed, the reasons for his migration were mainly financial. He sought to take advantage of the low price levels in interwar Germany, which he considered beneficial for his anti-imperial business project. He also profited from local contacts as well as from his networks to India, tending to the Calcutta branch personally during his visit in 1926.

Similar to the Chinese migratory patterns, Indians rarely arrived on a direct route from their place of departure but instead came via London or other destinations in the United Kingdom. Although the South Asian diaspora to Britain did not reach greater numerical significance until the 1950s, choosing a British port to enter Europe probably seemed logical for a migrant with a seafaring background. The huge *lascar* workforce on British ships was already familiar with port cities such as London, Liverpool, South Shield, and Hull, which housed small Indian communities. The decision to proceed to Germany was, at least in part, informed by economic considerations. As it was the case for the Chinese migrants, Indians used their foreign exchange to facilitate their start to a new life. Taking advantage of the devalued German currency and downtrodden economy, buying low-priced local goods, and selling them to India with a margin became a settlement strategy.

The same economic considerations also applied to the black market. In the early 1920s, freely and cheaply available contraband items such as guns and ammunition were purchased in Hamburg and could be sold at an Indian or Chinese port with a margin. Smuggling became a profitable business for many *lascar* seamen to add some extra earnings to their meagre wages during their voyages. Indian residents of the ports made use of their local knowledge and supplied their compatriots with the desired cargo. Since the illegal economy of the Hamburg port indisputably had an impact on the migrants' settlement prospects and life choices, an entire chapter is devoted to this issue. Hence, the present discussion only mentions smuggling tangentially to substantiate my argument. Since all South Asian migrants to Hamburg which

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid., p. 50.

figured in the archives have a record of smuggling charges, but none of them was expelled in consequence of these accusations, there is some reason to assume that the German state tolerated these activities if they did not run contrary to aims of the state.

2.2 Staying

2.2.1 Nationalizing the labour market

The first section has outlined the new border regime, whose exclusionist agenda became apparent in the immediate post-war years but had not yet reached its full force. The Chinese migration and ship desertions illustrate the porosity of the physical border for undocumented migrants. South Asian migrants crossed the border legally with the help of passports acquired from one of the British diplomatic presences. Their decision to seek residency in Hamburg was informed by the depressed post-war economy and the business opportunities provided by the proximity of an international port.

The second section is concerned with the migrants' agency after the initial period of arrival. It first highlights the state-sanctioned restrictions on migration, this time with regard to residency. It looks at how South Asian migrants negotiated and the prevalent socio-economic situation and how they resisted the exclusionist measures of the German state.

The drive to achieve ethnic homogeneity gained further ground once it was operationalized to justify discriminatory measures intended to relieve national distress during the massive economic crisis. Unemployment reached soaring heights due to the hyperinflation and attendant collapse of the German Mark in 1922/23. To stabilize the economy, import duties on foreign products introduced during the war were maintained with the objective of preventing foreign goods from entering the German market. Export opportunities, however, were stimulated by the massively devalued German currency.[327] Catering to the popular demand to preserve and create jobs for the restless German population, access to the labour market for foreigners was restricted.[328] Only those sectors of the economy suffering from labour shortage remained available to non-nationals. To avoid depriving the large-scale agricultural industry of cheap foreign labour on which it heavily depended, bilateral

[327] Oltmer, *Migration und Politik*, p. 34.

[328] Ibid., p. 37.

agreements with eastern and southern European countries loosened passport requirements. The main regulatory institution was the "Deutsche Arbeiterzentrale" (German Labour Bureau), established in 1911, which had monopolized recruitment, distribution and legitimization of the foreign workforce.[329] As a newly established institution after the First World War, the Reichsarbeitsministerium (Ministry of Labour) was involved in the organization of recruitment and distribution of labour in its capacity as a law maker, but it was also in charge of housing and settlement politics as well as welfare issues. As opposed to the regulations during the Kaiserreich, the access of foreign labour to the labour market was standardized by the ministry and its local branches throughout Germany after the war. For the employment of labour migrants, there now existed consistent rules throughout the country. For example, the ministry annually decided how many labour migrants each industry was allowed to absorb.[330]

Trade unions and the labour movement used their relatively strong position in the post-war period to demand a preference for German workers over foreigners in hiring practices as well as the adjustment of the pay gap between the German and non-national workers, whom they considered as low-wage competition.[331] The German government responded to these demands by legally requiring the industrial and the agricultural sector after 1922 to seek permission from their respective federal state administration for allocating jobs to non-German nationals.[332] The "foreign" applicant was only considered if there was a dearth of "local" labour. Although wage levels were equalized and standardized according to the respective industries, employers could circumvent this regulation in different ways. How the shipping industry illegally kept "coloured" labour outside of the tariff agreements, for example, has been discussed in the previous chapter. Theoretically, the principles of the welfare state incorporated in the democratic outlook of the Weimar Constitution meant that financial equality was accompanied by social equality. As Christina Reinecke has delineated in greater detail, non-German employees officially enjoyed the same insurance benefits as Germans, covering accidents at the workplace, sickness leave, disability insurance, retirement

[329] Ibid., p. 84; Christina Reinecke, *Grenzen der Freizügigkeit. Migrationskontrolle in Großbritannien und Deutschland, 1880–1930* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010), pp. 358–60.

[330] Reinecke, *Grenzen der Freizügigkeit*, pp. 363–4.

[331] Ibid., pp. 358–9.

[332] Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen. Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), p. 340.

funds and, to some extent, even unemployment insurance.[333] However, being a contractual employee neither translated into protection from expulsion nor into political rights, which were intrinsically linked to the possession of a German nationality. Foreign residents remained disenfranchised and excluded from all public offices.[334]

Hamburg was the only state to not officially implement the preference for German nationals in job allocation, since the demand for foreign labour on its farmlands remained insignificant.[335] However, rather than exemplifying a more hospitable stance towards foreign labour migration, this policy reflected the impulse to appease big capital through these measures. Nevertheless, to curtail immediate post-war migration and settlement, the city-state required work permits from all foreign workers who could not prove their residency in Hamburg since the cut-off date of August 1, 1914.[336] The situation relaxed slightly after 1922/23, when agricultural labourers who had continuously worked in Germany since 1913 and industrial labourers who had worked in Germany since 1919 received a "Befreiungsschein" (exemption form), granting them unconditional permission to work. Everyone else had to apply for these sparsely granted permits.[337] In the following years, in Hamburg, transnational migration in general, and labour migration in particular, remained low. Those who came between 1918 and 1939 were skilled workers, freelancers, merchants, traders, and clerks.[338] Compared to the pre-war years, working-class migration was negligible. Those already living in the city were allowed to stay.

Besides permanent migration, the transient migrations also need to be considered. The most prominent example is that of the seasonal workers who came from the eastern states of Poland and Czechoslovakia to work on the Prussian agricultural plantations during the planting and harvesting season. Their presence was the subject of controversial debates in the Reichstag. Although they were supposed to return to their sending countries during the winter season when there was no work on the fields, more than two thirds remained in

[333] Reinecke, *Grenzen der Freizügigkeit*, p. 371.

[334] Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen*, p. 347.

[335] Oltmer, *Migration und Politik,* p. 351.

[336] Elia Morandi, *Italiener in Hamburg. Migration, Arbeit und Alltagsleben vom Kaiserreich bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 156.

[337] Ibid., p. 157.

[338] Ibid., p. 159.

Germany in 1922/23.[339] As argued above, the German migration regime was far from efficient, and the seasonal workers often just had to cross the state border to disappear from the government agency's radar.

Another group of transient or 'floating' working-class individuals was the foreign seafarers who converged in the port cities. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, German shipping companies hired Indian, Chinese, and African seamen for the physically taxing work in the engine room. The employment of Chinese labour resulted in a small Chinese migration to Hamburg, as alluded to before. The settlement was irregular in the sense that the Chinese did not arrive via the official channels created for labour migration but had "jumped ship" and gone into hiding in the Hamburg dock neighbourhood, much to the dismay of the Hamburg officials.

The archive suggests that non-elite South Asian migration for settlement in Hamburg decreased after 1925, at least among those with the intention of staying. (Syed Amir Hassan Mirza was an exception, arriving in Hamburg for a second time in 1927.) The short-lived recovery of the German economy between 1924 and 1928 and the sharpening of border controls reduced the incentive and opportunity to migrate. By the mid-1920s, the improvement of the resident foreign nationals' situation due to more inclusive residency rights was counterbalanced by a more aggressively operating Hamburg police.

Since migration could not fully be halted at the border, the Hamburg police used their executive prerogative to expel foreigners from state territory in case they deviated from the norms compiled for them. As Jochen Oltmer has pointed out, the practice of local police overseeing expulsion and deportation was a German particularity. In other European countries, it fell within the jurisdiction of the state or judicial departments, if not of the head of state itself.[340] The diverse reasons for expulsion included illegal immigration, non-possession of certain documents, non-registration with the residential authorities, homelessness, or simply the suspicion of being guilty of one of these charges.[341] Particularly the legal construct of the "lästiger Ausländer" (troublesome alien), by definition prone to arbitrary interpretation, was often invoked to initiate an expulsion.[342]

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[339] Oltmer, *Migration und Politik,* p. 354.

[340] Ibid., p. 66.

[341] Ibid., pp. 64–6.

[342] Reinecke, *Grenzen der Freizügigkeit,* pp. 372–8.

The most common reason to withdraw residency rights, however, was financial distress. While unemployment was the main reason, even more randomly defined offenses such as pursuing a profession not considered beneficial for the general welfare, could lead to expulsion. Ironically, taking employment away from a German competitor was also on that list. What seems paradoxical at first can be read as an indicator of the socio-economic motivation behind physical exclusion. In the Weimar welfare state, any non-national who threatened to burden the social security system had forfeited their claim to the state's fragile goodwill.[343]

Restricting non-nationals from accessing the distribution of positions and benefits predated the World War and was a European phenomenon rather than a German particularity. As Leo Lucassen observes, the migrant poor have always been regarded with suspicion, hindered in their movements and subject to exclusion.[344] With regard to the post-French-Revolutionary central European states, he explains:

> The main fear among government officials throughout the nineteenth century, as remains the case in present-day welfare states, was that the would-be settler would become a 'public charge' and thus burden the system of poor relief. To prevent this from happening, potentially destitute aliens had to be kept out.[345]

Yet, as he elaborates further, until the First World War, most states were disinclined to interfere in the economic domain and were therefore not interested in excluding non-citizens from the labour market. Only when the question of poor relief became a major public concern did the exclusionist drive pick up momentum and develop into what has been described as the post-war scenario. In Great Britain, "destitute" *lascars* did not become a politically recognized problem before the early 19th-century. By the turn of the century, only a small handful appear to have made Britain their home. It was only from the 1920s onwards that Sylheti and Punjabi seamen began to desert in rising numbers in search of urban

[343] Ibid., p. 328.

[344] Leo Lucassen, "A Many-Headed Monster: The Evolution of the Passport System in the Netherlands and Germany in the Long Nineteenth Century," in *Documenting Individual Identity. The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 236.

[345] Ibid., p. 243.

employment.[346] From the 1930s onwards, more individuals began to run or work in cafés and boarding houses.

The first attempt by a British government to restrict the employment of Black workers was the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order of 1925. The legislation required all "coloured" foreign seamen to register with the police if they intended to remain in the country. Only if they could prove their identity as British subjects were they allowed to reside and work in the UK. Following Tony Lane's argument, the Order was principally aimed to curb the migration of Arab seamen from the Yemen, who had begun settling in Cardiff and South Shields in the early 1920s.[347] However, it affected all Asian and African seamen who had already migrated to one of the British port cities and could not provide the documents required. Because South Asian *lascars* only needed a seamen's certificate of identification to sign on a ship, they usually did not keep any other means of identification. However, when the police, executing the orders of the Act, started apprehending *lascars* for not carrying "proper" papers during their trips ashore, the passport gained currency among colonial seafarers. They acquired them in the British consulates, distributed across the Empire and beyond, as the following analysis of my source material demonstrates.

Following Laura Tabili, the Order was *"the first instance of state-sanctioned race discrimination in Britain to come to widespread notice."*[348] The main initiative came from the central government and the employers, who sought to bar Black seamen from the European labour market, confining them to labour contracts negotiated at colonial wage levels. Only a few years before, foreign seamen were still welcome additions to the seafaring and onshore workforce during the wartime labour shortage. Now, the vagaries of the interwar economy transformed them into undesirables barred from entry to British ports or deported when destitute.

Consequently, obtaining economic invulnerability was the most promising way to avoid harassment from officials, in Britain as well as in Germany. As the Prussian Secretary of State declared in August 1923, financially autonomous individuals enjoyed the protection of the

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[346] Balachandran, *Crossing the Last Frontier*, p. 100.

[347] Tony Lane, "The Political Imperatives of Bureaucracy and Empire: The Case of the Coloured Alien Seamen Order, 1925," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade. A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* edited by Diane Frost, (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 104.

[348] Tabili, *The Construction of Racial Difference*, p. 56.

Reich even if they had crossed the border illegally.[349] The Hamburg police expressed a similar attitude when they declared in 1920 that any foreigner who "added value" to the economy – in particular to the revitalization of the foreign trade – was under no circumstances to be deterred from settling.[350] These statements of intent never transpired into an enforceable legislation, and the right of residence of a non-German national could always be revoked. However, if one remained financially successful, socially inconspicuous, and politically compliant, the chances of leading a relatively normal life increased. As mentioned before, foreigners who had been long-term residents were generally exempted from expulsion and enjoyed greater freedom with regard to profession and mobility within German territory.[351]

2.2.2 South Asian migration to Hamburg

The most common strategy to secure economic stability for South Asian migrants was to seek self-employment. Most of them had not lived in Germany long enough to fall under the privileges available to long-term residents. Moreover, the preference for German nationals in employment allocation, which was the *status quo* in Hamburg even if not required by law, minimized the chances of finding contract or wage labour. The prospects of naturalization – whether to German nationality or the Hamburg state – were equally grim. The naturalization procedure was non-transparent, if not arbitrary, leaving the authorities with considerable leeway for haphazard interpretation. As a rule, the application was rejected if the applicant was not categorized as being of German descent.[352] Since citizenship rights were intrinsically linked to nationality, the non-availability of naturalization to German nationality meant the exclusion not only from all political rights but also from public offices.

It has become apparent that in the face of state-sanctioned restrictions to migration, it was pivotal for non-elite South Asians to succeed economically. Synthesizing secondary literature with source material, the following analysis traces the professional trajectories of three non-elite migrants in Hamburg: Henry Obed, Hardas Singh, and Syed Amir Hassan Mirza. I argue

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[349] Reinecke, *Grenzen der Freizügigkeit*, pp. 328–9.

[350] Morandi, *Italiener in Hamburg,* p. 158, footnote 65: "Den Wert schaffenden Ausländern, insbesondere denjenigen, die zur Wiederbelebung des Außenhandels beitragen, darf aber der Aufenthalt in Deutschland unter keinen Umständen erschwert werden." Quoted after Hamburger Polizeibehörde über "Die Vorschläge des Reichskommisar für Zivilgefangene und Flüchtlinge über die Fremdenpolizeiliche Behandlung der im deutschen Reiche aufhältlichen Ausländer", 20. Dezember 1920, StAHH, 111-2, Akte L z 51.

[351] Reinecke, *Grenzen der Freizügigkeit,* p. 369.

[352] Oltmer, *Migration und Politik*, p. 87.

that financial independence, or the absence thereof, increased or reduced the prospects of staying.

The section opens with what could be understood as an unsuccessful attempt of long-term settlement in Hamburg. Henry Obed's time in Hamburg barely exceeded over a year. He arrived in June 1922 and was gone by early 1924.[353] As far as the British authorities understood it, the Hamburg police expelled him for cocaine smuggling.[354] According to his own statement, he left Hamburg for financial reasons: because the German government had prohibited the purchase of German goods by foreigners, he was forced to close down his shops towards the end of 1923.[355] These two different explanations for his exit from Hamburg only seem contradictory at first glance. The German government did, in fact, discourage the use of foreign exchange in 1923 to counter the inflation.[356] If Obed's business model depended on the export of cheap German goods, this executive order would have meant the end of his commercial ambitions. Since economic prosperity was even more necessary for South Asian migrants, one could imagine that he took up the opportunity when it presented itself and sold drugs to supplement his income. Unlike the sale of guns, selling cocaine abroad was of considerable concern to the German authorities because it could almost unequivocally be traced to German manufacturers, as scrutinized in Chapter 3. Fearing for the good reputation of Hamburg as an international port, the authorities rigorously attacked drug smuggling.[357] Regardless of whether Obed sold cocaine or not, his expulsion from Germany derived from his economic instability.

Subsequently, Obed built a new life in the port city of Antwerp. After struggling in his initial years, he became a wealthy livestock dealer by the early 1930s. Despite repeated efforts by the British intelligence to associate him with arms trafficking, he was hardly troubled by the Belgian authorities, lending credit to the assumption that, in Belgium, similar mechanisms as in Germany connecting economic success and residential security were at play.

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[353] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 77.

[354] Ibid., p. 36.

[355] Ibid., pp. 76–7.

[356] Verordnung über Annahme ausländischer Zahlungsmittel im Inlandverkehre, Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt 1923, 21. Dezember 1923.

[357] Schmuggel von Kokain und Morphium in Indien und China, 1913-1914, Handelskammer Hamburg to Deputation für Handel, Schiffahrt und Gewerbe, StAHH, 132-1 I, Nr. 1687, 18. Juli 1914.

Other cases of expulsion and repatriation, though less extensively documented than Obed's case, support my findings. Mubarak Ali, the former seaman mentioned earlier, was expelled from Hamburg in 1924 by the Hamburg police after two years of residence. Evading his deportation, he disappeared to Berlin and, most likely, proceeded to Afghanistan from there.[358] He had partnered with Obed in his legal and illegal businesses and was expelled from Hamburg for cocaine smuggling. Unable to secure a sufficient income from legal sources, he was vulnerable to the grasp of the authorities.

In another instance, two Punjabi agriculturalists, Kishin Singh, and Banta, had called at the British consulate in Hamburg requesting their repatriation to India in 1931 because they were unable to find employment and to sustain themselves. Although it is not conveyed whether they had been pressured by the German government or desired to leave on their own accord, they both stated economic distress as the reason to return to their native place after ten and seven years abroad, respectively.

Furthermore, a young merchant named Subramania Nat-Ragen, traveling on a passport issued in 1925, appeared before the British consul in Hamburg in August 1930. Being in financial distress, he desired to reach out to his father in Madras to request a remittance. Three months later, he was arrested in Hamburg for fraud. He again asked for money to be sent to him in order "*to obtain his release and return to India."*[359] Although the information contained in the archival file is insufficient to draw a reliable conclusion, in the light of the arbitrary expulsion practices of the German state, there is reason to assume that the "fraud" he was arrested for was, in fact, synonymous with not being able to support himself or pretending to be a man of more substantial means.

Continuing the analysis with more successful settlement attempts, perhaps the strongest case in point for my argument is the professional life of Hardas Singh. Born in 1882 in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, to a Sikh farming family, he left his native place in 1914 to fight for the British Indian army in the First World War. He deserted his battalion and voluntarily rendered himself over to the Germans.[360] While in German captivity in Berlin, he was one of the few South Asian prisoners who voluntarily agreed to participate in the campaign against the Ottoman Empire. Remaining in Germany after the armistice, he first settled in Berlin until 1924 and then

[358] IOR/L/PJ/12/78.

[359] NAI, Foreign & Political, External, File No. 380-X, 1932.

[360] StAHH, 13-11, 60547, p. 4.

proceeded to Hamburg. Immediately after his arrival he opened an "Indian Bar" in the Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood. This bar-cum-boarding-house was a resort for Asian and African seamen, a meeting place for homosexual men until the late 1930, and a refuge for political dissidents travelling between Moscow and India.[361] Singh himself was under suspicion of facilitating the secret dispatch of banned literature to India via *lascar* seamen but he never faced any repercussions. The bar was his main source of income until it had to close under the pressure of National Socialists in 1938. Without going into the details of these reproaches and attributions, one can say that the bar was a space where various social and legal norms of the time were disregarded. While these accusations were reason enough to initiate Singh's expulsion, his economic success shielded him from the grasp of the authorities. The frequent references to his bar in various contemporary accounts hint at the possibility that it was not only economically profitable but also famous within a certain social milieu.[362]

Hardas Singh adopted a rather unrestrained lifestyle during the fourteen years he operated his bar. Having been married once until 1933, he got engaged again in 1936 to a dancer much younger than him from Switzerland, with whom he fathered a son before the couple split up in 1938.[363] The fact that the British Secret Service suspected him of being involved in the arms traffic and smuggling of revolutionary literature to India, and even of being a Nazi collaborator, seemed to have been of minor concern to him.[364] Since the British consulate in Hamburg could facilitate voluntary repatriations but could not enforce deportations from German soil, he felt relatively at ease as long as he upheld a favourable relationship with the Germans.

A second example of how economic success opened the door to a more self-determined life is the case of Syed Amir Hassan Mirza. His arrival in Europe in the early 1920s has been discussed above. During his thirteen years of residency in Germany of which at least the final eight were spent in Hamburg, he founded a prosperous "import and export" company bearing his own middle name. Running the business jointly with his two German partners, he earned himself a good reputation. On behalf of his enterprise, he travelled extensively in Germany,

[361] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose,* p. 627.

[362] See, for example, the descriptions of the bar in Abbott, "My Trip Abroad."

[363] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, pp. 3–4.

[364] IOR/L/PJ/12/659.

Czechoslovakia, France, Holland, and Belgium.[365] Like Hardas Singh, Syed Amir Hassan Mirza experienced an absence of poverty which bestowed him with considerable freedom to shape his life autonomously. He engaged in extensive political activity directed against British rule in India and wrote several political essays published in Germany. Eventually, he even took his beliefs to a more practical level: in 1931, he announced himself as the organizer for Gandhi's visit to Hamburg. In preparation, he wrote to Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru asking him for his endorsement to open a Congress Information Bureau in the port city. In October 1932, he contributed a German-language article titled "Mahatma Gandhis Mission" to the publication *Hamburger Nachrichten*,[366] and in December 1933, he published a book called *Weltwirthschaft* (World Economy), which was described by the British secret service as "*a compound of mysticism and anti-British propaganda*."[367] In the same year, he exhibited anti-British caricatures and posters at his office. A year later, he asked a friend in Cardiff to arrange a tour through the United Kingdom for him during which he planned to lecture on the "*new Germany and the condition of India*."[368] Gandhi did not accept his invitation, Nehru did not reply to his letters, and Mirza never embarked on his UK tour. Nevertheless, his activism reflects the extent of political freedom he enjoyed while living in Hamburg in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The British Secret Service had always suspected Mira of being engaged in illegal activities in the Hamburg docks. He and his compatriot Hardas Singh had allegedly teamed up to help an Arab seaman, Mohamed Ali, to escape deportation to Kenya in 1934. While Singh lodged Ali in his bar, Mirza was reported to have offered to pay his fare to Aden. Either Singh or Mirza was further accused of sending "threatening" letters in Ali's name to the British consul in Hamburg, asking the latter to intervene against the deportation.[369] Since Singh was illiterate or at least not fluent in writing, the letter was probably composed by Mirza.

In September of the same year, Mirza was caught on board the SS "Wartenfels" in "suspicious conversation" with the *lascar* spokesperson called *serang*.[370] In his defence, Mirza claimed to be the Indian Trade Commissioner to Hamburg, an outrageous lie quickly exposed by the ship

[365] IOR/L/PJ/12/489.
[366] Hamburger Nachrichten, 6. Oktober 1932, Nr. 470, p. 2 "Mahatma Gandhis Mission".
[367] IOR/L/PJ/12/489, p. 9.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Ibid.

authorities. It was henceforth suggested that he might be involved in smuggling via vessels of the Hansa Line, to which the "Wartenfels" belonged. The incident was reported to the German police, who surprisingly had no record of such accusations and remained conspicuously inactive.[371]

Being under surveillance by the British authorities did not necessarily endanger Mirza's residential status in Hamburg. Despite his extensive political activism and outspokenness, which could have been used against him had the authorities been eager to expel him, no action was taken from the German side. Even his suggested involvement in the smuggling network went unpunished. It was only when his politics turned against the German state itself that his economic capacity could no longer protect him.

2.2.3 Social exclusion and deportation

When Mirza took the liberty to criticize not only British imperialism but also German fascism, his time in Hamburg came to an end. In September 1934, shortly after the ship incident, the Hamburg police received an order from the government to deport the Indian on the grounds that he had been working against the state. The British authorities concluded that the reason for this order was his authorship of a book in which he "*represented the Germanic peoples as of inferior stock*."[372] Before his scheduled deportation date of November 5, however, Mirza disappeared from Germany.

Similarly, Singh's good fortunes turned in 1938. When the National Socialist authorities overhauled his bar, they accused him of betraying his customers, allowing prostitution, and engaging in money laundering. Since the bar had had a dingy reputation for years, the shutdown in 1938 seems politically motivated.[373] The fascist regime would no longer tolerate a space where 'deviant' sexualities were welcome, and people of mixed ethnicities could freely mingle. Singh himself was not expelled, probably because of his service to Germany during the First World War. Deprived of his means of livelihood, he survived by taking up daily wage labour in the port. In 1940, he still carried a "Fremdenpass" and received a small sum of alimentation from the employment office.[374] In 1941, he was admitted to a mental hospital

[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid.
[373] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 2.
[374] Ibid., pp. 4–5.

for the first time. After a five-year ordeal as a patient in various medical institutions in and around Hamburg, he died in one of them in 1946.[375]

2.3 Summary

South Asian presence in Hamburg was heavily shaped by the economic situation of the early 1920s. A strong incentive for the exclusively male Indian itinerants to move to the port city was the perceived advantage the ruinous German economy added to their migration efforts. Upon arrival, they found themselves confronted with a myriad of exclusionist policies and regulations emerging from German society's desire to create a culturally and racially homogenous nation state. Compulsory passports for foreigners during and after border crossing, a racist Harbour Act, the nationalization of the labour market, and the non-availability of German nationality and citizenship required special survival strategies. Despite these homogenizing tendencies, in the early 1920s, the democratic reality of the Weimar Republic also enabled inclusion. Benefits were granted to foreigners who fitted certain criteria, did not disrupt the political peace and, most importantly, did not burden the social security system of the state. For South Asian migrants, this meant that they had to become financially solvent as quickly as possible. Since access to industrial labour and public offices was barred, self-employment, preferably where migrants could take advantage of their transnational networks, was the most promising option. As the engagement with primary sources has shown, a financially self-sufficient Indian migrant could lead a rather self-determined life. From political freedom to romantic liberties to the non-persecution of criminal offences such as arms smuggling, their scope of action was considerable. However, if a migrant became destitute, they effectively forfeited any claims to the city or state.

The rise of National Socialism closed these minor affordances emerging in Hamburg during the interwar period. Once racial ideologies became the prime mover of state practice, people outside the Aryan paradigm were increasingly discriminated against. The second half of the 1930s saw the destruction of the Chinese colony in Hamburg as well as the end of South Asian non-elite migration. After the war, neither group returned. A new Chinese migration only started in the late 1950s in the course of a boom of Asian cuisine, and Indian migration

[375] Arolsen Archives, 01/36448950.

remained insignificant until the 1960s, when Indian students started entering German universities.

3. The illegal economy of the global ports: Cocaine smuggling networks

As shown in the previous chapters, non-elite South Asian migration to Hamburg was determined by a various of factors. The social space of the port city, which created the preconditions for migrant settlement, was fundamentally shaped by the harbour and the longstanding trading connections to India. The socio-economic developments in the interwar period in Germany have been juxtaposed with the political infrastructure of the time with the prospects of a successful long-term settlement. In the analysis, the international communist networks, the "Indian Bar", the Hamburger Berg, the migrant community, and the entanglement with local women all created spaces for the migrant opportunity. In the face of the exclusionist measures of the nation-state, the dysfunctional German economy and the restricted access to the German labour market, Indian migrants developed a set of strategies, which, to some extent, allowed them to overcome these obstacles.

The following chapter takes up this line of argument and looks deeper into the possibilities and limitations of South Asian migration. Hamburg, in its capacity as a global port with a considerable floating Indian presence and trade connections, provided economic opportunities. Like many other dock neighbourhoods, Sankt Pauli had a thriving shadow economy in which certain kinds of illegal or semi-legal proceedings were, to some extent, tolerated by the authorities. Prostitution, smuggling, and drug trafficking were common and sailors, European, Asian, and African alike, heavily engaged in these activities. The shadow economy also offered an economic niche for South Asian migrants. Drawing upon their international networks and local knowledge, they operated at the intersection between the maritime smuggling networks and the suppliers on land.

When the "Age of Steam" reached its peak in the 1920s, the illegal economy, which had grown in the shadow of expanding global trade, had taken on great magnitudes. Arms, drugs, and other contraband were smuggled across the oceans and rivers of the world, supplying warlords with their lethal tools and addicting the populations to substances they had not known before. The illegal or grey economy can be characterized as a complex web of industrialists, merchants, shipping agents, smugglers, and vendors united in their effort to trade commodities whilst bypassing national and international laws and restrictions. Non-elite South Asian migrants in European port cities combined their knowledge of local

structures and cultural proximity to the seafaring population to become players in this lucrative but precarious business. To situate their role in the transnational smuggling network it is pivotal to dissect the function of this network. We need to understand why the Indian migrants chose to participate in this trade and through which entry points they accessed these networks. Subsequently, the negative effects and (legal, social, economic) repercussions vis-à-vis the benefits of these illegal involvements for the migrants' prospects of staying in the country can be discussed.

This chapter investigates cocaine smuggling and the arms trade. Although smuggling of liquor, hemp, exotic animals, and revolutionary literature went on simultaneously, this text only deals with the two best documented commodities of the network. This selection can be justified by a direct geographical link between European port cities, especially Hamburg and Antwerp, and the Indian subcontinent. Cocaine and arms produced in German factories found their way to the Indian bazaars and clients.

Since the topic aroused the interest of contemporary observers, journalists, lawmakers, and politicians but has failed to attract the curiosity of academic scholarship, the argument is mainly based on published and archival sources. It must therefore be considered preliminary research, open for debate and further development.

The follow analysis first situates cocaine production in the German post-war economy. Determined to restore its former monopoly, the national pharmaceutical industry lobbied persistently for government support and against stricter regulations for production and export. The Anglo–Indian press observed these efforts with increasing concern, as they considered the German industry to be the main supplier of the drug to the subcontinent. While the German authorities, in the aftermath of the First World War, were worried about their reputation in the international community and feared the adverse effects of potential embargos, boycotts and import tariffs, the Indian government's fight against the drug menace was fuelled by its desire to establish its own hegemony in the domestic drug trade. As part of the colonial state's efforts to curtail the smuggling activities, the IPI appointed *lascar* seamen as undercover agents on the ships of international shipping companies. They were required to report any observations on cocaine transactions in foreign ports and amongst the crews.

The information provided in these reports must be treated with caution. Not much is known about either the genesis of these statements or their level of voluntariness. Surely, there was a stark power imbalance at play between the colonial officials and the native provider of the

intelligence. The Indians, who usually came from a lower class and caste background, were at the mercy of the British rulers, especially if the testimony was given during a court case where the informer was also the accused. However, one must be careful in assuming that the Indian informers had to first overcome an inherent solidarity with their compatriots before testifying against them. Eager to please the ruling authorities and enjoying the attention they received, they might have provided a lot of the information willingly.

Adding to the issue of the credibility of the archive is the governments' uncritical use of the print media. The state authorities often regarded newspaper articles as a trustworthy and neutral source of information. In both the British and the German Secret Service files, newspaper clippings make up a great proportion of the material collection. Without fact-checking the articles, readers who gave these sources an uncritical reception inflated the perceived problem of drug smuggling between the continents. Then again, the newspaper clippings provide a great source of corroborative evidence. Cases of smuggling reported in the British archive are more likely to have taken place if they were confirmed in the local press.

The following paragraphs unfold the supply chain of the contraband from European factories to the Indian bazaars. They provide an account of the parties involved, ranging across pharmaceutical companies, shipping companies, agency houses, shop keepers, captains, and ship crews. South Asian migrants living in European port cities are situated in this network and their incentives and motives to take part in this illegal activity are analysed. Taking up the discussion on the economic strategies of non-elite South Asian migrants in European port cities from the previous chapter, this text reconsiders the impact of the Weimar migration regime on the ways Indian migrants chose to make their living.

3.1 Cocaine production in Germany

The body of secondary literature which investigates cocaine consumption and addiction, as opposed to cocaine trading and smuggling, as a socio-political phenomenon within German society is quite substantial.[376] The first attempt to suppress the abuse of opium and cocaine

[376] See, for example, Jan Wreidt, *Von den Anfängen der Drogengesetzgebung bis zum Betäubungsmittelgesetz vom 1.1.1972* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006); Tilmann Holzer, *Globalisierte Drogenpolitik. Die protestantische Ethik und die Geschichte des Drogenverbotes* (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2002).

on an international stage was made in the Hague in 1912.[377] China and the United States, in particular, were determined to curtail what they perceived as a massive social and medical problem. Germany, as one of the main producers of morphine- and cocaine-based products, wanted to protect its pharmaceutical industry but also avoid diplomatic tensions through non-compliance with international directives. Therefore, they signed the negotiated agreement under the condition that they would only implement it if all states ratified the treaty by the end of 1912.[378] The follow-up conferences were unsuccessful, and the outbreak of the First World War terminated all efforts to come to a multilateral understanding for the moment.

The Treaty of Versailles eventually compelled the German government to ratify the Hague agreement and implement its first anti-drug law. It was enacted on January 1, 1921, and placed trade, manufacturing and processing of morphine and cocaine under direct control of the ministry of health.[379] These formal requirements notwithstanding, in practice, the act had very little effect. It outlawed neither possession nor consumption, not even for hedonistic purposes. Even before the implementation of the new act, cocaine had to be prescribed by a medical doctor and was only available in pharmacies. Buying the drug from wholesale agents was allowed for private individuals and the export of the drug was encouraged if the companies complied with international trade requirements. In 1924, the law was revised for the first time and reinforced the existing restrictions without adding to them. Apothecaries and doctors were now supervised more closely if suspected of selling or prescribing drugs beyond patients' immediate needs.

Regarding the export of narcotics, Germany did not always heed the legal provisions of the Hague agreement. According to data derived from the documentation requirements of the 1921 act, most of Germany's cocaine production went into export.[380] The low regulatory potential of the act allowed for the continuation of undocumented cocaine production, which

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[377] The summary of the country's legal handling of the issue is therefore taken from Annika Hoffman's monograph on drug consumption and control in Weimar Germany, see Annika Hoffman *Drogenkonsum und-Kontrolle. Zur Etablierung eines sozialen Problems im ersten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften), 2012.

[378] Ibid., p. 52.

[379] Ibid., p. 82; Reichsgesetzblatt, Jahrgang 1921, Gesetz zu Ausführung des internationalen Opiumabkommens vom 23. Januar 1912. Vom 30. Dezember 1920.

[380] Hagen Stöckmann, "Sucht und Rausch. Drogenpolitik und Drogenkonsum vom Kaiserreich bis zum Dritten Reich." Magisterarbeit, submitted at Göttingen University in 2010 with Prof. Dr. Bernd Weisbrod, p. 62.

was only gradually pushed back over the rest of the decade. Even the foreign office and ministry of health were aware that German companies were involved in the smuggling of opiates and cocaine to the far east and were worried about the backlash in the country's diplomatic relations.[381] Bowing to the pressure of the international community, the German government threatened to disenfranchise companies involved in the illicit export of narcotics.[382] The government further ruled that in order to be allowed to ship narcotics abroad, an import permit from the respective receiving state was required. It thereby partly shifted the responsibility for the containment of smuggling to their trade partners.

Despite these precautions, the German industry was accused of supplying the global market with narcotics in the 1920s. German products (forged or real) kept appearing on the black market and presented the government with the problem of losing credibility in its fight against drug abuse.[383] These products surfaced increasingly in India and Hong Kong, where the import of cocaine and morphine from abroad was strictly prohibited but the public demand was considerable.

The importance of opium, cocaine, and other drugs for the national economy becomes evident in the debates around the production and storage costs in the tax-free Hamburg harbour in 1929. The opposing parties of the debate were representatives of the German pharmaceutical industry on the one hand and the Hamburg state authorities on the other. The state department for cocaine and opium[384] in Berlin accused the Hamburg department of trade and commerce of impeding the legitimate wholesale trade of drugs and narcotics by enforcing overly restrictive security provisions for medium-size consignments inside the premises of the Hamburg harbour.[385] The transportation of all packages above 1kg required a security escort from the port authority, at the expense of the producers and shippers. These expenses, it was argued, added unnecessary financial burden to an essential yet struggling industry. Besides monetary considerations, the rationale behind the escort requirement from the state side was to minimize smuggling. As the Hamburg department of health argued, the

[381] Hoffmann, *Drogenkonsum und- Kontrolle,* pp. 134–5.

[382] Ibid., p. 136.

[383] Ibid., p. 138.

[384] Translated from „Fachgruppe Opium und Kokain".

[385] Regelung der Überwachung des Verkehrs mit Betäubungsmitteln in den Zollausschlussgebieten. Schmuggel mit Betäubungsmitteln, StAHH, 371-8 III, LZ Nr 52 Vol. 1, pp. 4–5.

transportation of consignments above 1 kg needed to be supervised in order to reduce the opportunities for drug trafficking.[386]

Another example for how the export of narcotics was perceived as a matter of national commercial interest is provided by an inquiry to the Hamburg department of trade and commerce in 1931. A Hamburg manufacturer of pharmaceutical compounds, Hugo Peters & Co, had just shifted part of their production into the taxation enclave of the harbour to reduce production and transportation costs. In the inquiry, the company asked the department for permission to include opium preparations into their range of products. The former elaborated that this expansion was necessary to secure the survival of a struggling industry, which had suffered severe losses during the war and had been unable to compete with British and American brands in a globalized market. Since Hugo Peters & Co were manufacturing opium-based tinctures and fluid extracts not only under their own brand name but also for other German chemical and pharmaceutical brands,[387] facilitating the company's growth would have a positive impact on the German balance of trade.[388]

3.2 Cocaine smuggling from Germany to India and China

From the Indian government's perspective, Germany's unregulated cocaine industry was highly problematic. The drug, although it was illegal, penetrated all layers of Indian society and was said to cause severe damage to the national health. During the interwar years, Germany was framed by India's national press as the centre of cocaine production in Europe. The following paragraphs analyse how the smuggling issue was perceived and discussed in the "Times of India" [TOI], a leading Anglo–Indian daily from Bombay with a circulation of 12,000 copies in 1918.[389] Despite its loyalist orientation and pro-British bias, a sampling of other Indian newspapers such as the anti-British "Bombay Chronicle" and the "Amrita Bazar Patrika" shows that the assessment of the issue was quite similar in any of these publications.

[386] Ibid., pp. 9–10.

[387] I.D. Riedel - E.de Haen A.-G., Berlin-Britz, Byk-Guldenwerke, Berlin, Chemische Fabrik Reisholz GmbH, Reisholz-Düsseldorf, H. Finzelberg's Nachfolger, Andernach am Rh., I.G. Farben Industrie etc., StAHH_371-8 III_LZ Nr 52 Vol. 1., p. 17.

[388] StAHH_371-8 III_LZ Nr 52 Vol. 1, pp. 16-7.

[389] Sandeep Hazareesingh, *The Colonial City and the Challenges of Modernity. Urban Hegemonies and Civic Contestations in Bombay City, 1900-1925* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007), p. 108.

Nevertheless, the selection of my source material in this section might have affected my interpretation, which I am urging the reader to keep in mind while following the argument.
The Hamburg port was considered to be the nodal point from which cocaine was centralized and dispatched to the East. Already before the war, Germany and Austria were regarded as the main suppliers of narcotics to the subcontinent and other parts of the world. Japan dominated the trade in the immediate post-war period when Germany was suffering a severe economic recession. However, as early as 1922, reports in the TOI assumed that Germany was about to reclaim its old monopoly.[390] The ports of entry into India were Calcutta and Bombay and, to a lesser extent, Madras and Karachi. One article published in 1922 argues that German chemists had again turned their attention towards the lucrative Indian market and managed to ship growing quantities of cocaine into the country.[391] Another goes on to explain that the drug, after being extracted from the leaf in Germany, was either openly dispatched or smuggled to all parts of the world.[392] Out of the myriad of voices, which depict Germany as the principal manufacturer of cocaine, the following passage sums up their message succinctly:

> The crux of the matter is the suppression of production and that mainly depends on Germany, for in Germany is the factory that makes quantities of the drug that are the cause of the trouble to the preventive and police authorities throughout the world.[393]

There is some reason to assume that the factory referred to in this quotation is E. Merck Darmstadt. The pharmaceutical company, which still exists today under the name Merck KGaA, has been one of the top-selling pharmaceutical companies in Germany and the world since the middle of the 19th century. It produced synthesized drugs such as the barbiturate "Veronal" and the thyroid medication "Thyreoidinum siccatum" as well as isolated active compounds such as morphine, codeine and, beginning in 1884, cocaine. The German police cleared the powerful global player of the accusation from the international press, assuming the cocaine to have been stolen from their premises. Criminal gangs were believed to have carried the stolen goods to ports in England, Germany, Italy, Scotland, and Norway, where

[390] *TOI*, "Cocaine from Germany," June 27, 1922, *TOI*, "Cocaine Traffic in Calcutta," August 16, 1926.
[391] *TOI*, "Cocaine from Germany," June 27, 1922,
[392] *TOI*, "Cocaine," May 22, 1924.
[393] *TOI*, "Cocaine Traffic," December 20, 1922,

they were repackaged and forwarded to their various destinations.[394] Merck was further considered to be the victim of label fraud by smaller cocaine factories, which used the popular brand name for their own products.

Another TOI article published in 1922 supposes that the cocaine discovered in India was of the same origin as the quantity found before the war:

> The source of supply before the war was well-known. It was a big firm of chemical manufacturers and exporters in Germany. They had a large factory at Darmstadt and also drew supplies from another at Grodno. The same people are exporting now, but it is, at least, suspected that their labels, bearing the address of their central factory, are stuck on consignments originating in laboratories in various parts of Germany.[395]

Despite increasing efforts of the customs authorities to control incoming cargo, the drugs often remained undetected, as they were parcelled into small packages, placed amidst other cargo, stored in secret hiding places, or attached to the bodies of sailors and even passengers.[396] According to the TOI, seamen smuggled the narcotic ashore and handed it over to agents, who either disposed of it right on the spot or sent it on yet another journey into the interior of the country.[397] The high margin with which cocaine could be sold – to either to gambling tents or street dealers – provided a strong incentive to get involved in the dangerous trade. One article estimated the value of cocaine seized in Calcutta port in the first half of 1925 at Rs. 70,500, with the largest individual seizure alone standing at Rs. 42,500.[398] These figures disregarded cocaine detected during police raids in private houses.

Lascar seamen and local intermediaries ran a comparatively higher risk of being arrested than European smugglers since the latter's 'well-dressed' appearance prevented them and their luggage from being searched. Similarly, the consigners overseas were almost never punished, as it was generally difficult to establish ownership of the contraband. Ship captains, when in trouble, tried to roll off the responsibility to their Indian employees, so that it was mostly the

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[394] Unterdrückung des Opium, Kokain und Morphiumschmuggels mit China (u. Indien) 1887-1914, StAHH, 371-8 II, Nr. S XIX C 15 8; Schmuggel von Kokain und Morphium in Indien und China, 1913-1914, StAHH, 132-1 I, Nr. 1687.

[395] *TOI*, "The Cocaine Traffic," May 20, 1922.

[396] *TOI*, "Cocaine Traffic," November 26, 1925.

[397] *TOI*, "Drug Evil in Calcutta. Girl as a Smuggler," June 9, 1925.

[398] Ibid.

rank-and-file workers who took the blame for a global crime. As one account from 1929 illustrates:

> Capt. William Clifton Smee, Master of the s. s. Canara has been arrested by the Excise authorities on suspicion of his being concerned in the smuggling of a large quantity of cocaine. It will be remembered that Inspector Hudson of the Excise Department in raiding the ship with the aid of some other officer some days ago found 51 ounces of cocaine in the possession of three Khalasis. The accused were arrested just as they were about to sell the goods to a bogus customer and placed before the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Bombay. When charged with being in illicit possession of cocaine they made grave allegations against the Captain and said that he was primarily responsible for the importation of the cocaine and that they were merely his tools.[399]

While the European captain was provisionally released on bail, which was paid by an employee of the Bombay Port Trust, the *lascars* went directly to jail. In the absence of financial resources to pay a lawyer or bribe a judge, they felt the full rigour of the law. As one article explains, there was a maximum sentence of one year of rigorous imprisonment or a fine of Rs. 1,000. The punitive measures, however, did little to deter seamen of various nationalities from engaging in the illicit trade.[400]

Regarding the financiers of the illegal trade, the media coverage remained vague. For years, the money was located with *"highly organized gangs backed by wealthy capitalists"*[401], *"smuggling syndicates"*[402], or *"the smuggling fraternity"*[403], running in an "*intense smuggling campaign"*[404] or even a *"conspiracy to smuggle cocaine"* from Europe to India.[405] These organizations were considered to be very elusive, operating behind closed doors, and letting hirelings conduct the dirty work. Seldom were their identities disclosed. In 1923, for example, the TOI ran a story about 70 "businessmen" arrested in Hamburg for drug smuggling. In a joint venture with captains and crew members, they had allegedly smuggled narcotics worth £2,5 million.[406] In the same year, a Japanese merchant, allegedly financed by *"powerful and*

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[399] *TOI*, "Ship's Captain Arrested. Alleged Smuggling. Sequel to Allegations in Cocaine Case," January 19, 1929.
[400] TOI, May 22, 1924, The Cocaine Habit.
[401] *TOI,* "Cocaine Traffic," November 26, 1925.
[402] Ibid.
[403] *TOI,* "Drug Evil in Calcutta. Girl as a Smuggler," June 9, 1925.
[404] *TOI*, "Drug Smuggling, 70 Arrests in Hamburg," December 10, 1923.
[405] *TOI*, "Cocaine Traffic," November 26, 1925.
[406] *TOI*, "Drug Smuggling," December 10, 1923.

wealthy organizations", was sentenced to three years of penal servitude in London for drug trafficking.[407] According to the prosecution, he had mainly dealt in morphine, channelling it from Switzerland via Hamburg to Japan. A share of it was forwarded to India and China.

Even if the identities of the consigners overseas could not be revealed, it was considered common sense that a big share of the imported cocaine came from Hamburg.[408] In order to get an idea of who these consigners were, we need to turn away from the Indian sources and consider German material. Hamburg police and court files, as well as documents from the German consulates in Asia and the Hamburg chamber of commerce, contain information about the origins of the cocaine and the business networks, which were involved in the packing and shipping of the narcotic. As the illegal export threatened to ruin the country's reputation as a reliable trading partner abroad, the German authorities took great interest in the matter. Their main concern was to avoid an undesired increase in customs controls in foreign ports, which they feared would disrupt the free movement of German goods on the global market and hurt the national economy. In addition, they wanted to avoid punitive measures against allegedly innocent shippers and crews who unknowingly smuggled illicit cargo on their voyages.[409]

Two early cases of cocaine smuggling to India from Hamburg were brought to the attention of the authorities by the German consul in Bombay, who reported that the customs office in Karachi suspected the shipping agents Blembel Brothers and Max Worseck of cocaine trafficking in two cases. The Hamburg shippers were reproached for repacking, relabelling, and sending 400 and 91 bottles of cocaine, respectively, declared as the apothecary item "quinine" in each case, to unnamed partners in Delhi and Jalandhar via Karachi in 1907 and 1909. In the first case, the consignment was detected in the customs office itself. The designated customer in Delhi turned out to be fake, so that the actual recipient remained unidentified. In the second case, two local men were arrested in Jalandhar, Punjab, in possession of the drugs and sentenced to six months of imprisonment.[410] Interestingly, this

[407] *TOI*, "The Drug Traffic," December 14, 1923.

[408] *TOI,* "The Drug Menace," February 3, 1927.

[409] Schmuggel von Kokain und Morphium in Indien und China, 1913-1914, Handelskammer Hamburg to Deputation für Handel, Schiffahrt und Gewerbe, StAHH, 132-1 I, Nr. 1687, 18. Juli 1914.

[410] Ibid., Abschrift der Korrespondenz des Kaiserlichen Konsulats in Bombay to the Reichskanzler, 5. Mai 1914.

incident was also reported in the TOI, corroborating the information from the German archive:

> The customs authorities at Karachi recently effected an important seizure of large quantities of cocaine, about Rs. 2,000 in value, which was being imported by a Punjabi native merchant in defiance of the orders of Government prohibiting its importation into India. The contraband article was shipped from Germany and was found in several cases in a number of bottles all of which were innocently labelled."[411]

The German authorities considered these two cases noteworthy because they had hitherto assumed cocaine to be smuggled by sailors of the Austrian Lloyd[412] and not directly commissioned from Hamburg. Around the same time, cocaine consumption became increasingly popular in India, adding to the state of alert of the authorities. As smuggling cases remained low in the following years, the authorities suspected that the smugglers had become more sophisticated in concealing the narcotics from their gaze. The German consul in Karachi complained about the continuous traffic in narcotics, worrying about not only its fiscal repercussions but also its health consequences for the local population.[413] The moral and humanitarian implications, however, were not the main reason German officials opposed the trade. The majority (for example, Mr. Lehmann from the foreign office) was concerned with the negative impact the illegal trade had on the German economy. Their principal aim was to protect the "*highly developed chemical and pharmaceutical industry from any harassment if not absolutely necessary*."[414] They had little interest in getting to the bottom of the problem since this could possibly reveal the complicity of the big pharmaceutical companies.

However, the issue could not be completely ignored. In 1914, the foreign office received a local newspaper report from the German consulate in Bombay, according to which 33

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[411] *TOI*, "Seizure of Cocaine," April 20, 1910.

[412] And apparently also by sailors of the Florio Rubattino Steamship Company, as TOI articles mention, for example: TOI, Nov 30, 1911, Smuggling Cocaine; TOI, Dec 1, 1911, Importation of Cocaine.

[413] StAHH, 132-1 I_Nr. 1687, Schmuggel von Kokain und Morphium in Indien und China, 1913-1914, Abschrift der Korrespondenz des Kaiserlichen Konsulats in Bombay to the Reichskanzler, 30. Juli 1913.

[414] StAHH, 371-8 II_Nr. S XIX C 15 8, Unterdrückung des Opium, Kokain und Morphiumschmuggels mit China (u. Indien) 1887-1914, Auswärtiges Amt to the Hamburg Senate, 14. November 1913: "Die Kaiserliche Regierung hat bisher bei den internationalen Verhandlungen über die Einschränkung des Verkehrs mit Opium, Morphium, Kokain und verwandten Drogen sich von dem Bestreben leiten lassen, von unserer hochentwickelten chemischen und pharmazeutischen Industrie möglichst jede nicht unbedingt erforderliche Belästigung fernzuhalten."

packages of Merck's cocaine were found in Bombay during a police raid of a washerwoman's house in connection with some stolen property. The main person accused in the court case (also covered by the report), a man named Nazirhusen Razahusen, told the jury that an "upcountry man" had given him the packages for a small sum of money for safekeeping. He had subsequently passed them on to the washerwoman, who was unaware of their contents.[415]

Merck cocaine and morphine also appeared in other Asian ports. The contraband was discovered in Hong Kong on the premises of the firm Mc Ewen, Frickel & Co, hidden in a box in between sardines and starch. The sender was stated as E. O. R. Vollbrecht and Adolf Ernst Schumacher from Hamburg, longstanding business partners of Mc Ewen, Frickel & Co. In an apologetic letter to the police, Vollbrecht explained that his firm used to export cocaine but had stopped the trade when Portugal prohibited the sale of the drug from its colony. He denied being involved in the smuggling case and suggested that Chinese workers might have brought the drug on the company's property.[416] In the course of the investigation, the German police traced the cocaine back to Scotland and Norway, where it was understood to have been repacked and forwarded to Hamburg. From there, it continued its journey to Hong Kong.

Another destination for German cocaine was Penang. One large package consigned by Hamburg shippers was found there on a steamer of the Hamburg-America-Line.[417]

3.3 Cocaine smuggling by *lascars*

It has now been established that Germany's potent pharmaceutical industry was perceived as one of the main suppliers of cocaine for the Indian subcontinent and other destinations in Asia. E. Merck Darmstadt, which held a virtual monopoly in cocaine production in the pre-war years, was on its way to tie in with earlier successes. The trade was facilitated by lenient export regulations and a strong German cocaine lobby. To understand how cocaine, which

[415] TOI, Jul 9, 1914, One Year Imprisonment; StAHH, 371-8 II_Nr. S XIX C 15 8, Unterdrückung des Opium, Kokain und Morphiumschmuggels mit China (u. Indien) 1887-1914, Deutsches Kaiserliches Konsulat to the Reichskanzler, 10. Juli 1914.

[416] Ibid., Handelskammer Hamburg to Deputation für Handel, Schiffahrt und Gewerbe, 13. Dezember 1913.

[417] Ibid., Abschrift der Korrespondenz des Kaiserlichen Deutschen Generalkonsulats in Singapur to the Reichskanzler, 23. April 1914.

was produced legally, was transformed into contraband, a change in perspective away from the manufacturers and retailers to the actual bootleggers is pivotal.

It has already been pointed out that cocaine was either stolen from the shop floor or manufactured clandestinely. Shippers, trading houses, or individual merchants were often willing to make some extra profits by sending small amounts of cocaine as part of their regular consignments. Another option was to channel the drug through seafarers and dockworkers. Admittedly, the link between the big pharmaceutical companies and the smuggling networks is still fragile. How exactly the cocaine came from the plant to the carriers remains object of speculation and some informed guesses. Further research needs to be conducted into the issue, which I was unable to do in the course of this dissertation.

If one aims to understand how exactly the trade operated, reports from the IPI are an instructive but also highly normative source. In their endeavour to combat what was perceived as a tremendous threat to the integrity of the imperial state, the intelligence agency engaged *lascar* seamen as undercover agents on ships to collect information about smuggling activities in foreign ports. Besides attending to their regular duties as firemen, trimmers, cooks, or saloon boys, they also had to report their observations after returning from a voyage. This included spying on their co-workers and superiors and running inquiries in the underworlds of the dock neighbourhoods, where the handover of cocaine was understood to take place.

Within the global network of arms and drug smuggling, which encompassed all major South Asian, Chinese, European, and American ports, Hamburg–Calcutta was one of the major routes for the transportation of contraband of various kinds. The preference for Calcutta over Bombay, which was of lesser significance with regard to the volume of smuggled goods, stemmed from the former's proximity to other Asian ports such as Colombo, Singapore, Rangoon, and Hong Kong. These places served as entry ports for European cocaine, as they were controlled to a lesser extent. Moreover, in these ports, cocaine could be exchanged for opium produced in India. Calcutta's proximity to the opium factories located along the banks of the Ganga, in the states of Bihar and Bengal, added to its geostrategic advantage, as explained in more detail below.

One IB Special Branch officer of the Calcutta police conveyed in January of 1926 the report of one of his native informers:

> […] it was common practice from a long time among the Noakhali, Sylhet and Chittagoninan seamen to smuggle opium from Calcutta, Bombay and other Indian ports and to get cocaine in exchange from Singapore, Hongkong and other Eastern [ports, SvJ] Hamburg, Antwerp, New York and other European and American ports.[418]

Being thus aware of the smuggling routes, police and customs authorities regularly intercepted transcontinental vessels when they arrived in an Indian port. To circumvent the inspections, smugglers preferred to have their cargo unloaded in Rangoon, Singapore, Hong Kong, or Colombo, after which it was transferred to Calcutta on smaller, less sensational-looking passenger ships.

The written memoirs of the Indian communist and revolutionary Amir Haider Khan contain one of the very few eyewitness accounts of the opium–cocaine trade in Calcutta. Before rising in the ranks of the Communist Party of India, Khan had travelled the world on behalf of the revolutionary cause, often in the capacity of a low-ranking sailor. Before the outbreak of the First World War, his equally mobile brother, Sher Ali, got briefly involved with the drug-smuggling people of Calcutta. He lived with a group of Peshawaris and some people from the north-western frontier who, like many of their kinsmen in the city, were in the fruit trade. They had their headquarters in a bungalow near the Hugli port, which was easily accessible for the seafaring population, who played a crucial role in the illegal side of their business. Illegal it was, of course, only for the Indian natives and not for the British rulers, who held a monopoly in the opium sale in the local bazaars and most importantly in the export abroad. Khan unfolds vividly how the Peshawaris combined the fruit with the drug trade:

> The gang used to get its supply of opium through its agents in different parts of India. At times someone would carry it on their persons to Calcutta by rail but this was not always safe as these men were often detected at Howrah station. Often it was packed in large fruit baskets which were sent just like fresh fruit to some wholesale fruit dealer with whom they had made a pick-up arrangement. After receiving the consignment they would deliver the same at the appointed time and place to some seafaring men for the on-the-spot cash payment. In their turn these men would supply the drugs to Burma, Singapore and China. These men were primarily from the Sylhet side of Bengal. But I had seen a certain European officer visiting the place at times. From the sailors they would get cocaine which they had brought from foreign countries. After purchasing the imported cocaine the gang would supply cocaine in Calcutta for cash. They also had contacts with cocaine dealers in other parts of India, as I had seen a certain doctor from Lucknow dropping in and staying at the house for a few days. He was probably an

[418] IOR/L/PJ/12/81, Arms Smuggling into India, p. 14.

> important link in the business word, and there might have been more important persons in the business who remained in the background.[419]

There are no other archival sources to corroborate this narrative. Still, it is at least possible that the network could have operated in the way Khan described. His description hints towards a yet undiscovered link between the sailors and their partners on land, adding another piece to the puzzle. It shows how the cocaine, upon arriving in Calcutta, was distributed throughout the whole country, from the Calcutta bazaar to Lucknow. To complete the study of the supply chain, the following investigation looks at Indian migrants' involvement in the smuggling business at the European ports.

3.4 Cocaine trade by Indian migrants

As becomes apparent from Khan's story, the illegal cocaine trade was embedded in a transnational smuggling network spanning large parts of the subcontinent, the Indian Ocean, and Europe. *Lascars* played a crucial role as carriers of the drug, but European sailors and officers, even captains, were also involved. Seafarers linked the continents and bridged the gap between the retailers and the recipients of the desired product. In the port towns, dealers discreetly approached the crews to initiate the exchange. Their methods were refined, as Khan's description shows. An investigative report published in the TOI sheds further light on the procedure as it was supposed to have happened in Hamburg:

> It appears that when a ship is leaving Germany for India the captain gets an anonymous letter in which the writer offers to supply any quantity of cocaine at a low price that he can obtain the drug at about Rs. 1-8-0 an ounce, and easily dispose of it in India for Rs. 100 an ounce.[420]

Involving the ship's captain into the process appears risky but not altogether impossible. Perhaps the dealers knew which captains to approach and which to bypass. With every transaction, the dealers risked being apprehended by the police. Drug abuse became a social problem in Germany in the second part of the 1920s. In the wake of the continuing "crisis of modernity", the urban population was perceived as being particularly vulnerable to its

[419] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, pp. 40–1.

[420] TOI, "Calcutta Letter. Cocaine Smuggling," April 14, 1922.

influence.[421] The Hamburg police reacted to the phenomenon by setting up drug departments to fight illegal consumption and trade. In their opinion, most drugs were brought into the city by Chinese seamen who had deserted their ships or pursued irregular migration. Consequently, the Chinese community was targeted even more rigorously than before. Although they were persecuted for the illegal trade and consumption of opium, the suppression of cocaine smuggling also fell under the newly founded departments' jurisdiction.[422] Since their focus was clearly on the Chinese quarters, however, cocaine received much less attention than opium.

As the IPI documents corroborate, opium was not the only drug dealt within the Sankt Pauli black market. According to the *lascar* testimonies, the cocaine trade flourished in Hamburg, as well as in other European ports. In an interview transcript penned in July 1926, a widely travelled officer's boy gave the following specification of how it operated:

> At Antwerp and Hamburg I found Bengali gentlemen working in some shops. Some of them are married and some are studying there.
> In these places some Muhammadans have tea shops containing sailor's clothes and requisites. They deal with smuggled goods. Indian seamen from ships go there and purchase revolvers and cocaine in exchange for charas (Hemp) etc. There are some Sahebs who do business in birds and animals. They ask Indian sailors to bring birds, deer, leopards, etc., and in exchange they supply fire-arms and cocaine.[423]

This statement illustrates the global scale and adaptable nature of the transoceanic illegal economy. Drugs were exchanged either for cash payment, rare exotic goods, or other contraband. Following IPI investigations, the reduction in the supply of one item was quickly compensated by its substitution for another. For example, when arms supplies went down in 1926 due to stricter police controls, smugglers shifted their attention to cocaine, which was still available in generous quantities.[424]

The reference to "Bengali gentlemen" as shopkeepers and drug dealers in the IPI report is noteworthy as well. The fact that they are described as "married" and "studying" suggests that they were permanent residents with at least some level of integration into society.

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[421] Hoffmann, *Drogenkonsum und- Kontrolle*, p. 79.
[422] Amenda, *Fremde. Hafen. Stadt*, pp. 171-2.
[423] IOR/L/PJ/12/81, pp. 32–3.
[424] Ibid., p. 14.

Although there is no way of knowing with certainty, these "gentlemen" could have been Hardas Singh, Syed Amir Hassan Mirza, and Henry Obed. Singh, of course, was not Bengali but Punjabi, and Obed was born in Lucknow. The latter, however, had spent some time in Calcutta before his departure for Europe. Mirza, who was born in Murshidabad, represents the only native Bengali of the three men. This attribution of a Bengali cultural background must not, however, be taken at face value but rather it should be seen as a half-differential and half-contemptuous marker of difference distinguishing the seaborne working class from the vendors in the ports.

There are some clues in the sources substantiating the assumption that the description refers to the three migrants in question. In 1926, Singh had just opened his "Indian Bar" in Sankt Pauli and was still married to his second wife, Herta. The couple separated a few years later, and Herta died in 1933 in a motor accident.[425] Mirza, according to British intelligence files, had *"picked up some sort of an education in Engineering and Chemistry"* between 1920 and 1926 and must have appeared to be an academic to an ordinary seaman.[426] He published articles in the German press and wrote letters to acquaintances in India and England. Obed, who had by that time already moved to Antwerp, had married his German-born partner two years prior in Hamburg. Caroline Margaretta Homann often assisted her husband in his business activities, which was not lost to the *lascars* with whom the couple conversed.[427]

Both Mirza and Singh were suspected of being arms traffickers but neither faced any charges. Obed was allegedly involved in both the cocaine and the arms trade. In fact, the British intelligence believed that his dealings in cocaine were the reason he and his Indian partner, Mubarak Ali, were expelled from Hamburg in 1924 by the German police. One of the few intelligence accounts which explicitly linked Obed to the cocaine trade runs as follows:

> In July 1923, information was received that one Mr. H. JAVLE an Indian in England, was desirous of commencing business as an importer of toys and was told to get in touch with Henry OBED in Hamburg. He wrote to Henry OBED, who replied agreeing to supply toys. The latter also hinted that he was doing some 'side business'. Javle answered the letter

[425] StAHH_213-11_60547, p. 11; IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.
[426] IOR/L/PJ/12/489, p. 8.
[427] Ibid., p. 95: "He hs [sic] married a german woman named Caroline Margaretta Dora Homann and opened a shop for seamen's requisites. Obed and his wife used to visit ships on arrival from India and the members of the crews were induced to visit the shop. There was a similar shop in Antwerp."

> and asked for some toys to be sent. In replying OBED said that the toys would be sent shortly and in regard to the 'side Business' he enclosed a sample of cocaine.[428]

Obed himself never admitted to being involved in the cocaine trade but insisted on having conducted only legitimate businesses. Allegations were also made against him, however, across the Indian Ocean. According to IPI information, his cocaine networks extended to the subcontinent. The previously established nexus between Hamburg and Calcutta reverberates in a statement given by a *lascar* seaman in 1926. He described Obed as a man of suspicious character and added:

> that OBED had asked him to carry a few cocaine envelopes and to deliver them cautiously to 'somebody' who would meet him at the jetty in Calcutta and would show him OBED's card.[429]

Even though Obed was a successful importer of wild animals by the 1930s, his economic activities in Antwerp continued to include the illegal trade for the better part of the following ten years. During one of his trips to India in 1934, *lascars* were reported to have been enquiring after Obed in his absence, because they had regularly dealt with him in arms and cocaine. The Antwerp police was understood to be aware of these transactions and even to have considered his expulsion in 1927, but they never took action.[430] Hence, even if Obed was never convicted of cocaine smuggling, there are strong indications that he acted as a middleman between the *lascars* and the local dealers.

In summary, non-elite Indian migrants enabled the flow of cocaine from Hamburg to the subcontinent to a significant extent. At the intersection of supply and demand, they linked the worlds of production and consumption. However, the existence of a powerful pharmaceutical lobby, combined with lenient government regulations and a vibrant black market, does not suffice to explain why these migrants became part of the shadow economy, risking jail, expulsion, and deportation. As discussed in the previous chapter, a financially self-sufficient and law-abiding Indian migrant could hope to settle in Hamburg and lead a rather

[428] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 8.
[429] Ibid., p. 9.
[430] Ibid., p. 5.

self-determined life. Why would they take the gamble and risk losing their relatively secure status for a few extra Marks?

Despite Obed's financial success in later years, the illegal trade always remained part of his economic enterprise. His legal business strongly depended on his being able to move freely between his native country and Europe and on the reliability of his South Asian partners to deliver his orders. Since neither mobility nor partnership could be taken for granted, the smuggling of contraband provided a second source of income to back up his export company. Since migrants were excluded from the social security programs of the Weimar republic and the Belgian state, the responsibility to prepare for a potential loss of income lay with individual migrants and their core family members. Knowing about the consequences of financial destitution, migrants felt the pressure to avoid bankruptcy at any cost. The cultural and occupational proximity to the *lascars*, even if separated by a class barrier, facilitated individuals' entry into the smuggling network. Having worked on ships before, Obed, Singh, and Mirza must have been aware of the exchange of illicit goods during the voyages. Their spatial proximity to the docks provided another incentive to become part of the scheme.

Since the smuggling of cocaine was intrinsically linked to the smuggling of arms, I will deepen this part of the analysis further at the end of the next section, which deals precisely with arms trafficking as part of the shadow economy.

3.5 Summary

It has become apparent that the analysis of primary sources opened the door to an entirely unexplored field of research but also left many gaps. Often, the functioning of the networks could not be explained fully but could only be speculated about: for example, with respect to the involvement of big business. The puzzle remains unfinished. What one can say with some conviction is that the networks encompassed people from various layers of society, European and Indian alike. They connected the geographical spaces of the European docklands with the Indian bazaars and the pharmaceutical companies with Pathan fruit sellers. The nodal points were the port cities, both on the subcontinent and in Europe, where *lascars* were able to navigate with confidence. For the migrant Indians, drug smuggling meant an additional income but also an additional risk to their already marginalized status.

The limits of migrant opportunity become more defined through the study of their participation in the network. This participation was not voluntary but obligatory, derived from the necessity to have a second source of income. In the absence of citizenship rights and access to welfare programs, this source of income was likely to be situated in the shadow economy of the European ports.

4. The illegal economy of the global ports: Arms smuggling networks

Cocaine was not the only “made in Germany” contraband commodity that was traded in the illegal economy after the First World War. Revolvers, rifles, pistols, and, of course, ammunition found their way from Europe to Asia. After the cessation of hostilities, many small-sized arms were bereft of an immediate purpose and resurfaced on the black market. Some were kept in the possession of demobilized soldiers or dealers, who were now desperate to sell any non-essential items to avoid financial bankruptcy. Others came directly from the factories of the armament industry, which were eager to cut losses and empty their warehouses.

In the colonized world, the war triggered or amplified anti-imperial sentiments. Disappointed by the insufficient concessions the British government had granted the Indian population with regard to more self-government and outraged by the oppressive Rowlatt Act and the brutal Amritsar Massacre in 1919, the anti-colonial movement gained momentum in the 1920s. A growing ‘terrorist’ revolutionary movement in Bengal and the rise of a militant communist movement particularly alarmed the British authorities. Since the Indian (*sepoy*) mutiny in 1857, the production, ownership, and sale of arms without licence was strictly prohibited in India. Therefore, the government feared the illegal import of arms from abroad via passenger and cargo ships. Although the prospect of an imminent violent upsurge modelled after the Bolshevik revolution was a colonial anxiety rather than an actual threat, there were some attempts from the revolutionaries to emphasize the seriousness of their agenda by resorting to violent means of resistance.

The dock neighbourhoods of major continental ports such as Hamburg, Antwerp, Rotterdam, and Marseilles were marketplaces for lethal cargo. Here, weapons changed hands and were dispatched on their journey across the sea. Either they were carried on the bodies of sailors or they travelled in the freight space alongside less suspicious cargo, undeclared in the invoices and undetected by the customs authorities.

But the story neither ends nor starts there. The following chapter unfolds the arms smuggling network from Europe to Asia and situates the resident Indian migrants in Hamburg within it. The supply chain comprised not only sailors of all nationalities but also big industrialists, merchants, petty shopkeepers, and ship captains. South Asian migrants were key actors at the intersection between the former and the latter group, between supply and demand, and

between land and sea. The social space of the dock neighbourhood allowed them to become part of the shadow economy, explained in Chapter 2. Their legal businesses often provided the link between the two worlds, as they offered legal as well as illegal goods to their *lascar* clients or traded legal as well as illegal cargo with their home country.

However, the mere opportunity of trading with arms does not suffice as an explanation for South Asian migrants' involvement in the smuggling network. Buying and reselling weapons was a dangerous business and could be punished with deportation. There was an element of compulsion in their decision to take up dealing arms alongside their actual businesses, which this chapter seeks to investigate. It looks at the opportunities but also the dangers and pitfalls that came with the trade and investigates why many non-elite South Asian migrants nevertheless chose to take the risk.

There are but a few scholars who have studied the maritime arms trade in the interwar period. Jonathan Hyslop broaches the issue of the smuggling of weapons and revolutionary literature by Indian *lascars* in his article "Guns, Drugs and Revolutionary Propaganda: Indian Sailors and Smuggling in the 1920s."[431] He mainly juxtaposes the sailors' self-image with external ascriptions and talks less about the functioning of the smuggling network itself. He investigates the construction of colonial and revolutionary narratives about mariners in the British imperial sources but does not look at the impact of the smuggling activities on the sailors' lives.[432] With regard to the origins of the contraband, he does not go beyond the commonplace assumption that Europe was stocked with wartime weaponry made available by hawkers and local shopkeepers in Hamburg, Antwerp, and Marseilles. However, the absence of regulations in the ports and the high demand from the Bengali revolutionaries had a stimulating effect on the trade.[433] His vague mention of "sympathetic merchants" who acted as intermediaries is neither discussed in more detail nor is it substantiated by archival evidence. His only example, the Indian Henry Obed of Hamburg, exposes his superficial reading of the sources. He locates Obed at the intersection between revolutionary exiles such as M. N. Roy and the *lascar* seamen, which is not absolutely false but fails to do justice to Obed's intentions and ambitions.[434]

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[431] Jonathan Hyslop, "Guns, Drugs and Revolutionary Propaganda: Indian Sailors and Smuggling in the 1920s," *South African Historical Journal* 61, no.4 (2009): p. 841.
[432] Ibid., p. 839.
[433] Ibid., p. 841.
[434] Ibid., p. 843.

Ali Raza and Benjamin Zachariah provide a more insightful contribution to the discussion. In their joint paper titled "To Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble: The "Lascar System," Politics, and Agency in the 1920s",[435] they employ the term "lascar system" to describe the clandestine movement of men, arms, and printed material across the sea.[436] They analyse how contraband was smuggled by Indian seamen working for international shipping companies, on behalf of militant trade unions, communists, anarchists, and other radical groups operating from abroad. Dismissing Hyslop's assumption that the *lascars*' prime motivation was a self-interested search for profit, they argue that many of them were, in fact, open to the egalitarian message of world socialism prevalent at the time.[437]

More important than their assessment of the political consciousness of the *lascar* population, however, is Raza and Zacharia's careful handling of the source material. Recognizing the power imbalance inscribed in the interrogations of colonial informers, the scholars warn against taking their testimonies at face value. They emphasize that the colonial interlocutors had to meet the expectations of the colonial administration but also protect themselves from the authorities' grasp.[438] Determined to downplay their own role in the subversive activities, but aware that pretending to be in complete ignorance about the subject matter would seem suspicious, the *lascars* often provided incomplete accounts regarding their knowledge of the system. Skilfully appropriating the colonial stereotype of the illiterate, apolitical, money-seeking colonial seafarer, the *lascars* conveyed that they were merely onlookers caught up in the events that unfolded around them.[439]

Although Raza and Zachariah situate the 'lascar system' against the backdrop of international communism, which had been gaining popularity in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution and the formation of revolutionary networks seeking to overthrow the British Empire from abroad, the article does not investigate how, exactly, the contraband travelled from Russia or Europe to India and China. A scrutiny of the origins of the weaponry as well as a comprehensive analysis of the actors involved in its trade is still missing. This chapter sets out to close this gap.

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[435] Ali Raza and Benjamin Zachariah, "To Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble: The "Lascar System," Politics, and Agency in the 1920s," *Itinerario* 36 (2012): pp. 19–38.

[436] Ibid., p. 19.

[437] Ibid., p. 33.

[438] Ibid., p. 19.

[439] Ibid., pp. 24–5.

4.1 Arms produced in Germany

To locate the origins of the firearms shipped from European ports across the world and to examine Hamburg's role as a central hub for the export of this particular contraband item after the First World War, the TOI coverage on the matter provides a promising vantage point for further discussion. The journey of illegal weapons from Europe to China and India received quite a bit of attention in the Anglo–Indian press. Between 1925 and 1928, articles on the issue of arms "made in Germany" were published with some regularity.[440] Whereas the coverage on cocaine smuggling spanned a broader time frame, going back to pre-war activities, the reports on the smuggling of arms are confined to the four years in question. The war was in many ways a starting point, unleashing a great number of arms on the global market and activating revolutionary sentiments.

4.1.1 The origins of the weapons

The TOI strongly assumes that the weapons came from overseas. Germany was believed to be the major supplier, arming revolutionary movements, warlords, criminal gangs, and ordinary individuals in the eastern part of the world. One article published on January 26, 1925, alleges that certain areas of Calcutta were practically a secret arsenal of firearms available to the convenience of terrorists and anarchists. The weapons, it continues, were either of post-war foreign manufacture or they were renovated wartime service revolvers and pistols.[441] On the following day, the TOI continued the story with details about the criminal network and the source of the contraband:

> It is in all probability as extensive an organisation at work in the smuggling of firearms as there is in the illicit cocaine trade. There is the buyer of old revolvers and pistols made new in Belgium and Germany, who hands over firearms to those who bring them to Calcutta.[442]

[440] *TOI,* "An Arsenal in Calcutta," January 26, 1925; *TOI*, "Disguised Cargo," July 10, 1924; *TOI*, "Smuggling of Arms in Calcutta," January 27, 1925; *TOI*, "Smuggling of Munitions," Sep 8, 1925.
[441] *TOI,* "An Arsenal in Calcutta," January 26, 1925.
[442] *TOI*, "Smuggling of Arms in Calcutta," January 27, 1925.

On a similar note, another article dwells on the origins of a consignment of 100 rifles and 200 revolvers detected in Colombo in 1924 on a China-bound steamer from Hamburg:

> The rifles were apparently adapted German service rifles. The barrels had been shortened and they were minus sights and magazines. The revolvers were two kinds, one the ordinary short barrelled Mauser and the other a long barrelled variety provided with detachable wooden stock and sighted up to 1,200 yards. […] The revolvers were dated 1918.[443]

The long, violent struggle for power following the fall of the Qing dynasty was a catalyst for the accelerated turnover of weapons from Europe to China. Chinese warlords were reported to have dealt not directly with the German munitions factories but with professional smugglers operating from Hamburg.[444] They placed their orders upon advance payment through a chain of intermediaries to a "*syndicate of smugglers and soldiers of fortune who, in turn, purchase, ship and deliver the munitions to their destination*."[445] Again, the source of the weapons is mentioned:

> Most of the munitions being smuggled from Hamburg originated in Germany; a lesser part comes from Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, Russia, Italy and the Near East.[446]

German arms were also shipped from other European ports, for example from Oslo.[447] Besides firearms, other weapons, such as German bayonets were also traded.[448]

4.1.2 Weapon and ammunition manufacturers

Having established that a lion's share of the arms originated from factories in Germany and were dispatched from Hamburg, investigating the supply chain is the logical next step to get a more detailed picture of the smuggling network. As already indicated, the war created a tremendous repository of firearms and a depressed national economy. Compared to cocaine smuggling, where the source of the drug was relatively undisputed, the case of firearms

[443] *TOI*, "Disguised Cargo," July 10, 1924.
[444] *TOI*, "Smuggling of Munitions," Sep 8, 1925.
[445] Ibid.
[446] Ibid.
[447] *TOI*, "German Arms for China," January 21, 1928.
[448] *TOI*, "Revolutionary Activities in Bengal," May 31, 1926.

proves a little bit more intricate. A trans-local web of producers, agents, shopkeepers, and shippers participated in the trade, as the following text demonstrates.

To begin with, ammunition manufacturers were, to some extent, directly involved in the illicit arms trade. In 1924, the IPI was confident that Indian exiles in Berlin were buying large quantities of cheap war material from German armament firms for transport to India.[449] A couple of years later, in 1932, the same authorities were under the impression that the firm in question was a manufacturing firm from Hamburg, shipping to India small consignments of weapons via "*selected Indian seamen serving on German boats*."[450] The only time a specific name was mentioned in the British sources was in 1926, when the Intelligence Bureau in Simla conveyed that a company called Messrs. Gustav Genschow & Co had been selling arms to customers across the world over the last couple of years. Their factory was understood to be located near the Russian border and their head office in Berlin, with branch offices in Hamburg, Königsberg, and Vienna.[451] They were suspected of smuggling pistols and rifles to India and China, bypassing Indian laws and customs regulations:

> The method adopted by this firm is to supply to arms dealers in India air guns fitted with weak springs and to supply stronger springs for the same air guns separately. […] It will be seen, therefore, that the German firm is contriving to evade both the provisions of the Indian Arms Rules and the payment of the higher rate of duty.[452]

4.1.3 Local retailers of weapons

It was much more common, however, to smuggle arms via agencies that dealt with contraband but did not necessarily manufacture it. It appears from official British sources that most of the firearms were supplied by private enterprises, most prominently by Hamburg- and Bremen-based firms.

One agency receiving considerable attention in the sources is Wilhelm Michels & Son, described as "*general merchants and dealers in arms and ammunition*",[453] operating from 60 Tunnel Street and 40 Bank Street in Hamburg.[454] The volume of this firm's smuggling capacity

[449] IOR/L/PJ/12/78.
[450] IOR/L/PJ/12/91.
[451] SI No. 106/1925 File No. 87/25.
[452] SI No. 106/1925 File No. 87/25.
[453] IOR/L/PJ/12/78.
[454] IOR/L/PJ/12/79, Arms Smuggling into India, File 6049/22.

was considered significant enough to have an agent watch the movement of its owner, Wilhelm Michels, in Hamburg and to ask the German Consul at Liverpool to have an eye on the firm's dealings on the ground. It was further suspected that Michels bribed the German police and was, therefore:

> always informed beforehand if any allegations were being made against him, and he was then prepared for any search being made of his premises.[455]

The firm was alleged to have equipped a Chinese arms trafficker named Choy Loy, whose headquarters for the illegal arms business with his native country were in 49 Richard Street, Hamburg. The Hamburg office was run by Harold Milton, the brother of Loy's English wife. Milton purchased the arms from Wilhelm Michels & Son and dispatched them to Hong Kong via ship. Choy Loy was regarded as particularly dangerous, not only because he was responsible for the smuggling of arms into China via Colombo but also because he was suspected of supplying Indian 'extremists' who visited Hamburg and would purportedly get in touch with him in furtherance of their own criminal intentions.[456]

There were other agencies involved as well. The Hamburg-based shipping agents Messrs Von Anthony & Birchmann shipped pistols and 100 cartridges independently to Colombo,[457] Messrs Jürgins & Co of Hamburg hinted their willingness to undertake arms trafficking with Indian exiles,[458] Paul Heintze sent revolvers to Bombay declared as "chinaware samples,"[459] Messrs Benny Spiro of Hamburg dispatched 10,000 rounds of ammunition for automatic pistols to China,[460] and the Bremen-based firm Messrs Frerichs and Albrecht sold revolvers to a *serang* in 1924.[461]

The case of the firm Messrs Singh Sarkar & Co of Calcutta can be looked at closely. In partnership with the Hamburg firm Willi Fuhlendorf & Co, Singh travelled frequently between Hamburg and Calcutta on account of his business and was considered to be a man of substantial means by his contemporaries. He was supposed to have successfully exported and

[455] IOR/L/PJ/12/78.
[456] IOR/L/PJ/12/79.
[457] Ibid.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Ibid.
[460] SI No. 115/1924 File No. 178/24.
[461] IOR/L/PJ/12/91.

sold a consignment of 340 cases of German bayonets declared as "common iron goods" in February 1923 to India.[462] Another consignment of 129 cases was confiscated only a few days later by the Calcutta customs authorities upon arrival in the Indian port. The IPI understood that the contraband was shipped from Hamburg to Calcutta by Willi Fuhlendorf & Co as cargo on one of the Brocklebank Line steamers. The company was contacted by the intelligence agency and reported:

> The firm of Willi Fuhlendorf & Co. is without importance and is doing practically only Mr. Singh's business. The Bank reported when he first began to ship that Mr. Singh was a man of substantial means.[463]

It appears from this account that some merchants operated from Hamburg with the sole purpose of smuggling contraband from Germany to India and other places, they even founded dummy companies, which only worked for them. With their headquarters and money in Germany, there was little the IPI could do to stop the activities.

4.1.4 Weapon brands

Those instances of arms trafficking as described by the IPI led the authorities to conclude that many German firms were "*shipping arms and ammunitions in cases alleged to contain trade samples without showing these in their invoices*"[464] in the first half of the 1920s. The brand names of the firearms were as diverse as the local retailing agencies. The weapons bore the marks of Harzer Waffen Industrie Haselhorst & Co, Kreiensen (central Germany),[465] Venue Waffenwerk Oscar Will, Zella-Mehlis (central Germany),[466] J.P. Sauer & Son, Suhl (central Germany),[467] Waffenfabrik Walther, Zella-Mehlis (central Germany),[468] Mauser, Oberndorf (southern Germany),[469] Deutsche Waffen und Munitions Fabriken, Karlsruhe (southern

[462] IOR/L/PJ/12/90, Import into India of Germany bayonets.
[463] Ibid.
[464] IOR/L/PJ/12/78.
[465] IOR/L/PJ/12/86, Arms Smuggling in SS Izrada.
[466] Ibid.
[467] Ibid.; SI No. 115/1924 File No. 178/24.
[468] IOR/L/PJ/12/86.
[469] SI No. 115/1924 File No. 178/24; SI No. 106/1925 File No. 87/25.

Germany),[470] and H. Ortgies & Co, Erfurt (eastern Germany).[471] Although there is no clear indication that the manufacturers of these brands had a direct link to the smuggling network, the appearance of their products in India and other places is yet another reason why Germany was considered the main supplier of firearms after the First World War. Its armament industry had been vital in supplying the German military during the war and swamped the country with its deadly leftovers afterwards. In the 1920s, these guns travelled the increasingly connected world to new destinations.

4.1.5 Shipping companies involved in smuggling

Equally complicit in the trade, even if not by direct involvement but rather by accident, were the international shipping companies. Although most of the weapons were found on ships of the "Hansa Line", either in the possession of its crew members or stored among other cargo, the smuggling was by no means restricted to the Bremen-based company. In fact, illicit cargo was detected on ships of many different flags, manned by sailors of various nationalities.

The steamers of the DDG "Hansa" are easily identified by their names, which all end with the suffix "Fels". They appear frequently in the British sources concerned with the documentation of smuggling of arms to India and China. Their popularity with smugglers had to do with the fact that the Hansa Line was the only German company offering a direct and regular service between Germany and India, and furthermore the line employed a predominantly Chinese and Indian crew.

In January 1922, when the SS "Ockenfels" and SS "Bahrenfels" called at Calcutta, eleven revolvers, two pistols and 34 rounds of ammunition were discovered in the possession of the ship's crew.[472] In August of the same year, a German sailor of the SS "Sturmfels" was caught in Rangoon trying to sell seven revolvers in the port.[473] Two years later, another German sailor was caught in possession of a Mauser pistol on board the SS "Wildenfels",[474] and in 1926, an Indian butcher named Akbar Ali was arrested in Calcutta on board the SS "Trautenfels" for

[470] Ibid.
[471] SI No. 106/1925 File No. 87/25.
[472] IOR/L/PJ/12/78.
[473] Ibid.
[474] Ibid.

carrying two automatic pistols and 50 cartridges.[475] Despite having their headquarters in Bremen, the Hansa boats often loaded cargo at Hamburg and Antwerp before departing on their journey to India. Akbar Ali stated that he had purchased the pistol from a Belgian porter in Antwerp. To the annoyance of the IPI officer concerned with the case, a native shopkeeper in Antwerp had "*at times sold revolvers to seamen on board the Fels boats*"[476] but refused to supply useful information about the identity of his customers.

An Indian crewmember of the SS "Trautenfels" named S. K. Niyamath told the authorities upon being questioned in Calcutta in 1924 that rifles and revolvers were sold freely in Hamburg to anyone without any restrictions. From this piece of information, in addition to other voices reporting along similar lines, the authorities concluded that Hamburg was "*the chief mart for the illicit Arms Traffic*."[477]

Arms and ammunition were further discovered on the vessels of other German shipping companies such as the Hamburg-Amerika-Line (Hamburg), the Rickmers Line (Hamburg), and the Hugo Stinnes Line (Hamburg).[478] The Hugo Stinnes Line was involved in a larger scam, attributed to the Chinese smuggler Choy Loy, who was allegedly responsible for two large consignments of arms from Hamburg to Hong Kong. The first one was discovered at Colombo in July 1924 on the SS "Schlesien" and the second in August of the same year on the SS "Albert Voegler" in Singapore, containing approximately 400 pistols and 120,000 rounds of ammunition.[479] The Stinnes Line was mainly calling at South American ports but also made occasional trips to East Asia.

How smugglers often used the international entanglements of the shipping industry to their advantage is perhaps best exemplified by the case of the SS "Hav", a steamship built in Shanghai in 1917 and sold to a Norwegian shipping company in 1923. In 1924, it was chartered by the Rickmers Line for a voyage from Antwerp to Canton but sailed under the Norwegian flag. Alongside the regular orders, it transported a consignment by Alfred Blujmuller, openly declared as arms and ammunition:

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[475] IOR/L/PJ/12/94, Arms traffic into India: correspondence with shipping companies and sale of arms at European ports.

[476] Ibid.

[477] IOR/L/PJ/12/78

[478] Ibid.; SI No. 115/1924 File No. 178/24.

[479] *The Statesman*, "Contraband Arms. Another Seizure on the "Schlesien"," 20.08.1924, Newspaper clipping found in SI No. 115/1924 File No. 178/24.

> Customs Officials in Colombo boarded the Norwegian S. S. "Hav" on her arrival in Colombo Harbour on 19.7.24. She was found to have 1,500 tons of cargo on board for Hong Kong and Canton of which approximately 100 tons were manifested as arms and ammunitions.[480]

Although the Colombo customs office took notice of the weapons, they had to let the "Hav" continue its journey to Canton. Since Norway had not signed the embargo agreement against the importation of arms into China, Norwegian vessels could not be deterred from anchoring at Colombo with war material for China on board, much to the annoyance of the British officials.

Contraband was also discovered on British, Scottish, French, and Dutch boats. For example, arms ascribed to a firm from Germany were confiscated from the SS "Streefkerk" of the Vereenigde Nederlandsche Scheepvaartmaatschappij in Colombo.[481] The P. Henderson Line, a Scottish shipping company operating to Burma, is mentioned frequently in British interrogation reports as the employer of *lascar* seamen found guilty of arms trafficking.

A scandal of a somewhat larger scale unsettled the British Brocklebank Line in 1923, when German bayonets consigned from Messrs Singh Sarkar & Co. of Hamburg and Calcutta were discovered in two of their steamers, the SS "Anchoria" and the SS "Matheran". Due to a loophole in the imperial legislation, the customs authorities had been unable to stop the first load of suspicious cargo from being cleared and taken into the country. Realizing their mistake, the government of Bengal reacted promptly and included bayonets in the list of items prohibited from importation under the Arms Act.[482]

Although ships owned by German companies trafficked illicit cargo more often than others, the smuggling network encompassed steamers of all flags. More important than the country of a steamer was its port of departure, the destinations it would call *en route,* and the port of arrival. As the examples above indicated, contraband intended for India or China was often addressed to Rangoon, Singapore, or Colombo. The reason for this detour was the thoroughness of the searches of the Calcutta customs and police authorities when it came to large, transcontinental steamers. Smaller, local boats arriving from the Bay of Bengal, or the

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[480] Ibid., Telegram from Office of the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, C.I.D., Colombo, 6 September 1924 to the Special Assistant, Intelligence Branch, C.I.D., Calcutta.

[481] IOR/L/PJ/12/79.

[482] IOR/L/PJ/12/90.

Calcutta backwaters were not given as much attention. Regarding departure destinations, illicit cargo was usually loaded in Hamburg, Antwerp, or Marseilles, or, to a lesser extent, in Genoa, Rotterdam, Liverpool, or Bremen. Most of the weapons were traced back to one of the three ports first mentioned. I have already indicated the involvement of the German armament industry and local retailers in the smuggling network. Perhaps of even greater importance was the existence of black markets in the dock neighbourhoods of these continental ports. The following section illustrates how the dock neighbourhood of Hamburg with its variety of sailors' shops, cafés, and bars was also the marketplace for guns, pistols, and ammunition. The focus on Hamburg can be justified by the city's importance as trading place for these kinds of goods throughout the 1920s, followed by Antwerp. As G. W. Hose, a leading IPI employee, informed the Foreign Office in 1925:

> In the former papers His Majesty's Consul-General at Antwerp stated that the sale of arms of an inferior quality was prevalent in Antwerp but that members of crews made most of their purchases at Hamburg.[483]

To cut the trade in Hamburg and other continental ports, Hose suggested *"that foreign governments should be approached and requested to place some control over some sale of weapons and ammunition in the neighbourhood of ships in ports."*[484]

4.1.6 Hamburg and Antwerp as main ports of dispatch

Not only from the IPI documents, but also in the Anglo–Indian press, it was understood that Hamburg was the main port of dispatch for arms and ammunition.[485] It was further assumed that the shipping agents profited from lenient shipping regulations. It was not necessary to provide a detailed list of the contents of a box or case in which cargo was packed. They could be declared with the Hamburg port authorities as holding, for example, agricultural machinery or furniture, and they could then be sent off without further inspection. Bribing minor officials could help restrain their curiosity, as they might otherwise discover the rifles, revolvers, machine guns, and rounds of ammunition not mentioned in the invoices.[486]

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[483] IOR/L/PJ/12/94.

[484] Ibid.

[485] *TOI*, "Arms for China," September 17, 1924; *TOI*, "Disguised Cargo," July 10, 1924.

[486] TOI, "Smuggling of Munitions," September 8, 1925.

However, what really distinguished not only Hamburg but also Antwerp and Marseilles from other ports was the existence of small, locally owned enterprises, which catered to the demands of Indian seafarers on their trips ashore. Besides their regular business, these shops offered forbidden goods, which they either displayed in their windows or sold secretly. To make the purchases even more convenient, the vendors visited the ships personally and offered their merchandise to the sailors on board.

Before I continue to describe the situation in Hamburg, it needs to be pointed out that there were other cities which figured prominently. Although Hamburg was an important nodal point, the smuggling network was much broader and encompassed a variety of places and routes. A significant round trip not discussed here was Japan–India–Egypt–France–China. According to an informer, who allegedly "*[knew] the 'tricks of the trade'*",[487] the arms and the drug trade was rampant in this circuit:

> They import cocaine from Kobe, Japan and sell at a profit in Bombay. With the proceeds, drugs mostly charas are bought in Bombay, and taken to Port Said for Egypt where they are sold at a profit: with the proceeds of these sales, arms are bought in Marseilles and taken to China where their disposal is not so difficult and likewise profitable.[488]

Like in Hamburg, the shadow economy of the Marseilles dock neighbourhood had the infrastructure to supply Indian smugglers. A fireman named Bagistan, in a statement given during his trial in 1929 in Bombay, remembered purchasing arms in the French port:

> I cam [sic!] to know that arms and ammunition could be purchased cheap at Marseilles and sold in China at a profit from the other fireman on board. I went to the shop myself. No one accompanied me. I was aware that arms could be purchased from the shop. They are exhibited in the shop windows. A Frenchman owns the shop. He speaks Hindustani and accepts Indian money.[489]

Since the material details given by the accused corresponded with the information received from an informer, the Bombay police considered the statement reliable and shared it with the Intelligence Bureau in Simla.

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[487] IOR/L/PJ/12/95, Arms traffic into India: correspondence with shipping companies and sale of arms at European ports, p. 14.

[488] Ibid., p. 14.

[489] Ibid., p. 17.

4.2 Seafarers as smugglers

Coming back to Hamburg, one way to obtain weapons was to buy them from vendors who visited the ships. Between 1924 and 1926, the IPI interviewed many *lascars* on their return to India or sent them on undercover missions to inquire about the situation in Hamburg, which was perceived as increasingly out of control by the British authorities in India. The sailors reported that both German and Indian peddlers often visited *lascar* ships when they berthed in the harbour. In a memorandum from the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, to the Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, the situation was summarized as follows. The information was provided by one Ohid Ahmed of Chittagong, probably a native informer who had just returned from a trip:

> "At Hamburg many German hawkers came on board the vessels with razors, knives, steel chains and many other instruments and weapons. Some of them had with them revolvers and pistols also but they did not expose the same for sale. They said that they had got the arms as samples for showing the purchasers and if any of them wanted to purchase them they could supply any number they require. They (the hawkers) told the seamen the price of the revolvers and pistols as between one and two pounds according to quality.[490]

Another informer, not mentioned by name but only by his code number S-37, reported along similar lines. He proudly introduced himself as an experienced sailor:

> I am working in ships for the last 25 years as an Officer's boy, Captain's boy, pantryman and second cook. I worked in Crook Line, Clan Line, Bank Line, Byron Company, City Line and Dutch Line. During the course of my travels I have been to many places on the continent, England, American ports, Chinese ports and other places.[491]

He confirmed that:

> revolvers are freely available at Hamburg, Antwerp and Rotterdam. Indians have small shops in these places and through them revolvers are available at Rs. 7/-8/-10/-15 each. There are many hawkers at these places, who supply revolvers by coming to ships. There are watchmen on behalf of the Customs – who pay particular attention to cargoes only

[490] IOR/L/PJ/12/94, p. 85.
[491] IOR/L/PJ/12/81, p. 31.

> and they never take any trouble to find out whether anybody is carrying any revolver with him or not.[492]

Although a direct link between the Sankt Pauli black market and the weapon-supplying hinterland is difficult to establish with certainty due to the nature of the sources, there are some hints and traces. In a report submitted by a Calcutta Special Branch officer in 1925, containing his interview with a "sailor boy" whom he calls his "deponent", the various ways in which seamen had access to contraband are described. After confirming the availability of revolvers and ammunition in almost every major port, the officer continues to map out how the trade between local vendors and seamen operated:

> Many hawkers, representatives of different firms, coolies and Indians were visiting the vessels at the jetty at Marseilles and offering pistols, revolvers and cartridges along with other articles for sale. Smuggling of arms and ammunition was being carried on by Indian seamen and foreign sailors from Hamburg, Antwerp and Marseilles to Port Said, on a very large scale.[493]

Although it does not become entirely clear who these hawkers and other individuals were and how they were related to each other, it can be assumed that there was a connection between petty traders and the arms retailers who commissioned the former to offer weapons to the crews. Indian residents were a part of this sales network. As the source continues:

> There were some Bengali Hindus at Antwerp and Hamburg who visit the ships as hawlers [sic!] and representatives of firms. They also induced Indian seamen to purchase firearms and ammunition.[494]

The possibility of buying arms directly on the ship relieved the sailors from the burden of running this errand ashore, where the risk of getting arrested was considerably higher. Nevertheless, arms were also available in designated sailors' shops, which were often operated by Indians and attracted a considerable number of customers. Purchasing arms from these shops, which were well-known in the seafaring community, became the preferred method of exchange once the Hamburg police became more suspicious of the ship-going

[492] Ibid., p. 32.
[493] IOR/L/PJ/12/94, p. 69.
[494] Ibid., p. 70.

vendors. In these seamen's supplies stores, which offered tobacco, clothing, and hygiene articles, weapons were also for sale. In some cities, such as Antwerp and Rotterdam, there was not even a licence required.

Hamburg was not far behind. The aforementioned informer named Ohid Ahmed observed that at the local market, *"arms and ammunition were being sold to anybody and everybody without any restriction and just like other necessaries of life."*[495]

These shops operated secretly. One experienced *lascar* named Shaik Karim, upon being interrogated by the Deputy Commissioner of the Calcutta police, remembered the following intimate details about the arms trade. He provided the report immediately before his departure on another undercover mission on the Harrison Line, for which he was ordered to collect more information on the smuggling business. The commissioner paraphrased Karim's words for his colleagues in the Intelligence Bureau and the IPI:

> Some time before he went to Hamburg in a vessel and found one Mahaboob Sukhany (Sea-cunny) of Taltolla, Calcutta, purchasing revolvers from a shop. Mahaboob went to a particular shop, where he had an Indian acquaintance, by the back door, and purchased four revolvers and carried them into the ship without being searched by any Customs Officers. I do not remember the name of the shop. Mahaboob kept them concealed in some drums of paint and safely brought them to Calcutta. Mahaboob told him that he disposed the arms at very high price. Karim further gave out that he had seen many Bengali employees in the arms dealers' shops at Antwerp and Hamburg, and they help the lascars in purchasing arms.[496]

These reports suggest that these migrant Indians, whom the informers casually called Bengalis or Bengali Hindus, probably to emphasize their perceived difference in social status from the predominantly Muslim seafarers, were, in fact, working in the arms dealers' shops or acting as their representatives. Although these reports seldomly revealed the national identity of the shop proprietors, whether they were German or foreign-born, one can assume that Indians residing in Hamburg were amongst their employees. As vendors or cashiers, Indian seafarers played a crucial role in the network labelled here the shadow economy of the port.

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[495] Ibid., p. 85.

[496] IOR/L/PJ/12/79, p. 66.

Arms were also dealt outside of designated shops on an even more clandestine basis. The German sailor Herrmann Fleck of the SS "Wildenfels" was caught in Calcutta with a Mauser pistol and 50 cartridges. He claimed to have bought the pistol from an unknown man in a restaurant in Hamburg, located on Admiral Street, close to the docks. This man, whose identity remains undisclosed, explained to his customer that he was selling the revolver because he was "hard up",[497] meaning that he was broke.

One South Asian migrant in Hamburg who embodies the various ways of engaging in the illicit arms trade is Henry Obed. I have already spoken about his economic activities, legal as well as illegal, in previous chapters. He had his own export business, partnered in another, sold cocaine to international clients, and approached *lascars* on ships to guide them to arms dealers in the vicinity. Since an entire chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to unravelling his life trajectory, his engagement in the smuggling network will only be discussed here briefly. The anonymous sailor boy cited before met Obed around 1925 in Antwerp. He described him as being a "great friend" of the Indian seamen and reported that:

> He or his agent visits every ship that goes to Antwerp and assist the Indian seamen in purchasing the necessary articles. With the deponent's knowledge Abid Hussain [Henry Obed, SvJ] purchased and supplied several revolvers and pistols to Indian seamen.[498]

Another unnamed native informer reported that in 1926, Obed had taken him to a firearms shop and asked if he wanted to buy a revolver, which could be bought at a very low price.[499] Yet another source claimed to have met Obed in his own shop in Antwerp. The seaman remembered having the following conversation with the Indian:

> He asked me whether I required many revolvers and I replied in the affirmative. I further inquired how he would arrange to send revolvers to Calcutta. He gave me one of his cards, and instructed me to write in red ink on the back of the card and send it through a known Indian seaman with half the price of the revolvers.[500]

[497] Ibid., p. 10.
[498] IOR/L/PJ/12/94, p. 70.
[499] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 9.
[500] Ibid.

In these statements, a complex network comprising shopkeepers and peddlers, professional smugglers, and spontaneous customers emerges. The risk of being detected was imminent, as the colonial authorities had their own network of agents and informers collecting information in the ports. However, their power to intervene was limited. An informer might have provided the name and whereabouts of arms dealers in distant places and warned the authorities of the arrival of contraband, but it was outside their jurisdiction to break up a smuggling ring or even arrest individuals. Operating from the territory of a foreign government could shield an Indian migrant from the grasp of the colonial power and allow for a dash of entrepreneurial freedom.

There were, however, substantial risks involved as well. The British Indian authorities were highly alerted by the ongoing trade and collected as much information as they could on suspected individuals. It so happened that when Obed travelled to India on behalf of his business at the end of 1934, his passport was impounded by the Government of Bengal.[501] He was tried for smuggling weapons from Germany and Belgium to India based on accusations dating back to 1923. Although he walked out of the trial as a free man, he was unable to get back his travel documents and was therefore unable to return home, eventually forcing him to bribe his way back on a steamer, working his passage as a common seaman.

4.3 Summary

In the early 1920s, arms and ammunition were freely and cheaply available at Hamburg and could be sold at an Indian or Chinese port with high margins. It thus became a profitable activity for many *lascars* to smuggle contraband and thereby add some extra rupees to their below-average income during their voyages. The transcontinental arms smuggling network was of immense scale and could not be explored here in its geographical entirety. Nevertheless, a close analysis of the bustling Hamburg–India nexus already revealed an extensive network connecting munitions factories, shipping agencies, ambitious entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, revolutionary exiles, and European and Indian ship crews.

Indian migrants were indispensable in this global trade of arms from west to east, acting either as shopkeepers or as street vendors in the Sankt Pauli black market. What enabled them to occupy this economic niche was their double connectedness. On the one hand, their

[501] Ibid., p. 39.

migrant identity paired with their familiarity with the local conditions allowed them to negotiate the complex web of social relations in the dock neighbourhood. Whether their partners were Chinese migrants or German nationals, they knew how to interact with the respective social group. On the other hand, their South Asian heritage and seafaring experience bestowed them with the cultural capital necessary to connect with the Indian maritime labouring class. Although there was a palpable gap with regard to social and educational background, their apparent otherness as compared to the White German majority population sufficed to build a bond of trust with the dark-skinned *lascars*. Race trumped class in this case.

However, the availability of contraband and the possibility to sell them with profit does not explain why the Indian migrants chose to participate in the arms and cocaine trade, especially in the light of the fact that they all had legal businesses to attend to. The risk of attracting police attention and thereby jeopardizing their already marginalized residential status must have been apparent to them.

Therefore, I assume their immersion in these unlawful activities to have been born out of economic necessity rather than pure lust for profit or even moral depravity. The pressure to avoid financial destitution in an exclusionist, racist society literally required them to break the law. This becomes even more apparent when one considers the law as a social contract: Why should these individuals live by the rules of a society which gave them nothing in return for their obedience but deprived them of basic access to the society, for instance withholding the right to reside, work, or vote? Although Obed, Singh, and Mirza all reached some level of financial stability, it was never enough to secure permanent residency or basic citizenship rights. On the contrary, the risk of losing everything they had built for themselves was omnipresent. Their lives were marked by the constant struggle for legitimacy at the margins of social existence.

Apart from this insecurity and necessity, however, there is another factor to be considered, however speculative and intangible. The migrants all displayed an unyielding resolve to pursue their commercial, political, and romantic ambitions, which attracted them to the illegal economy. Ready to break the boundaries limiting the scope of possibility for non-elite South Asian migrants in Germany in the interwar period, they accepted the risks and challenges that came with their prospects of freedom. Their success was astonishing. Obed expressed his affluence by showcasing status symbols such as trucks, mansions, and exotic

pets, emulating the lifestyle of European high society. Singh practiced romantic liberties unfathomable in his home district in the Punjab, and Mirza indulged in free political expression and activity which would have rendered him a political prisoner back in British India.

5. Historic migrant biographies: The life story of Hardas Singh

> 72. SINGH, Hardas. Son of Khazana, of village Kot Patiali, dist. Hoshiarpur. Born on 18.5.82. Wheat complexion; rather tall and fat; long beard. Has no British passport. A havildar who deserted from his regiment (41st Dogras) in 1915 and afterwards worked as a German agent. Opened a boarding house and drinking shop for lascars and Orientals in Hamburg, where he was suspected of not only engaging in the arms traffic (i.e., selling revolvers to lascars) but also of assisting to smuggle Communist literature into India. Is extremely anti-British and likely to be utilised by the Nazis.[502]

This brief account is one of the many biographic fragments of Hardas Singh which appeared during my archival research. It covers his desertion from the British Indian army, his work for the German military, his settlement in Hamburg, and his stance towards the Nazis and is therefore one of the more comprehensive narrations of his life. However, the accuracy of the description, printed in a "List of Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe" in February 1944 by the IPI, is limited. Looking closely at Singh's life story, consulting multiple sources, and adopting various perspectives, the image that emerges of the migrant to Hamburg is an altogether different one. Neither was he engaged in the arms trade nor did he smuggle Communist literature — or, at least, he was never convicted of these crimes. He was not utilized by the Nazis but became a victim of their racism and oppression. Also, he was not considered "fat" by his German contemporaries and was described as clean-shaven.[503] Who, then, was he? The following chapter sets out to answer this question.

Hardas Singh was born in the village Kot Patiali in Hoshiarpur district in the north-western state of Punjab. His father, Khazana or Kasan Singh, was a farmer in this village, and his mother's name was given as Rhamdey.[504]

In the sources, the spelling of his home district differs widely. They vaguely referred to "Husapur" or "Shapur" or "Shaper" in India, a testimony to the European ignorance of Indian names and places. Only the holdings of the Arolsen Archives provided me with precise information about his natal town, which was later confirmed in the material I found in the

[502] "List of Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe,", IOR/L/PJ/12/659, February 1944, p. 65.
[503] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 17.
[504] Ibid., p. 11.

British Library and at Göttingen University.[505] This difficulty of determining the exact place of birth despite the availability of many sources speaks to one of the major challenges of this chapter. The unreliability of western archival knowledge regarding colonial subjects has been discussed at various stages of this thesis and will again be of interest here.

The following analysis traces Hardas Singh's life trajectory through various archives and source materials, crossing continents and repository institutions. It is a story of incredible success and failure, of migrant possibility and limitation. It investigates the conditions and contingencies of his migrant existence on the margins of society, inquires the socio-political structures that allowed for his settlement in Weimar Germany, and looks at the networks which facilitated his economic success or inhibited and jeopardized his commercial ambitions. Further, his contacts to local women and his and his relationship to the Sankt Pauli working class and the Chinese migrants take centre stage. Lastly, it wonders whether his failure to prosper, emotionally and materially, was inevitable, or preventable and makes a historically informed guess about the reasons for his ever-increasing marginalization.

5.1 The First World War at the frontline

Nothing is known from the archives about Singh's childhood and adolescent years. In 1914, aged 32, he was one of many from his region who joined the British Indian army to fight in France against the German forces. The Punjab, along with the Indo–Afghan border region and Nepal, was one of the principal recruitment grounds for the Indian troops. Between August 1914 and October 1918, 140,000 Indian combatants and non-combatants were stationed in Europe, either fighting in hand-to-hand combat or doing menial labour, mainly consisting of digging trenches.[506] The Punjabi districts Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, and Hoshiarpur provided around 50 per cent of the total recruits for the British war efforts. The militarization of this region was a direct result of the 1857 mutiny during which the Punjabi rulers had been loyal to the British.[507] Moreover, its inhabitants were framed as

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[505] Ibid., Arolsen Archives, Copy of 0.1 / 36448949; IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81; Felix von Luschan, "Kriegsgefangene: 100 Steinzeichnungen von Hermann Struck," Begleitworte von F. von Luschan (Berlin, 1917), p. 30.

[506] Ravi Ahuja, "Lost Engagements? Traces of South Asian Soldiers in German Captivity, 1915–1918," in *"When the war began we heard of several kings": South Asian prisoners of World War I Germany*, ed. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, and Ravi Ahuja (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011), p. 19.

[507] https://qz.com/india/1425486/british-indian-army-recruited-half-a-million-from-punjab-in-ww1/.

"martial races" by the British colonizers. According to this doctrine, certain ethnic, religious, or social groups were physically better equipped for combat and more loyal than others. Based on these ascriptions, they were considered less susceptible to nationalist sentiments and therefore more suitable for military service.[508]

Singh held the rank of a *havildar*, which was the Indian equivalent of a sergeant and the fifth-highest rank of the British Indian infantry. His regiment was raised in 1900 at Jalandhar, not far away from his home village in the Hoshiarpur district.[509] He may have risen to this position during his service for the 41st Dogras in previous colonial wars in which the regiment had fought in Somalia (1903) and China (1905-1910).[510]

So far, his life story is not very unusual. It all changed in 1915, however, when he decided to shoot his British officer and desert across the frontline to the German enemies. What compelled him to thit act remains uncertain. He might have been influenced by German propaganda leaflets dropped by aircraft over the colonial soldiers or by propaganda messages conveyed via loudspeakers to induce them to surrender and change loyalties. Since the beginning of the war, colonial troops were directly addressed by the German propaganda machinery. The leaflets appealed to their patriotic feelings and duties as Indians and rebutted the rumours spread by the Axis Powers about terrible weapons the Germans had allegedly invented to kill them.[511] Members of the IIC in Berlin, consisting of South Asian political exiles of various designations, were sent to the front to directly address the *sepoys* in Indian languages.[512]

Another reason for Singh's desertion from his battalion could have been the inadequate treatment and ferocious conditions the Indian soldiers had to endure while fighting in France. 1914/15 was the first time the British sent their *sepoy* troops to fight on a European

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[508] Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars. Between Self and Sepoy*, (London: Bloomsbury Academy, 2014), pp. 11–34.

[509] Officers of the Regiment**,** The Story of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 41st Dogras. Volume I. October 1900 to December 1923 & October 1917 to March 1922, Compiled from the Digest of Services & other sources (Printed for Private Circulation Only), (Bombay: Thacker & Co., Ltd. Printers), p. 4.

[510] Ibid., p. 4.

[511] Heike Liebau, "The German Foreign Office, Indian Emigrants and Propaganda Efforts Among the 'Sepoys'," in *'When the war began we heard of several kings.' South Asian prisoners of World War I Germany*, ed. Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, and Ravi Ahuja, (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011), pp. 111–2.

[512] Ibid., p. 113.

battleground. The army was trained for colonial warfare[513] in warm climates and was short of warm clothing. They also had no modern weapons.[514] Underequipped as the soldiers were, they were sent into battle to back up the Allied army to stop the German advance. With the onset of the cold weather, the troops had to be withdrawn from the front, having suffered heavy casualties. They spent the warmer months of 1915 in France fighting in the trenches but were deemed incapable of facing a second winter in Europe. Desertion was not uncommon among the *sepoys*. The British military authorities suspected 92 soldiers of the Indian Expeditionary Force of having left their units intentionally.[515]

As a *havildar*, Singh possibly had a certain sense of entitlement and perhaps considered such conditions unworthy of his rank. According to his own statement, he left his battalion in the French town of Douai and was taken prisoner by the Germans.[516] In the files of the German Foreign Office, it is mentioned that he fatally shot his English superior before voluntarily crossing the frontlines.[517]

He was taken to Berlin to the camp for South Asian prisoners of war in Zossen / Wünsdorf. Although technically a prisoner of war [POW], he enjoyed certain privileges right from the beginning of his internment. He and two other Indian officers were permitted to move in and out of the camp under the supervision of one Mr Kartaram, a member of the IIC.[518] They were later exempted from imprisonment in the camp and allowed to live in the town of Wünsdorf, where their expenses were paid by the German camp authorities.[519] In return, they were obliged to undertake propaganda activities among the South Asian POWs, for the purpose of which they were allowed to enter and leave the camp of their own accord.

Singh probably enjoyed these privileges in the camp because he was chosen to be part of a military mission to Constantinople. From the beginning of the war, in accordance with the

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[513] As Ravi Ahuja has illustrated, the British India had served for several decades as a reservoir of cheap military labour to police colonies or quell insurgency across the Indian Ocean region, see Ahuja, *Lost Engagements*, p. 18.

[514] Claude Markovits, "Indian Soldiers' Experience in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front," in *The World in Wars. Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah, and Ravi Ahuja (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 32.

[515] Ahuja, *Lost Engagements*, p. 20.

[516] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 3.

[517] PAAA, R 21253, Bd. 09, p. 5, Bericht zur Geheimverfügung des Kriegsministeriums vom 3.2.15, Halbmondlager, den 14.1.1916.

[518] Ibid., Von Hauptmann Nadolny an Baron von Wesendonk, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, 12.1.16.

[519] PAAA, R 21254, Bd. 10, 3.3.1916, p. 9, Hauptmann Nadolny an Baron von Wesedonk.

"Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient" [NfO], a special propaganda and intelligence bureau for eastern soldiers within the German Foreign Office, South Asian prisoners were separated according to their future tasks. A few Indians were selected into a group which would go with Indian nationalists via Constantinople to Afghanistan to carry out revolutionary activities there, together with a large group of Indians in Afghanistan.[520]

5.2 The First World War in German captivity

The first image of Hardas Singh available to researchers was created in the camp itself. The German–Jewish painter Hermann Struck contributed 100 drawings of different inmates from the Berlin camp to Felix von Luschan's 'anthropological study' of prisoners of war.[521] Number 59 depicts *"Hardas Singh, Patialang, Distrikt Hoshiarpur, 33 Jahre, Landwirt, Hawildar, 41. Dogra Inf.-Regiment."*[522] In the pencil drawing, Singh wears a turban. His face is clean-shaven except for a moustache with curled-up tips. Although his dress is only outlined and fades out after the shoulder and neck area, he appears to be wearing a civilian suit or coat and a light scarf, not a military uniform. He has full lips, a regular nose, and a stern expression. Based on his given age on the drawing and his year of birth, it can be assumed that the picture was drawn in 1915, shortly after his arrival in the camp.

[520] Heike Liebau, "A Voice Recording, a Portrait Photo and three Drawings. Tracing the Life of a Colonial Soldier," *ZMO Working Papers*, no. 20 (2018): p. 4.
[521] von Luschan, *Kriegsgefangene*, p. 30.
[522] Ibid.

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What was the context in which we can understand his privileges in exchange for his propaganda-related activities? Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the German Foreign Office initiated a broad propaganda campaign to win the allegiance of South Asian prisoners of war. The German foreign policy towards Indian nationals was part of a larger scheme to instigate insurrections in the British colonies. The scheme had been outlined by Max Freiherr von Oppenheim in 1914 in a paper titled "Memorandum on revolutionizing the Islamic territories of our enemies" and was implemented by the Foreign Office.[524] Germany had secured Turkey's allegiance as early as August 1914, and the Ottoman Sultan Sheik-ul-Islam in Constantinople declared an Islamic holy war against Britain, France, and Russia three months later.[525] It was against this backdrop that the South Asian soldiers and prisoners of war emerged as major targets of propaganda executed mainly by the German Foreign Office with the newly founded NfO and by the Indian emigrants and political exiles organised in the IIC.[526] Besides distributing seditious leaflets along the frontlines, one premier task as laid out by the NfO was to supply prisoners of 'Oriental' nations with books and newspapers, organize lectures, and accommodate their religious needs.[527]

[523] Ibid.

[524] Liebau, *The German Foreign Office*, pp. 96–7.

[525] Andrew Tait Jarboe, "The Prisoner Dilemma: Britain, Germany, and the Repatriation of Indian Prisoners of War," *The Round Table,* 103, no.2 (2014): p. 203.

[526] Liebau, *The German Foreign Office*, p. 97.

[527] Ibid., p. 102.

To make this plan feasible, the German war administration erected a special camp for Muslim prisoners of war in Zossen (Weinberg Camp) and Wünsdorf (Halfmoon Camp) in January of 1915. Most of the Indian prisoners were interned in the Halfmoon Camp where they were allowed to follow their respective religions and participate in cultural activities and educational events.

Being under the impression that the Indian Muslims would support the caliphate, the dissemination of pan-Islamic ideas was a major priority of the propaganda efforts. In order to directly reach the POWs, representatives of the IIC together with members of the NfO were appointed as propagandists for regular work inside the camp. One of the strategic goals of the educational efforts was to send the Muslim prisoners as so-called *jihadists* to Turkey, where they were supposed to be integrated into the Ottoman army.[528] The first group of 'volunteers' was sent on February 8, 1916, followed by others on March 3 and March 8, 1916, as well as April 5, 1917.[529] According to the historian Gerhard Höpp, only 49 of the approximately 1000 Indian Muslims had agreed to join the campaign to Turkey.[530]

In order to be more successful among the POWs, the German authorities tried to persuade 'native' individuals to act as multipliers on their behalf. They asked deserters to join the campaign to Turkey, where they should address their co-religionists across the frontline and induce them to desert the British Army. Occasionally, the NfO tried to incorporate deserters or prisoners with certain special skills into their propaganda work as translators, calligraphers, or writers. Such attempts were met with difficulties, either because the Indians were not ready to collaborate with the Germans at all or because they did not blindly accept the conditions of this 'collaboration'.

Heike Liebau, in an article on the propaganda efforts among the South Asian POWs, describes the difficulties the German authorities encountered with one Punjabi soldier whom they asked to translate texts in the Punjabi/Gurmukhi language for the NfO.[531] He agreed to work for the Germans under the conditions that he was to be released from the camp and granted permission to relocate to Berlin. According to the source, his request was refused by the camp

[528] Ibid., p. 122.

[529] Ibid., pp. 122–3.

[530] Gerhard Höpp, *Muslime in der Mark. Als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen, 1914-1924* (Berlin: Verlag das Arabische Buch, 1997), p. 83.

[531] Liebau, *The German Foreign Office*, p. 126.

authorities, but we cannot be sure whether this was the final verdict in this case. The name of the prisoner as stated in the source was "Hardar Singh."[532]

We do not have enough source material to confirm that the Punjabi in question is, in fact, identical with Hardas Singh. A contrary indication is the fact that he is referred to as Har Dass Singh in other files of the German Foreign Office. However, since the German authorities were generally prone to misspelling the names of any South Asian individual, it is still possible that we are talking about the same person. Different officials could have made different spelling mistakes. In support of this hypothesis, it needs to be mentioned that Singh had shifted from the camp to Wünsdorf in 1915 and was allowed to leave and enter the camp at his own convenience. His rank as *havildar* further lends credibility to the assumption that he was literate and hence able to read the script of his native language. As a deserter, he would have been the prime target of the German authorities to function as a multiplier.

Another more tentative line reasoning in favour of Hardar Singh's being Hardas Singh is the firmness with which the Indian laid out his own terms and conditions for the cooperation with the German authorities. As demonstrated below in this chapter, he had a habit of confronting German authorities with full confidence, even if he was standing with his back against the (prison) wall.

Singh's participation in the campaign in Constantinople, though, is confirmed. His case had always presented as special because of his voluntary and violent desertion from the British forces. Being aware that he would have to face severe punishment, Singh requested to be given the assurance that he would not be repatriated to India after the cessation of hostilities. Fearing that the British would take control over the entire Berlin camp in the case of Germany's defeat, the authorities decided in the beginning of 1916 to send Singh and two other Sikhs to Turkey. Despite being promised otherwise, the three Sikhs were not attached to any of the three groups of *jihadists*, which left Berlin for Constantinople in February, March, and April 1916.[533] Presumably, the German authorities felt uncomfortable sending them along with the Muslim soldiers, expecting tensions between the members of different religions. They were eager to find a secure solution for the Sikhs and felt that it was "*absolutely essential that the above-mentioned men be set free*."[534] Eventually, they joined a

[532] PAAA, P 1510, 15.12.15, Short memo written on a piece of paper by an unknown author.

[533] PAAA, R 21253, Bd. 09, 3.3.1916, Hauptmann Nadolny an Baron von Wesedonk.

[534] Ibid.

group of Tatar soldiers on May 5, 1916, which headed towards Constantinople. Upon arrival, they were to be treated as free men by the Turkish military authorities.

In Turkey, however, the local officials did not fulfil their end of the bargain. After a three-months stay in the Taxim barracks, where they enjoyed full liberties, they were removed to Fatih barracks, where they were again treated as POWs.[535] In a distressed letter to the Turkish government, the NfO asked the former to not remove the soldiers to another barrack in "Brussa" [sic!][536] as prisoners but to treat them as free men. Regarding the reasons for their differential treatment by the Turkish, the German authorities suspected religious tensions:

> We have unfortunately reason to believe that the Hindu soldiers are the victims of the incessant malicious activity of certain Indians whose insane hostility to all Hindus is likely to cause a serious disturbance of the peace if allowed to continue.[537]

The intervention was successful, and the Hindu and Sikh soldiers were released from Fatih barracks and temporarily lodged in a hotel in Constantinople at the expense of the German government. Hardas Singh was supposed to be employed as propagandist in the Hindu prisoners' camp,[538] whereas three other Sikhs were to be taken as servants by German officers headed to Persia, where they were to be given the opportunity to proceed towards their home.[539]

Neither of these plans materialized. Being of no use to the Turks and a financial liability to the Germans, it was decided that all of them were to be sent back to the camps in Germany. On January 15, 1917, they commenced their journey, arriving five days later. While the other Sikhs joined the captured and interned *lascars* of the SS "Möwe" in Lübeck, which was considered more adequate than having them join the Muslim prisoners in Berlin, Hardas Singh was set free on the condition that he stayed at the disposal of the German Foreign Office.[540]

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[535] PAAA, R 21260, Bd. 14, September 1916, p. 35, To Baron von Wesendonk, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin.

[536] This could either refer to "Broussa", a small place in the province of Bursa, or the metropolitan city of Bursa, Turkey itself.

[537] PAAA, R 21260, Bd. 14, p. 15, To Ali Bey Bash Hampa, Istanbul.

[538] In the sources of the PAAA, the camp is referred to as "Hindu prisoners' camp" although it was designed to host mainly Muslim South Asian soldiers (PAAA, R 21260, Bd. 14, p. 35). It is probably meant to distinguish the Halfmoon Camp in Wünsdorf for Indian, African and Arab Muslim prisoners from the Weinberglager in Zossen for Muslim prisoners from Russia, mainly Tatars.

[539] PAAA, R 21260, Bd. 14, September 1916, p. 35, To Baron von Wesendonk, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin.

[540] R 21261, Bd. 15, 12. Dezember 1916, p. 31, Minute from V. Hülsen, PAAA.

This first impression of Europe possibly had a lasting effect on the *sepoy*. In a state of extended transit, he never really belonged anywhere. There was much uncertainty about where he would be sent next, what his tasks would involve, and what risks he had to take.

Sources from the Hamburg State Archive confirm Singh's trip to Constantinople. A summary of his life course provided by the Hamburg police to the state prosecutor at the Hamburg district court in 1940 states that Singh had agreed to fight for the German cause and had joined the campaign to Turkey. In 1918, he was released from military service and settled in Berlin.[541] British sources lend further credibility to this assumption. His name appears on a list compiled by the British military in October 1918, naming Indian POWs who were "*suspected of having deserted to the enemy or having given information to or otherwise assisted the enemy after capture.*"[542] His name and rank are given as Naik Hardas from the 41st Dogras. Under the column "Reason for which considered suspect" it is written that he wounded a British officer attached to the 41st Dogras and disappeared afterwards. Under the column "Latest information", it is mentioned that he was last seen in Baghdad, which is unlikely given the itinerary of his trip to Turkey as taken from the sources of the German Foreign Office. As a Sikh, he would have had no intention to proceed to Baghdad, since this was a Muslim dominated region, and this was not desired by the Germans either. Sixteen years later, his name resurfaces again in a memorandum titled "List of Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe", distributed internally by the British Secret Service in 1944. Here it is stated that after deserting his regiment in France, he worked as a German agent.[543]

This itself is already an impressive performance with regard to archival presence, but Singh yet again appears in another set of British sources. In an interview conducted with six repatriated prisoners of war at the Y.M.C.A. Hostel in Cleveland Square, London, on January 13, 1919, the following information was given:

> 5. Naik HAR DAS of the 58th, who was supposed to have shot a European officer before deserting, remained in Germany when the others were repatriated. He said good-bye to them with considerable regret, but maintained that under the circumstances it was impossible for him to leave Germany and go back to India.[544]

[541] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 3.

[542] Nominal Roll of Indian Prisoner of War, Suspected of Having Deserted to the Enemy or Having Given Information to or Otherwise Assisted the Enemy After Capture, IOR/L/MIL/718501, List A, October 1918.

[543] "List of Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, February 1944, p. 65.

[544] Interview with repatriated prisoners of war, IOR/L/MIL/718501, p. 2.

In this quotation, one gets a first peek into Hardas Singh's emotional world. During the three turbulent years in German captivity, he developed a friendship and emotional attachment to his fellow prisoners. His feeling of regret might not only have been caused by the separation from his friends but also by the awareness that he would never see his home country again. Drawn into the war by the colonizers, he was now barred from returning and forced to start from scratch in a completely alien environment. His sentiments could also have been caused by the uncertainty of his future in a foreign land which, so far, he had only encountered in wartime. He might have felt insecure about how to make ends meet in peacetime Germany and how to interact with the local population.

Furthermore, this quotation illuminates the uncertainty and unreliability of the archival material. Whereas in the sources of the German Foreign Office and in other sources of the British Secret Service, his rank is stated as "havildar", the British military documents label him only as "naik", which is one rank below the former. It is imaginable that Singh 'promoted' himself when he went over to the Germans, hoping for preferential treatment. Another possibility is that he was awarded a higher rank while stationed in France, which the military authorities did not record properly or even decided to annulate after his violent desertion. It is also imaginable that this change of rank, which happened quite often to colonial soldiers as people in permanent transit, is an expression of something more structural in the administrative mindset of the colonial power. Expressive of the soldiers' uncertain life trajectories — for example, changing from being a foot soldier for the British army to a privileged but nevertheless captive POW — the change in their military designation was just another marker of their constant living "in between" or at the margins.

Singh's 'migration' to Germany was not a voluntary choice in the sense that he had planned to leave India for another country in order to start a new life or to pursue a professional career. Nevertheless, his arrival in Germany was characterized by a high degree of agency on the part of the soldier. As an act either of bravery or of despair, he decided to quit his war service for the British forces and switched sides, venturing into a world entirely unknown to him. Whether he used his weapon against his White superior in an act of self-defence or resistance, we cannot know. All we can say is that he made use of the limited choices available to him at various points to steer his very uncertain path of extended transit.

In Germany, he refused to be treated as a prisoner of war and used his language skills as a bargaining chip to ensure certain privileges. Considering the power imbalance between a foreign soldier and person of colour in a German prison camp and the prison authorities, this behaviour speaks of immense courage and confidence. Eventually he succeeded and walked out as a free man. He settled down in Berlin Charlottenburg and started a new life in a foreign land.

Through his desertion and captivity, Singh exploited, albeit unknowingly, a liminal space opened by the First World War. Inhabiting this space between captive and collaborator, alien and ally, British and German, friend and enemy, gave him leverage vis-à-vis the German military authorities, setting the stage for his migration experience. It allowed him to negotiate favourable terms of captivity and guaranteed certain liberties after the termination of the war. This state of liminality stayed with him for the rest of his residency in Germany, as shown further below. Living in between spaces, physically, legally, and emotionally, is a characteristic of Henry Obed's migrant biography as well and has been observed for other South Asian migrant experiences.[545]

5.3 Post-war years in Berlin

Like several other Indian and Afghan soldiers who had collaborated with the Germans during the war, Singh initially settled down in the district of Charlottenburg, close to the office of the NfO. In the immediate aftermath of the war, quite a few Indian students and anti-colonial activists moved from England to Berlin. Between 1920 and 1923, more than 300 Indians were living in the capital.[546]

Their start to a new life was facilitated by the German authorities, who had created a fund to cover the initial expenses required to secure accommodation and work in Berlin at the end of the hostilities.[547] In the files of the Geheime Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, it is mentioned that some Indians who had worked for the German government received monthly allowances for their studies, whereas others were granted capital to open "tobacco or sweet

[545] See, for example, Bald, *Bengali Harlem*; MacDonald, *Colonial Trespassers*.

[546] Manjapra, *The Illusions of Encounter*, p. 377.

[547] Jarboe, *The Prisoner Dilemma*, p. 205.

shops".[548] For that purpose, the Foreign Office made available a sum of 205,000 Marks.[549] The reason for this benevolence was the high degree of collaboration those Indians had shown during the war. Hardas Singh is not mentioned as the recipient of any funds in the lists of the German administration. However, it is recorded that he opened a grocery store referred to as "Delikatessengeschäft", store for delicacies, in the German sources[550] at Wilmersdorfstraße 104.[551] During his time in Berlin, he was allegedly a member of B. N. Dutt's revolutionary party.[552] The same source further claims that he married a German woman in 1924 and moved to Hamburg in 1926, where he ran a boarding house and restaurant.[553]

Again, the IPI source cannot be taken at face value. We learn from other sources that Singh moved to Hamburg in 1924 and not in 1926.[554] Moreover, there is no corroborative evidence lending plausibility to the suggestion that he was part of any revolutionary group while he was in Berlin. In the capital, there existed the "pro-India Society", which was founded in 1919 in Charlottenburg after the dissolution of the IIC by some of its former members, such as B. N. Dutt, V. Chattopadhyaya, C. Pillai, and others. Then, there was the group that formed around the communist leader M. N. Roy, which was the official representative of the Communist International of Indian exiles in Berlin. Since both groups were closely monitored by the IPI, Hardas Singh, a deserter and, in their eyes, a traitor, would have appeared on their earlier records. In none of the sources did the ex-soldier express any explicit political opinions. He was considered a friend of the Germans, which is hardly surprising given his dependency on the German authorities and his war background. The only reference to him being politically vocal stems from the IPI source, which places him as a member of the "pro-India Society". He had allegedly written a letter to the editor of the *Kirti* of Amritsar in 1934, a Punjabi nationalist newspaper, where he said that he was determined to return only to a free India.[555] A thorough search of the *Kirti* newspaper for said quotation, however, did not yield any results.

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[548] GStA: 1. Rep76 Vc. Sekt. 1. Tit. XI Teil 1. Nr. 58, 36, 30 Januar 1920.

[549] Oesterheld, *„Der Feind meines Feindes ist mein Freund"*, p. 98.

[550] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 3.

[551] "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.

[552] Ibid.

[553] Ibid.

[554] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, pp. 3–4.

[555] "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.

The unreliability of factual content can be traced back to the purpose of the source. Perhaps the author of this piece of intelligence had to deliver plausible information in exchange for funds but happened not to have any. To please his superiors, he might have added certain information while neglecting other details. The point of this statement was perhaps to underline that the Indian community in Germany, particularly in Berlin, was very anti-British and worth supporting even in Nazi Germany. People like Hardas Singh were dependent on the goodwill of the German state and used their agency accordingly, making use of their limited choices and options.

Therefore, we cannot be sure whether Singh was engaged in any political activities during his time in Germany. His shift to Hamburg in 1924, away from the Indian community in Charlottenburg and the epicentre of anti-imperial agitation at that time, does not speak in favour of this assumption. Although some actions and practices, like his attitude towards certain minority groups of which we shall speak later, can be considered "political", he was certainly no leading figure in any organized revolutionary or anti-colonial movement.

5.4 Interwar years in Hamburg

In 1924, Hardas Singh moved to the port city of Hamburg. Without any prior experience in the hospitality business but probably well-acquainted with the German trade sector and tax system from his retail business in Berlin, he opened a bar in Bernhard-Nocht-Straße 63 in the Sankt Pauli district, very close to the docks. According to the business registration office, the bar was first registered by Lucia Gertrud Alice Singh, his wife at the time, in July 1925.[556] About two years later, in February 1927, Singh registered himself officially as barkeeper for the "Indische Bar Neu Haarlem".[557] While the archives remain silent about the destiny of Singh's relationship with Lucia, we know that Singh married, and later divorced, a woman named Herta Dimme.[558] Two sources claim Dimme to have died in 1933, allegedly in a motor car accident, when the couple was already separated.[559]

He settled in Brüderstraße 20 IV B in Hamburg Neustadt as the lodger of a house owned by a woman named Greim. In the interwar years in Germany, it was not uncommon for single or

[556] StAHH, 376-2, Gewerbepolizei, VII C c 1.
[557] Ibid.
[558] Auszug aus dem Strafregister, StAHH, 213-11, 60547.
[559] Ibid. and "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.

widowed women whose husbands or fathers had not returned from the war to sublet parts of their flats to lodgers in order to supplement their income. There is no information about the details of their arrangement except that Mrs. Greim is referred to as "Wirtin" (landlady) in the sources.[560] Neustadt was a working-class residential district situated north-east of Sankt Pauli, still considerably close to the docks. Singh's way to work took him 20 minutes by foot. He could either walk along the shores of the Elbe River and then turn left, passing the huge Bismarck statue and the St. Michaelis church, or walk along the Reeperbahn, crossing the entire amusement district with its bars, cafés, restaurants, theatres, brothels and gambling dens.

As detailed in Chapter 1, Sankt Pauli used to be a working-class neighbourhood, whose international atmosphere attracted visitors from across the world. The African diaspora had settled here as well as the small Chinese community. On the Reeperbahn, jazz bands employed Black musicians, and in the Chinese-run establishments dance events brought together tourists, local inhabitants, and eastern migrants. The population was further diversified by the myriad of seafarers of all nationalities who roamed the streets of the dock neighbourhood while on land leave from their ships. They sought the shops of their compatriots but also visited other places to satisfy their curiosity and desire for diversions.

Of the Asian and African seafarers, many visited Hardas Singh's "Indian Bar". They probably heard about its existence from the owner himself, who visited the docks to distribute his advertisement card among the crews.[561] Other than that, word of mouth and its convenient location in the dock neighbourhood contributed to its prominence.

Excurse: A. Raman Pillai

Hardas Singh was not the only Indian who preferred to stay outside the realm of the Indian circles in Berlin. A. Raman Pillai, who had come as a student from Edinburgh to Göttingen in 1914, was never drawn to the capital either. His case is an interesting example of South Asian migrant possibility and can be compared to Hardas Singh's. Despite coming from entirely different backgrounds, they found themselves 'stuck' in Germany after the war and had to start from scratch.

[560] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 4.
[561] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, p. 627.

During the war, Pillai, who was from an affluent Hindu family residing in the princely state of Travancore,[562] was allowed to continue his studies of forestry at Göttingen University. He maintained a cordial relationship with the local academic elite, which allowed him to speak in front of larger audiences on political matters. On the "Vaterländische Unterhaltungsabend" (patriotic entertainment evening) of the "Vereinigten Göttinger Kriegervereine" (united Göttingen warrior societies), he held a speech in autumn of 1914 titled "Deutschland – Indiens Hoffnung" (Germany – India's hope), which was published a few weeks later.[563] In this speech, Pillai criticized the widespread acceptance of British colonial rule in India and requested the German nationals to support the Indian nation in fulfilling their dream of national sovereignty and to show sympathy for this cause.[564] He argued that the Indian nation was able to free itself from British rule since it was, unlike other colonized nations, capable of self-government.[565] Moreover, he insisted that, "scientifically" speaking, the Indians belonged to the same race, which had been termed "Caucasian" by the Göttingen biologist Blumenbach and "Iranian" by physician Prichard. In order to support this argument, he quoted contemporary theories of the shared origins of the Indian and the Germanic races.[566] Significantly, Hardas Singh would later invoke the same argument when he tried to prove his innocence during a trial in 1940 in which he was accused of having stolen a coat in Sankt Pauli. Without citing Blumenbach or other authorities, he claimed that his Aryan heritage prevented him from committing such crimes as lying or stealing.[567]

Pillai's recognition in Göttingen's bourgeois society was facilitated by his academic background. He was an example of the European-educated, 'civilized' Indian, who had risen above the low standards of the anonymous peasant masses inhabiting the subcontinent and had become fully integrated into Western society, as his colleague von Seelhorst phrased it derogatorily.[568] In Göttingen, he was loosely associated with Prof. Dr. Friedrich Carl Andreas, a German orientalist and 'expert' in Iranian languages, who conducted linguistic studies with

[562] Conrad Von Seelhorst," Geleitwort," in *Deutschland – Indiens Hoffnung* by Raman A. Pillai (Göttingen: Spielmeyer's Nachf, 1914), o. S.
[563] Ibid.
[564] Pillai, *Deutschland – Indiens Hoffnung*, p. 30.
[565] Ibid.
[566] Ibid., p. 8.
[567] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 10.
[568] Von Seelhorst, *Geleitwort*, o. S.

Indian and Afghan prisoners of war whom he had ordered to be sent from Berlin to Göttingen for this purpose.[569] After the war, Pillai chose to stay in Göttingen and not to settle in Berlin like many of his compatriots and fellow IIC associates. Despite sharing their nationalist convictions, he pursued an academic career without the support of local Indian networks. Why he decided not to return to India directly after the war remains unclear. Not being formally associated with the IIC, he was not officially banned from returning home, yet he was still regarded with suspicion by the British Indian authorities. Perhaps he considered a return too dangerous, given his public appearances and publications in which he had spoken up against British rule. Unable to continue his studies due to the lack of financial means, he opened a bookstore and publishing house in Göttingen.[570] After the business endeavour failed, he eventually returned to his native place in India in 1926. Perhaps, a bookshop and publishing house was not 'exotic' enough for German society, which expected South Asian migrants to run tobacco shops or restaurants. Compared to a huge cosmopolitan city like Hamburg, Göttingen, a middle-sized university town, did not offer the same survival opportunities. Unlike Hardas Singh, Pillai could not resort to other means of income provided by the shadow economy of a dock neighbourhood, such as occasional smuggling, peddling or drug dealing. The scope of South Asian migrant possibility reached its limits here. Even for educated immigrants from the upper-middle class, it was not possible to settle permanently without extensive networks and a flexible income structure.

5.5 The "Indian Bar"

5.5.1 The "Indian Bar" in published sources

Most of the sources through which we learn about Hardas Singh are those concerning his bar. The first set of sources analysed includes those published by various contemporary authors who visited the venue and later described it in their work. Contrary to the other archival

[569] Lena Glöckler, "„Nicht bloss tote Papierlinguistik": Iranische Sprachstudien im Göttinger Kriegsgefangenenlager Ebertal während des Ersten Weltkriegs als transnationales Ereignis." Masterarbeit „Master of Education" Lehramt an Gymnasien an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Göttingen, 6.10.2020, p. 2.

[570] The information on the bookstore and publishing house are, according to the A. R. Pillai's Wikipedia entry, contained in the private archives of his son Rosscote Krishna Pillai, to which I did not have access. Given that the Pillai family was well-known in India, especially with his father-in-law C. V. Raman Pillai being a famous novelist, I still regard the information as credible.

material which talks about the bar and its owner, these accounts were written for the entertainment of an educated audience. The desire to please their respective readers influenced the writers, perhaps lending a little bit of edge or an air of scandal to their descriptions of the place. For example, the German–Jewish writer, dramatic advisor, and literary agent Heinz Liepman evokes the image of two young Black waitresses serving a local brand of beer in the bar, whereas the Black American writer Robert S. Abbott turns it into a meeting place of people from African descent.

Before returning to the literary accounts, I include one visual representation of the venue. In the photograph, published as an advertising postcard between 1925 and 1938, Hardas Singh poses in front of his bar. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the photograph's exact year of origin. From the Olympic rings glued to the windows, one can conclude that the picture was taken either in 1928, 1932 or 1936. In these days, it was quite common to sell advertising postcards in bars or cafés, which the customers would send to friends or relatives, adorning them with a short note or greeting.[571]

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[571] This information was kindly provided to me by Jens Wunderlich, who owns a large private collection of historic postcards of the greater Hamburg area.

[572] „Indische Bar" von Hardas Singh, Hamburg Bildarchiv, AA 1663, Bernhard-Nocht-Straße 63, http://www.hamburg-bildarchiv.de/XAA1663.jpg, used here with the permission from Jens Wunderlich.

A signboard reading "Indische Bar Neu-Haarlem" hangs prominently above its entrance. The name could have been a reference to "Harlem", the migrant neighbourhood in New York. As discussed in the "Introduction", Harlem, in 1920s and 1930s, registered a large influx of South Asian seamen who had jumped ship and settled there. Word of this migratory pattern might have reached Singh via the *lascars* who frequented his bar and whom he possibly wanted to attract with this signboard.

On the left side of the door hangs a bird's cage with a living bird inside, and commercial prints for "Bavaria St. Pauli Bier" are painted on the house walls. On the third step leading down from the entrance, Hardas Singh himself stands erect, looking into the camera. The tall, broad-shouldered Indian wears a European suit and tie combined with a traditional turban. The moustache he had been sporting in the prison camp was shaved off. His figure is robust and steady and stands in contrast to a British and admittedly unreliable source from 1944, in which he is described as *"rather tall and fat; long beard"*.[573]

What becomes apparent in the picture is that he used his perceived migrant 'otherness', namely his Indian cultural and ethnic background, to promote his business. 'Exotic' features such as the foreign-sounding name, the turban, and the living bird were applied to catch the attention of passer-by in the Sankt Pauli neighbourhood. However, he also tried to appear 'European' and 'modern' by dressing contemporarily, and advertising for German beer and a popular sports event.

Noticeably, this business models differs greatly from Pillai's choice. The latter perhaps had trusted his European education to enable him to pursue a 'respectable' career and run a bookstore. Singh displayed a sense of pragmatic realism and picked the more financially successful and socially accepted option and capitalized on his perceived otherness, following the example of Black performers on the Reeperbahn and Sankt Pauli (see Introduction).

Over the fourteen years of the bar's existence, it was the subject of various written accounts from an international authorship. The first such account came from the Indian communist revolutionary Amir Haider Khan, who spent a few weeks in the port city in 1928 on his way from Moscow to India while waiting to be signed on as a *lascar* on a steam ship. In his memoirs, he describes the bar vividly. He starts his description with a few words about the owner himself:

[573] "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.

> There was a café not far from the waterfront owned by Hardit Singh who was from UP (India) and had been a prisoner during the First World War of 1914-1918 in Germany. In the Second World War Subhas Chandra Bose had created the Azad Hind Fauj, the "Free India Army", from Indian prisoners of war. Similarly Indian German Committee which was headed by Verandra Nath Chattopadhayay, Raja Mahindra Pratap and others had contacted Indian prisoners of war in Germany to educate them, in the interest of Indian nationalism and British imperialism [sic!]. I do not know how many they were able to convert in their favour but Hardit Singh was certainly one. After the defeat of Germany he married a German woman and chose to stay in the country. There he opened a coffee house near the waterfront.[574]

Although Khan was imprecise with regard to the details of Singh's first name and place of birth, he was well informed about the owner's migrant biography. Since Khan was a traveller himself, the presence of a resident Indian in Hamburg possibly stimulated his curiosity. He considered Singh an ally of the Germans and was initially unsure whether he could be trusted ideologically. According to his memoirs, the bar was a meeting place for Indian seafarers and female sex workers. With the latter, the communist developed a special relationship during his time in the port city. One day, two political rallies clashed right outside Singh's café. Supporters of the Social Democrats faced supporters of the Communist Party, and the atmosphere between the two hostile groups was very tense. Khan writes:

> Just as they were about to plunge headlong into a clash a girl entered the café and said something to the girls inside. They all rushed out the door and one among them, Frieda, a Belgian who spoke some English, began shouting loudly at the Social Democrats while at the same time cheering the communists. After some minor scuffles, both groups proceeded along with predetermined routes. When all the patrons had returned to their seats in the café I asked Frieda what parties the procession belonged to and why she had gotten so excited. 'It appears that you are supporting one side.' I said, purposely looking as if I understood nothing about the parties.
> In an empathic voice she explained, 'One belonged to the Social Democratic Party which supports the present capitalist system and the other belonged to the Communist Party which defends the working class interests; naturally I sympathize with the communists.[575]

It is not unlikely that the incident happened as described or in a similar manner. In 1928, the harbingers of the economic crisis of 1929 were felt among the working poor, calling the

[574] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose,* p. 627.
[575] Ibid., p. 628.

'respectable' working-class associations to action. Although the influence and popularity of the KPD had severely declined after the Hamburg rebellion of 1923, they were still relatively strong in certain areas of the port city. Their support was particularly strong in the working-class neighbourhoods, where their inhabitants sympathized with the more radical, militarized parts of the organization.[576] A migrant woman like Frieda, who came from a working-class family in Brussels, thought that her interests were best represented by the communists.

Khan also took note of the social interaction between the sex workers and the *lascars*. He describes the former as "European in race" but catering mostly to Indian clients. As soon as the women discovered that Khan sympathized with the communists, they changed their attitudes towards him and welcomed him in their midst:

> Before this I had successfully disguised myself as a stranded seaman who had missed a ship but now it was impossible. Though the owner of the café must have warned them against questioning me or speaking of me to outsiders, their behaviour towards me had changed entirely. They now knew that I was a communist and as a result their attitude was one of respect and courteousness.[577]

There is an interesting element of distrust in this narrative. Perhaps as a side product of the bar's being a place for strangers and 'deviants', every guest in the bar was put under scrutiny. There were the "settled" people, who lived in Hamburg but did not quite belong to the 'respectable' Hamburg working class, and there were the "travelling" strangers, who experienced hospitality but were also perceived as alien and therefore suspicious.

It appears as if Singh sometimes tended the bar himself an on sometimes had employees to take orders and serve drinks. When Amir Haider Khan, in his account of his visit in 1928, stressed that "*Hardit Singh himself was behind the counter*"[578], he suggested that on other days, employees did so in his behalf. This resonates with the otherwise rather dubious account of Heinz Liepman, who wrote in an article for a German magazine in 1932/33, that "*two very cute negro girls were serving Köhm there*."[579] Unfortunately, there is no information available as to the nature and terms of their employment. They might have worked on regular

[576] Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung,* p. 76.

[577] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose,* pp. 634–5.

[578] Ibid., p. 634

[579] Liepman, *Häfen, Mädchen und Seeleute*, p. 285. The original text reads: „[…] daß sich in der „Indian Bar" die Neger treffen und keine Inder, weil dort zwei sehr süße Negerinnen „Köhm" ausschenken?" The translation is mine.

contracts or been employed illegally or sporadically. It is possible that Singh had been informed by his employees or the regular prostitutes about Khan's political identity. The uncertain world of employment of these migrants could also have created certain loyalties and dependencies. Overall, the bar appears to have been quite a stable microcosm of its own, in which a tight-knit community existed and prospered. It was doing well enough to allow Singh to retreat from the counter occasionally to attend to other requirements of his business, such as paperwork, placing orders with the wholesale trade or acquiring new customers at the docks.

After one and a half months in Hamburg, Khan met a Bengali engine room *serang* from a Hansa Line ship in Singh's bar. An inquiry revealed that his crew was short of a coal passer, and Khan signed on. Six years later, in 1934, Khan visited the bar again during a trip to Hamburg, the purpose of which remains obscure. He only devoted a few lines of his memoirs to his second stay in Hamburg in which he mentioned that the sex workers, whom he had become very fond of during his first visit to the port city were still conducting their business in the Indian Bar.

The second international observer who came across Singh's bar during his trip to Hamburg was the famous Black American lawyer, newspaper publisher, editor, and activist Robert S. Abbott. He toured Germany in 1929 and visited, among other places, the "Völkerschau" (showcase of people from non-European ethnicities) at Hagenbeck Zoo and the Reeperbahn.[580] In his own newspaper, The Chicago Defender, Abbott wrote about his sojourn in the cosmopolitan city. He noticed that there was a small migrant population of male Africans living in Sankt Pauli who had children with German women. Furthermore, "sailors of all races" were to be seen along the city's stretched waterfront.[581]

> Many of them are Negro's, mostly Africans, and are chiefly to be found along Bernhard Nochtstrasse not far from the ferry. They meet mostly at the Indisch bar, run by H. Singh at No. 6a, this same street.[582]

On Bernhard-Nocht-Straße and on the Reeperbahn, he discovered jazz bands with Black and White musicians playing together at night. One of these musicians was named John Gerrold,

[580] Abbott, *My Trip Abroad*, p. 10.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Ibid.

who said that he lived in Harlem, New York. This encounter could be read as evidence of the cosmopolitan character of Hamburg's dock neighbourhood, hosting sailors, residents, and travelling artists from all parts of the world. It could also be interpreted as a showcase of the assumptions Abbott had made based on his own experiences. In his opinion, Black people liked jazz because this was the case in the United States. Those performers in Sankt Pauli, however, were most likely migrants from the former German colonies in Africa and not Black Americans. Pushed into economic niches by disenfranchisement and exoticization after the First World War, an increasing number of migrants from the former German colonies became musicians, actors, or circus performers.[583] This reorientation was stimulated by the emergence of a mass popular culture and a growing enthusiasm for cultural products associated with the United States in Weimar Germany. Moreover, as Black American artists from overseas were prohibited from performing during the war and in the early interwar years, migrants from Africa who were already living in Germany filled the vacancy.[584] Often unable to find employment in their respective learned professions, Black residents took to music and acting as a means of making money, but also to transcend stereotypical notions of their identities. These artists, adapting their performance to the taste of the White German middle-class audience, were able to capitalize on perceived otherness and the German longing for exoticism and entertainment.

Although it cannot be ruled out that Abbott had made the acquaintance of an African–American traveling performer or even a Black seafarer, this scenario is rather unlikely. While African or Black American seamen were a visible presence in European ports such as Marseille and London, they were much less common in Hamburg. With conclusive research especially for the Weimar period still pending, data produced by Robbie Aitken shows that Black seamen only accounted for a small proportion of Germany's maritime labour personnel and even fewer were actually based in the country.[585]

In Abbott's account, the bar is viewed from a different perspective than in Khan's. Whereas the latter focused on the Indian customers and the general public's attitude towards communism, Abbott's looked at the Black population. According to his article, Singh's bar was

[583] Aitken, *Germany's Black Diaspora*, p. 93.

[584] Lewerenz, Susann, *Geteilte Welten. Exotisierte Unterhaltung und Artist*innen of Color in Deutschland 1920–1960*, (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2017), p. 76.

[585] Aitken, *A Transient Presence*, p. 248.

the premier meeting place for Black people in Hamburg, even though the street offered many other amusement opportunities, including places in where jazz bands were playing. Singh's bar was probably the most unpretentious and did not discriminate between customers of different backgrounds. Considering Black and Asian seafarer's low wages, the affordable prices of food and drink were to their liking, as well as the European and Black females who offered a welcome distraction from their daily routines.

A third written account was published a few years later, in 1932/33, and it, too, presents the bar from an entirely different angle. It appeared in an article titled "Häfen, Mädchen und Seeleute" (Harbours, girls, and sailors) authored by Heinz Liepman, who has already been introduced. Despite his leftist political activism in the early 1930s, when he made his flat available as a contact address for the club of proletarian-revolutionary writers, his article of 1932 is full of racist (and sexist) stereotypes and degradations. For example, he described the quarters of the poor population of Marseille's waterfront in the following manner:

> And the houses? I don't know, if they have ever been houses, these miserable barracks, these crocked, supported barns. If one peeks inside these houses, one sees negro women, bloated, stupid, idiotic – the sick, the leprous, the coloured, emaciated women, in between white women in a desolate melancholy, strands of hair in their faces.[586]

In the light of these violent words, his characterization as an "anti-fascist" in his Wikipedia article seems rather inappropriate.[587] Although, in the 1930s, many opponents of the fascist regime were sexist, racist or held other prejudices prevalent at the time, the entire scope of their political activism and thought should be taken into account before being given the attribution anti-fascist. Because of his Jewish identity, Liepman was arrested in Amsterdam in 1934 and sentenced to one month in prison. He was released in Belgium and proceeded to Paris and later to New York. He returned to Hamburg in 1947. There is an interesting parallel between Liepman and the German–Jewish painter Hermann Struck, who was complicit in the racist anthropological studies of Felix von Luschan during the First World War. He painted the

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[586] Liepman, *Häfen, Mädchen und Seeleute*, p. 283. The original text reads: „Und die Häuser? Ich weiß nicht, ob es jemals Häuser gewesen sind, diese elenden Baracken, diese schiefen, gestützten Scheunen. Man sieht hinein in die Häuser, man sieht dort Negerinnen, aufgequollen, verblödet, idiotisch, - Kranke, Aussätzige, Farbige, ausgemergelte Weiber, dazwischen weiße Frauen von einer trostlosten Melancholie, Haarsträhnen im Gesicht." The translation is mine.

[587] https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinz_Liepman#Exil_(1934_bis_1947).

prisoners of war in the Berlin camp, with Hardas Singh among them. Being a passionate Zionist, he emigrated to Israel in 1923 and never returned to Germany.

Liepman's representation of the dock neighbourhood and bar echoes the racist sentiment of the time:

> However, between the Reeperbahn and the docks there is a labyrinth of dark allies, extremely croocked streets, there is the Blue Star Diele, where the Antwerp diamond traders are located, or the "Puppenstübchen", where merry, cigar-smoking "ladies" are lingering. Or don't you have enough phantasy to imagine that in the "Indian Bar" the negros meet and not the Indians, because there, two very sweet negro girls serve "Köhm"? Or do you want to learn about the "Afrika Bar", which is owned by Mr Schwarz, a serious man in a suit, whose skin colour is matching his name? All this is known from films, in which these bars are represented better than they actually are.[588]

The normalization of racism is important here. It should lead us to regard the trope of the "safe haven" provided by communist networks with caution, as the communist movement itself was quite ambivalent towards the issue of race, as the comment of the "anti-fascist" Liepman reflects. It emphasizes the marginalization of the South Asian migrants even among those who were generally sympathetic towards their presence. The left-wing support for people of colour was never unconditional as even their ideologies were not free from chauvinistic views. Instances of racism as indicated above are not supposed to undermine the credibility of an entire movement. There were strong currents within the communist movement in support of international solidarity, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism. According to David Featherstone's contribution to the subject, colonial seafarers, and sympathetic activists from Africa and the Caribbean were often the driving force behind a non-racist intervention into Comintern politics.[589]

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[588] Liepman, *Häfen, Mädchen und Seeleute*, p. 285. The original text reads: „Aber zwischen Reeperbahn und dem Hafen gibt es noch ein Gewirr dunkler Gassen, ganz verzwickte Straßen, da gibt es die Blue Star Diele, wo die Antwerper Diamantenhändler sitzen, oder das „Puppenstübchen", wo sich vergnügte, Zigarren rauchende „Damen" Stelldicheine geben. Oder haben Sie nicht genug Phantasie, um sich vorzustellen, daß sich in der „Indian Bar" die Neger treffen und keine Inder, weil dort zwei sehr süße Negerinnen „Köhm" ausschenken? Oder wollen Sie von der „Afrika Bar" wissen, die Herrn Schwarz gehört, einem seriösen Herrn im Abendanzug, dessen Hautfarbe seinem Namen angepasst ist? All das kennt man aus Filmen, in denen diese Kneipen besser dargestellt werden, als sie in Wirklichkeit sind." The translation is mine.

[589] David Featherstone, "Anti-Colonialism, Subaltern Anti-Fascism and the Contested Spaces of Maritime Organising," in *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective. Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism*, ed. Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David Featherstone (London: Routledge, 2021).

Also notice the reference to films which allegedly depicted the bars in the Sankt Pauli amusement district as *"better than they actually [were]"*. In the 1920s, several films used the neighbourhood as the backdrop for their stories of crime, adventure, and romance. For example, the film "Die Carmen von St. Pauli" is a take on the work of a gang of smugglers operating in the harbour. Released in 1928, it tells the story of Jenny Hummel, a very pretty working-class woman who works as a dancer in one of the night clubs in the amusement district. To increase her income, she supports a gang of smugglers who steal goods from the ships at night. Jenny meets the sailor Klaus, who takes her out one night, roams the bars with her, and intends to leave Sankt Pauli with her to start a better, decent life. This and other films must have rendered Sankt Pauli as a place of longing for many people, a place so different from their lives defined by poverty, destitution, and oppressive moral standards. For conservative observers, these depictions were potentially subversive, as they foreshadowed the possibility of a different world.

In Liepman's account, the "Indian Bar" blurs with other venues of Sankt Pauli's amusement district. Potentially a result of his racial prejudice and his desire to please a like-minded audience, the bar is described as a meeting place for Black people and not for Indians. Given his ignorance, it is not unlikely that the writer was unable to recognize or willingly ignored the multitude of East Asian, African, and Indian sailors who spent their evenings in Singh's bar. In Liepman's gaze, everyone merged into one "dark" underworld of 'primitive' people and 'deviant' behaviours, curious but despicable.

What has become apparent in all these accounts is that the "Indian Bar" was deeply interwoven with Sankt Pauli's working-class society and migrant community. Seafarers of all denominations frequented the bar, as did itinerant revolutionaries and sex workers with communist inclinations. It operated in the midst of diamond traders, brothels, and other shady and semi-legal venues in the district alongside other bars, jazz clubs, and restaurants. Judging from the existence of paid employees, it was doing relatively well and allowed Singh to make ends meet for the duration of 14 years.

5.5.2 The bar in police and court files

The "Indian Bar" not only attracted the attention of Hamburg tourists. It is also mentioned over the years in quite a few police interrogation files, court documents, and intelligence records. Since the bar was part of the shadow economy and subculture of Hamburg in the

1920s and 1930s, its customers as well as the owner himself frequently got into trouble with the local authorities or the secret services from far away British India.

The earliest reference recollects an encounter with the owner in 1923. Henry Obed, the subject of the second historic biography, spoke about his relationship to Hardas Singh in March 1935 in front of a jury in a trial against him in Calcutta. Obed was accused of having violated the Bengal Smuggling of Arms Act. The Police Commissioner of Calcutta at that time, Charles Tegart, who had been chasing Obed for years, wanted to expel the Indian merchant from the presidency. In his defence, Obed provided a seven-page-long statement in which he laid down his professional curriculum vitae, intending to prove the groundlessness of the accusations. He tried to prove that since the beginning of his career as a merchant and trader in Hamburg, he had been the victim of jealous business competitors, who, having been driven off the market by Obed, wanted to take revenge by spreading false rumours.

One of these competitors was Hardas Singh. The competition, however, was on not the professional field but the private field. According to Obed, the men were having a dispute over a woman they both desired. In his statement, which he conveyed via his solicitors, the events unfolded like this:

> That in 1923 during his stay in Hamburg petitioner met an Indian there named Hardas Singh alias Mita Singh who was a deserter from the British Army during the War. Subsequently this man became petitioner's bitter enemy owing to both having serious disputes over a German girl for months in 1923. This man threatened petitioner with revenge and it is possible he might have been responsible for some of the false reports against petitioner.[590]

As opposed to Amir Haider Khan, Obed remembered Singh's name correctly. However, he was off with the timing given that the latter only moved to Hamburg in 1924, one year after the alleged altercation. The story itself is rather curious since Singh was probably still with his first wife Lucia Gertrud Alice, who had registered the bar in her name in 1925. Henry Obed himself married a German woman only a few months later and she followed him to Antwerp. Regardless of these incoherences in the sources, the Sankt Pauli nocturnal culture allowed for 'deviant' sexualities and encounters to thrive, as we are going to see below.

[590] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 77.

Another noteworthy point in Obed's statement is his mentioning of Singh's pseudonym, Mita Singh. Taking an alias was not uncommon among South Asian migrants in Europe and served different purposes. It could hide one's true identity from the authorities or was used strategically to cater to different audiences or clients. European merchants might have found it more trustworthy to trade with a partner having an English-sounding name, whereas spectators of a variety show or concert enjoyed the exotic sound of an Indian alias. We can only speculate about why Singh kept a pseudonym. His alleged participation in illegal activities such as arms smuggling and the involvement of the bar in the communist network might be a reason. Interestingly, he chose the name of his former fellow prisoner in the Wünsdorf camp. *Havildar* Mita Singh was, like Hardas, a deserter from the British troops and joined the Germans in 1915.[591] Both of them volunteered for the campaign to Turkey because they could not be repatriated to India after the war. Both were regarded as trustworthy by the Germans and permitted to live in Wünsdorf outside the camp, possibly sharing accommodation. Separated from his friend, he might have kept his memory alive by using his name as one of his own during his time in Hamburg.

This was probably not the first time that the British authorities had come across Hardas Singh, but it was the first time he was mentioned in the sources available to me. The second reference dates to August 1935, when his name pops up in a memorandum of the IPI in which the biographical details of a suspect, Syed Amir Hasan Mirza, were assembled.

Excurse: Syed Amir Hasan Mirza

Syed Amir Hassan Mirza was born in 1894 [1898][592] in Murshidabad, West Bengal, into a Muslim family. He converted to Christianity in 1914 and was consequently disinherited by his presumably wealthy family and cut off from their financial resources.[593] In 1916, he married an English-born Christian woman named Bertha Scoresby, who was a Baptist missionary. The couple married in South India at the end of 1916. She died in 1923.[594]

[591] PAAA, R 21253, Bd. 09, Bericht zur Geheimverfügung des Kriegsministeriums vom 3.2.15, p. 5.
[592] IOR/L/PJ/12/489, p. 49.
[593] Ibid., p. 18.
[594] Ibid, p. 50.

Mirza first arrived in Europe in 1920. After a short sojourn in Glasgow, he went to Germany in order to study engineering and chemistry.[595] Entering either Bremen or Hamburg on a passport issued to him in London in July 1921, he stayed in Germany for a period of thirteen years, only interrupted by a one-year return to India in 1926.[596] From the IPI files found in the India Office Records, it is possible to reconstruct about 40 years of his life history. The reason why his biography was not chosen as a main chapter of this thesis is the lop-sidedness of the material. There is no other source than the immensely biased records of the British intelligence service. His profile was compiled in 1936 because Mirza, after being thrown out of a missionary seminar in Philadelphia, was facing deportation from the United States of America to India. Given his previous record as a "troublemaker" who had been expelled from Germany and other European countries before and who had displayed a hostile attitude against British rule in India, the British authorities were alerted about the return of a potential threat to homeland security.

After his short trip to India in 1926, Mirza returned to Germany one year later and re-established his Hassan Indian Company in Hamburg, trading with "*all raw products of India, China and Africa*", as he claimed in his deportation trial in Washington, D.C., in 1937.[597] Like Henry Obed, he sought to take advantage of the low price levels in interwar Germany, which he considered beneficial for his anti-imperial business project. He also profited from Hamburg's capacity as a nodal point for goods to be sold to other parts of Europe. The decision to proceed to Hamburg from London was, at least in part, informed by economic considerations. As was the case for the Chinese migrants, Indians used their foreign exchange to facilitate the start to a new life. Taking advantage of the devalued German currency and fragile economy, buying low-priced local goods and selling them with a margin to India became a settlement strategy.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, in the face of state-sanctioned restrictions to migration, it was crucial for non-elite South Asians to succeed economically. During his thirteen years of residency in Germany, of which at least the final eight were spent in Hamburg, he founded a prosperous "import and export" company bearing his own middle name. Running the business jointly with his two German partners, he earned himself a good reputation. On

[595] Ibid., p. 9.
[596] Ibid., p. 8.
[597] Ibid., p. 50.

behalf of his enterprise, he travelled frequently within Germany and to Czechoslovakia, France, Holland, and Belgium.[598] As was the case for Hardas Singh, the absence of poverty bestowed Mirza with considerable freedom to shape his life autonomously. He was engaged in extensive political activity directed against British rule in India. He expressed his anti-British attitude in a number of opinionated essays, which he conceived and published in Germany, and he even took his beliefs to a more practical level. The following analysis of his activism partly overlaps with prior discussions on migrant practices. To be able to provide a full picture of Mirza's range of actions, in short: his migrant possibility, the repetitions are included deliberately.

In 1931, Mirza announced himself the organizer for Gandhi's visit to Hamburg. In preparation, he wrote letters to Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru asking him for his endorsement to open a Congress Information Bureau in the port city. In October 1932, he contributed an article titled "Mahatma Gandhis Mission" to the "Hamburger Nachrichten" (in German, notably),[599] and in December 1933 published a book called "Weltwirthschaft" (World Economy), which was described by the British Secret Service as "*a compound of mysticism and anti-British propaganda*".[600] In the same year, he exhibited anti-British caricatures and posters at his office. A year later, he asked a friend in Cardiff to arrange a tour through the United Kingdom for him during which he planned to lecture on the "*new Germany and the condition of India*".[601] Gandhi never visited Hamburg, Nehru did not reply to his letters and Mirza never embarked on his UK tour. Nevertheless, his activism reflects the amount of political freedom the migrant enjoyed while living in Hamburg in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The British Secret Service had always suspected him of being engaged in illegal activities at the Hamburg docks. In September 1934, Mirza was discovered on board the SS "Wartenfels" in "suspicious conversation" with the *lascar* spokesperson called *serang*.[602] In his defence, Mirza claimed to be the Indian Trade Commissioner to Hamburg, a lie quickly exposed by the ship authorities. It was henceforth suggested that he might be involved in smuggling via vessels of the Hansa Line to which the "Wartenfels" belonged. The incident was reported to

[598] Ibid.

[599] *Hamburger Nachrichten,* "Mahatma Gandhis Mission," 6.Oktober 1932, Nr. 470, p. 2.

[600] IOR/L/PJ/12/489, p. 9.

[601] Ibid.

[602] Ibid. Unfortunately, it is not stated by whom he was discovered. It could have been by the ship's authorities or by a British undercover agent.

the German police, who surprisingly had no record of such accusations and remained conspicuously inactive.[603] Perhaps the authorities believed him to be in touch with Gandhi or Nehru and therefore refrained from taking immediate action against the Indian.

Being under surveillance by the British authorities did not necessarily endanger one's residential status in Hamburg. Despite his extensive political activism and outspokenness, which could have been used against him, if the authorities had been eager to expel the Indian, no action was taken from the German side. Even his suggested involvement in the smuggling network went unpunished. It was only when his politics turned against the German state itself that his economic capacity did no longer protect him. In 1934, he published a book in which he described the German "Aryans" as "*peoples of inferior stock*".[604] Before his deportation order could be executed, Mirza had disappeared to Czechoslovakia in November of the same year. He took up residence in Prague and continued his anti-British activities from there. He tried to convince the Jewish Revisionist League that it was possible to free India and Palestine from British rule if the Jews joined hands with the Muslims.[605] He continued his writing activities and sent "*exceedingly offensive and seditious letters*" to members of the Pathan, Sikh, and Rajput communities in London.

According to his own statement, he left Czechoslovakia at the end of 1936 after a dispute at the C.S.R. Government Pilot School where he was undergoing training.[606] He was admitted to the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia as a bona-fide student in January 1937, receiving a stipend of $200 per year. After a fallout with the president of the seminar, Dr Gordon Palmer, he was expelled from the educational institution in May of that year. Having lost his status as a student, he was liable to be deported. Although he fought against his expulsion from the university and his pending deportation in various letters to the Secretary of State for India in London, the High Commissioner for India at the India House, London, and the Faculty of the Theological Seminary, he was not granted an extension of his passport. He was arrested in August 1937 and eventually deported from San Francisco to India on April 8, 1938, being 40 years of age.[607] His trace is lost here.

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[603] Ibid.
[604] Ibid.
[605] Ibid., p. 10.
[606] Ibid., p. 12.
[607] Ibid., p. 64.

In the IPI correspondence with the American authorities, he was repeatedly described as mentally ill. The IPI referred to him as "*not quite sound mentally*"[608], and "*not quite right in the head*",[609] even calling him a "*madman*".[610] His writing was described as a mix of mysticism and anti-British propaganda and as "*gibberish*" from a "*crank*".[611] The Theological Seminary picked up this rhetoric and called him "*mentally unbalanced*". In addition to this derogatory remark on his mental health, he is described as physically quite short with a small head.[612]
Although his letters to the various authorities bear the marks of mental desperation, the accusations against the president of the seminary do not appear to be entirely unfounded. According to Mirza, he was denied admission for the upcoming semester because his anti-British attitudes were disapproved off by Dr Palmer, a British emigrant. A colleague of Palmer's, Dr Mueller was overheard saying that a person so bitter against Britain like Mirza would never be recommended to be a missionary or minister.[613] His fierce anti-imperialism, which he fought for relentlessly, eventually cost him his freedom and means of livelihood.
In the United States, the last of many stages on his journey to undermine British power, he encountered not only strong opposition to his anti-colonial project but also the rampant racism of the time. In a letter to the India Office, dated July 1937, he complained:

> Are the British officers not wise enough to be aware that if a foreigner of another race, especially a collored [sic!] man in America, has no fund how he would have to suffer? I am sure if it was the case of a white Britisher it would not have been so neglected as mine, […].[614]

In another letter to the Secretary of State for India in London, the full extent of his desolation, anger, and consternation becomes apparent:

> May I be allowed to ask the honrable [sic!] Government & Crown whether we Indians are free men or slaves of the British rule? Because I want to live in America for study why do I have to get permission for it from the British Indian Government? Am I not allowed to live wherever I like?" […] "I am a poor Indian Christian man & my Government is a

[608] Ibid., p. 8.
[609] Ibid., p. 7.
[610] Ibid., p. 20.
[611] Ibid., p. 9.
[612] Ibid., p. 35.
[613] Ibid., p. 18.
[614] Ibid., p. 27.

> Christian Government. I am sure they will treat me according to the golden law of the Master Jesus.[615]

In this statement, his discontent not only with the suppressive nature of British rule in India but also with the global migration regime is expressed. Not being allowed to choose his domicile, always depending on the issuance of passports and residency permits and constantly facing the threat of deportation had put his life under severe constraints. His disappointment with the hypocrisy of Christianity and the broken promise of equality delivered on the day of his conversion from Islam are also apparent in his words.

The emergence of the global migration regime in conjunction with the new restrictions for travel and settlement all over the globe were the impediments most heavily felt by the enterprising Indian. He lived in a time when the practical barriers for migration were reduced, mainly through the opening of the Suez Canal and the transport revolution, but the legal barriers were being raised, resulting in an unequal and selective system of migration.[616] The hostility, racism, and oppression he encountered were mostly experienced through restrictions on his freedom of movement and settlement.

In hindsight, his criticisms and accusations are all well-grounded and his assessments very far-sighted. Racism, imperialism, ethnic exclusion, and the double standards of Christianity are all issues which were as relevant back then as they are now.

Not many activists who have mustered the courage to devote their lives to the fight against oppression and suffered the full extent of the consequences. An even lesser number have received any appreciation for it, except for those who originated from the more privileged classes of society. The accepted position of lower-class anti-colonialists was one of devoted followers or local leaders. After all, Gandhi and Nehru ignored Mirza, too. His voice was not heard outside his most immediate circles, and, over the years, he acquired more enemies than friends. He returned to his home country disillusioned and broken. But during the time he spent abroad, especially in the initial years in Europe, he acquired financial security, received an education, and made extensive use of his freedom of political expression.

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[615] Ibid., pp. 12–3.

[616] Various countries regulated migration in the late 19th and early 20th century: The "Chinese Exclusion Act", 1882 (United States), the "Johnson-Reed Act", 1924 (United States), the "Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, 1919 (Great Britain), the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925 (United Kingdom), the German government order of 1919. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 2.

He presents one of those "borderline cases" Giovanni Levi talks about, which makes it possible to define the limits of the latent possibilities of a non-elite biography.[617] According to this notion, his seemingly unintelligible, even unreasonable human actions point towards a historic reality of the non-elite strata of society which is often lost in the documentation of the elites. These actions are at odds with the privileged classes' understanding of how a lower-class individual is supposed to act or function in the face of oppression and marginalization and therefore open new pathways for the study of such people. Mirza embodies Edoardo Grendi's "normal exception", an individual of a minority group with an outstanding biography given the circumstances and the way we usually understand them through historical records. Though only apparently exceptional as certain digressions and deviations constituted the norm for non-elite individuals.

In September 1934, Mirza and Singh tried to help the stranded Arab seaman Mohamed Ali whom the Hamburg police intended to deport to Kenya. He was given accommodation in Singh's bar, and Mirza allegedly offered to pay for his ticket to Aden.[618] One of the two Indians sent letters to the British Consul in Hamburg, urging the official to intervene on Ali's behalf against the deportation. Unfortunately, the letter itself is not conveyed in the sources but given that Mirza was as a prolific writer and fluent in both German and English, one could attribute the authorship to him. Singh, who did not speak German fluently, must be suspected of being the financial driving force in this plan, since Mirza was probably financially unequipped to pay for a ticket or lodging fees.

The intervention, provided it was not entirely a product of the IPI's imagination, is a testimony to outstanding interreligious solidarity. Singh, a Sikh from the Punjab, and Mirza, a Christian convert from Bengal, helped a Muslim seafarer from either the Arabic Peninsula or Kenya to avoid involuntary deportation. Here, again, Singh's bar provided refuge for a seaman in trouble, years after Amir Haider Khan had used his place to hide from the German authorities. They were confident enough to call on the British consulate for help, evoking their status as British subjects despite their breach with the British authorities and their Indian home years prior. What compelled them to join forces in this operation remains obscure. Both were accused of being involved in the arms trade, but there is no further evidence corroborating

[617] Levi, *The Uses of Biography*, p. 70.

[618] IOR/L/PJ/12/489, p. 9.

this accusation. Perhaps they were united by their anti-British views, even if Singh's desertion is less clearly an indicator of his anti-British attitude than Mirza's publishing activities of anti-British literature.

5.5.3 The "Indian Bar" and the gay community

Thus far, the bar and its owner have been viewed through the lens of intelligence information collected by the IPI. The aim of these reports was to create a profile of suspicious subjects, listing in detail all their social interactions and whereabouts. Another set of sources in which the bar figures prominently is the records of the Hamburg judicial authority. Compiled between 1936 and 1940, they document the persecution of homosexual men. Since these documents are just as problematic as the IPI files, a summary of their genesis and trajectory seems apt here alongside a brief history of gay life and persecution in the interwar period and the early fascist period.

Between 1933 and 1945, approximately 3,500 men were sentenced in the area which is now Hamburg state territory for homosexual acts.[619] Since thousands of case files were deliberately destroyed by the Hamburg State Archive between 1986 and 1996, this number is only an extrapolation of the surviving material.[620] The magnitude of the scandal through which historical records of inestimable value were lost to research and commemoration can be retraced in various contributions by Stefan Micheler and Moritz Terfloth.[621] It suffices to say here that these files, comprising of lengthy interrogation reports, charges, and court judgements, also contain information about the everyday- and community life of the accused. In an effort to extract as much 'compromising' information as possible, the victims were

[619] Stefan Micheler, „Wir dachte, damit ein gutes Werk zu tun…". Nationalsozialistische Verfolgungspraxis und Denunziation Männer begehrender Männer in Hamburg," in *Homosexuelle in Deutschland, 1933-1969. Beiträge zu Alltag, Stigmatisierung und Verfolgung*, ed. Alexander Zimm (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2018), p. 62.

[620] Stefan Micheler and Moritz Terfloth, "Aus den Mühlen der Justiz in den Reißwolf des Archivs: Der Umgang des Hamburger Staatsarchivs mit Strafverfolgungsakten von NS-Opfer," in *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle. Verdrängt und ungesühnt*, ed. Burkhard Jellonnek and Rüdiger Lautmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), p. 383.

[621] See also Stefan Micheler, "Verfahren nach §175 übertrafen in ihrer Häufigkeit die Verfahren gegen andere Verfolgte erheblich" – daher wurden sie vernichtet. Zum Umgang des Hamburger Staatsarchivs mit NS-Justizakten," in *Verfolgung Homosexueller im Nationalsozialismus: Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Heft 5, 1999), pp. 112–121 and Stefan Micheler, Jakob Michelsen, and Moritz Terfloth, "Archivalische Entsorgung der deutschen Geschichte? Historiker fordern die vollständige Aufbewahrung wichtiger Gerichtsakten aus der NS-Zeit" *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. Und 21. Jahrhunderts*, Heft 3/96 (1999): pp. 138–145.

pressured into naming their sexual history, sex partners, and other homosexual people known to them, as well as the places of their encounters.

Since the standardisation of the German law in 1871, sexual contact between two men was a criminal offence according to §175 of the German penal code.[622] After a brief period of liberalisation in the 1920s, the National Socialists aggravated the legislation in June 1935, expanding the punishable actions and increasing the severity of penalties.[623] In addition, §174a was created for 'severe cases' with a maximum sentence of ten years of imprisonment.[624]

United in their fight against §175 but otherwise multifaceted in their ideological approaches, the gay movement had gained an unprecedented momentum in the Weimar years.[625] As Stümke and Finkler establish in their pioneering study on homosexual persecution and resistance in the 20th century, the conditions for gay emancipation were comparatively favourable. Gay men and women were granted basic democratic rights and liberties, something they would lack during National Socialism and in the Federal Republic of Germany until 1969.[626] The movement was influential in large urban centres such as Munich, Dresden, Leipzig, Breslau, Cologne, and Hamburg.[627] The undisputed capital of gay emancipation and activism, however, was Berlin, with a vast landscape of organizations, magazines and journals, which not only promoted gay culture and lifestyle but also adamantly made their case for the abolition of §175.[628]

Homosexual life in Hamburg revolved around not only designated gay bars but also 'mixed' bars and cafés in general as well as public places such as certain parks and train stations.[629]

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[622] Alexander Zinn, *„Aus dem Volkskörper entfernt"? Homosexuelle Männer im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2018), pp. 58–9.

[623] Ibid., p. 282.

[624] Ibid.

[625] See, for example, Burkhard Jellonek, "Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz. Die Verfolgung von Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich," in *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle. Verdrängt und ungesühnt*, ed. Burkhard Jellonnek and Rüdiger Lautmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1990) and more recently Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic. German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis*, (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press), 2015.

[626] Zinn, *„Aus dem Volkskörper entfernt",* p. 40.

[627] Hans-Georg Stümke, Rudi Finkler. *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen. Homosexuelle und „Gesundes Volksempfinden" von Auschwitz bis heute* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981), p. 24.

[628] Ibid, p. 20.

[629] Rosenkranz, Bernhard and Lorenz Gottfried. *Hamburg auf anderen Wegen. Die Geschichte des schwulen Lebens in der Hansestad*t. Hamburg: Lambda Edition, 2005, p. 21.

Nightlife in the 1920s incorporated the areas of Sankt Georg, Altstadt, and Neustadt, where the four most popular cafés were situated.[630] The adjacent Sankt Pauli's urban 'subculture' also attracted gay men for its tolerance and the possibility of blending in with the crowd. The bar "Alter Treffpunkt" in Heine Straße 14, for example, temporarily owned by a luminary of the homosexual scene, catered discretely but explicitly to gay men.[631] Other than that, localities predominantly visited by seafarers and dock workers were also quite popular for the same reasons.[632] Within this vibrant scene, the "Indian Bar" was a nodal point not only for gay romance but also for commercial male prostitution. Open to various kinds of marginalized personalities and semi-legal enterprises, the bar provided a relatively safe space for commercial and non-commercial sexual encounters. The sex workers, so-called "Stricherjungen", were mostly unemployed juveniles or very young adults between 16 and 21 years old who worked for a cash payment but also for food, drinks, or a place to spend the night.[633]

Another popular venue throughout the 1920s and mid 1930s was the "Alsterpavillon" in the city centre right at the Alster Lake. Commonly known for its notoriously rebellious swing-youth customers and modern jazz bands, it was also a regular meeting place for gay men.[634] Information on a typical afternoon was recorded in the context of its crackdown by the Nazi forces in 1936. One customer remembers:

> Raids were conducted in the Alsterpavillon as well. Inside the Pavillon there was a gallery with tables and armchairs. The 'red platform'. On Saturday and Sunday afternoon, there existed a gay meeting point. This was common knowledge. The fascists anyways disliked the Alsterpavillon because the band played too daring music, namely Boogie-Woogie and Jazz. This was considered 'Jewish-Bolshevik', alien music, not Germanic.[635]

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[630] Stefan Micheler and Moritz Terfloth, *Homosexueller Männer als Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in Hamburg* (Hamburg: Freundschaften, 2002), p. 23.

[631] Rosenkranz, *Hamburg auf anderen Wegen,* p. 23.

[632] Ibid., p. 20.

[633] Ibid., p. 26.

[634] Ibid., pp. 53–4.

[635] The original quotation, printed in Stümke, *Rosa Winkel*, p. 250 reads: "Razzien wurden auch im Alsterpavillon durchgeführt. Dort gab s innerhalb des Pavillons eine Empore mit Tischen und Sesseln. Die ‚rote Plattform'. Dort existierte besonders am Samstag- und Sonntagnachmittag ein schwuler Treffpunkt. Das war allgemein bekannt. Der Alsterpavillon war den Faschisten sowieso ein Dorn im Auge, denn die Kapelle spielte zu gewagte Musik, also Boogie-Woogie und Jazz. Das war ja ‚jüdisch-bolschewistische', artfremde Musik, nicht germanisch." The translation is mine.

Although the subculture described by the customer of the "Alsterpavillon" differs from the social milieu we have extrapolated from Singh's bar, both places share a sensation of 'otherness' and 'opposition', which might have just been as compelling to the homosexuals as the intimacy of an all-gay environment.

Until the mid-1930s, the Hamburg criminal police had little interest in the persecution of what they considered 'respectable' or 'normal' gay people and cooperated closely with homosexual organizations. As foreshadowed in the statement above, this changed with the cementing of fascist rule. In July 1936, a special unit of the Gestapo[636] dispatched from Berlin raided establishments and companies suspected of having 'homosexual' customers and/or employees.[637] In a coordinated effort, they arrested and interrogated several hundred men and a few women.[638] Following the raid, the Hamburg Gestapo, and after 1937, the Hamburg criminal police, continued the persecution with extreme rigidity. The victims were often interrogated for days and forced to make a comprehensive 'confession' in which they had to name all their sex partners.[639] As Micheler has shown, one third of all people convicted for homosexual acts had been named during these interrogations.[640] It appears as if after 1936, nightlife retreated from openly gay bars in Sankt Georg and Neustadt to more 'mixed' and thus supposedly less suspicious establishments in Sankt Pauli.

The case of the 17-year-old Hermann von Appen presents one of 1,815[641] surviving records of homosexual persecution stored in the Hamburg State Archive. The blacksmith apprentice was tried in November 1938 for allegedly having had multiple sexual encounters with different men in exchange for money.[642] He claimed to have met his clients in Singh's "Indian Bar" as well as in bars named "Loreley" and "Rosenboom", also located in Sankt Pauli.

The first time he recalled having a homosexual encounter was in November 1937. He and his colleague Herbert Gribsky made the acquaintance of the 28-year-old writer Gert Gang in Singh's bar, where the latter treated both juveniles to several rounds of beer. On their way home, von Appen and Gang had sexual intercourse in a public toilet for which Gang paid three

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636 Geheime Staatspolizei, Secret State Police, the offical secret police of Nazi Germany.

637 Micheler *„Wir dachte, damit ein gutes Werk zu tun…"*, p. 63.

638 Rosenkranz, *Hamburg auf anderen Wegen*, p. 49.

639 Micheler *„Wir dachte, damit ein gutes Werk zu tun…"*, p. 63.

640 Ibid., p. 70.

641 Ibid.

642 StAHH, 213-11, 65024.

Marks. They met again a few days later at Singh's bar, followed by a visit to a public toilet. Since he was mentioned in the interrogation, Gang himself was sentenced to two years of imprisonment for the violation of §175a in 1940.[643]

According to his statement, von Appen continued to visit the "Indian Bar" in search of clients after the encounter with Gang. In December 1937, he made the acquaintance of a man named Walter, with whom he went to a small alley in Sankt Pauli a little bit outside the main amusement district and exchanged sexual favours for 3,50 Marks. He also met with a truck driver named Bruno, who picked him up at Singh's bar and took him in his employer's car to Eidelstedt, a suburb of Hamburg, where he paid him 3,50 Marks for his services.

Von Appen's fellow apprentice Herbert Gribsky, born in 1920, was also arrested by the police authorities. They had probably started searching for him actively after he was alleged by von Appen to have known many of the customers in Singh's bar. He was tried for the violation of §175a in December 1938, the main charge being commercial prostitution.[644] In his interrogation report, he situated an encounter with the truck driver Bruno at Singh's bar, where the latter had treated him to three or four glasses of beer. Subsequently, on the ride home, they had sexual contact in Bruno's vehicle. Gribsky further 'admitted' to three more experiences of this kind, some of them in exchange for money.

Another case is that of the 18-year-old seaman Ewald Marlow.[645] Having signed off his ship in May 1937, he stayed in Hamburg until December of that year. Being unemployed, he lived off his savings and his parent's money. His first non-commercial homosexual experience happened with a senior seaman named Böhm in 1937, whom he had known since 1934. The latter convinced Marlow to quit his job at sea, promising to cover Marlow's expenses. According to his statement, they spent some time together and occasionally had sexual contact.

Marlow further told the police that he had had sexual encounters with other men, too, usually in exchange for money. He met these men in Singh's bar, where they would drink beer and later proceed to their respective apartments. The clients came from rather different socio-economic backgrounds, their professions ranging across language teacher, docker for Blohm

[643] StAHH, 213-11, 63284.
[644] StAHH, 213-11, 62850.
[645] StAHH, 213-11, 55220.

& Voss, dancer in Sankt Pauli, and steward on the ships of the Schugmann-Buxier shipping company.

At the end of the interrogation, Marlow claimed to know many homosexual men who were all regular customers at Singh's bar. He also mentioned other bars in the Sankt Pauli district, which were visited for dating purposes, stating their names as "Anker", "Trichter", "Nordmann", and "Miele". He was sentenced to one year and three months of imprisonment for the violation of §175 and §175a in May of 1938.

These four examples present only a selection of files in which the "Indian Bar" is mentioned as a point of contact. Although incomplete, their study adds another dimension to the social character of Singh's bar. Fully integrated into Sankt Pauli nightlife and subculture, it became a popular meeting place for the homosexual community and a platform for male prostitution. Since this feature of the "Indian Bar" is only documented in the records of the Nazi state, it is hard to determine whether the bar had had this function during the Weimar years as well. The earliest mention dates back to 1935, when the stoker Elimar Wagner was sentenced to three months of imprisonment for the violation of §175.[646]

For Singh, this clientele was bittersweet. On the one hand, he made good profits from the sale of drinks. Treating a sex worker to beer initiated the contact between worker and client and was often part of the payment. On the other hand, these interactions brought the bar to the attention of the Nazi authorities. It is highly likely that the police shutdown of the bar in 1938, discussed below in more detail, was related to the existence of a homosexual scene there. The suspicion of offering a platform for these kinds of encounters could lead to raids or even closures. In short, being open towards the gay community could increase the revenue but also endanger the entire business.

Noticeably, other contemporary sources depicting the social milieu of Singh's bar are silent about the presence of the homosexual community. As mentioned before, Liepman mentions (Black) female sex workers and Black males, Abbott focusses on African seafarers, and Amir Haider Khan notices female prostitutes and multi-ethnic seafarers. Perhaps, the gay community was particularly cautious and eager to blend in with other subcultures for fear of hostilities and discrimination. Another explanation for this omission could be that the male

[646] StAHH, 213-11, 51395.

gaze of Liepman, Abbott, and Khan, as different as they are in other respects, only observed female prostitution and other female deviations from the social norm.

After Singh's release from imprisonment during the First World War, he navigated the liminal space of the Hamburg dock area. Straddling the maritime world of Black and Asian seafarers and the nocturnal life of Sankt Pauli's working-class, he was fully integrated into its social milieu. His bar, a nodal point for various networks, was a liminal space itself. It often functioned as a refuge or safe haven for those who had been marginalised by Weimar society. Singh, through his occupation as a bar owner, oscillated between legality and illegality, the shadow economy and international tourism. He bridged the worlds of his Indian past and German present, made room for personal liberties and choices, helped compatriots in need and had relationships with German women. Often, this state of in-between was the source of personal and work-related problems, expressed in the surveillance for alleged smuggling of arms and ammunition to India by the British Secret Service[647] and the susceptibility of his bar for police raids because of his marginalized customers.

In late 1938, the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce shut the place down. The responsible authorities described the bar as "übelberüchtigte Kaschemme" (notorious dosshouse),[648] where Singh allegedly cheated his predominantly East Asian customers. The owner was further alleged of having provided a platform for fist fights and stabbings and of promoting male and female prostitution.[649] Further justifying the closure, the authorities claimed that the place was dirty and smelly. Singh's paperwork was supposed to be in disarray and the registered monthly income said to represent the actual income of only three days. Moreover, Singh was described as a show-off and swank. He had allegedly offered to take the officers out on his expense on the condition of them wearing their (Nazi) party uniforms.

Under the accusation of irregularities in the paperwork hinting at tax evasion, customer fraud, and prostitution, the Indian was robbed of his longstanding business. The homophobic political climate alluded to above gives reason to assume that the presence of "Stricherjungen" was perhaps the primary reason for the shutdown. However, this remains the object of speculation. Other possible reasons could have been the presence of communist

[647] "List of Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe,", IOR/L/PJ/12/659, February 1944, p. 65.
[648] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 3.
[649] Ibid.

activities, the smuggling networks, racism, or Singh's actually fraudulent and unhygienic way of running his bar as those were not uncommon in the shadow economy.

The closure is mentioned in a Hamburg police record from 1940 documenting a judicial procedure. In May 1940, Singh and two others were charged with robbery. The plaintiff identified the Indian as one of the offenders who violently took possession of his coat at night while he walked the streets of Sankt Pauli.[650] During the Second World War, regular blackouts gave burglars the opportunity to disappear into the darkness, leading to an increase of theft-related crimes. After a lengthy police interrogation in which the plaintiff repeatedly contradicted himself and admitted to suffering from memory loss due to alcohol intoxication, the jury found Singh to be innocent. To his advantage, one of the other accused pleaded guilty without incriminating the Indian. Apparently, the plaintiff had tried to frame Singh, perhaps considering him an easy target given his skin colour.

5.6 The Second World War and death

A special part of the 1940 case file is Singh's own testimony. This is the first (and only) occasion we read from the Indian in the first-person perspective. In his answers to the police officer's questions, glimpses of his personality and his attitude towards the interrogation situation come to the surface. When asked about the day of the crime he was accused of, he recounted what might well have been a typical day in his life in the early 1940s. Singh had not found any work in the days leading up to the event. In the morning, he collected his unemployment benefit from the employment office from which he paid his weekly rent. Afterwards, he went to his ex-fiancé's flat and paid the alimentations for their child. He proceeded to a bar at Groß Neumarkt, where he watched people play pool without playing himself. He passed the time there all afternoon, before he went to "Nordmann", one of the bars mentioned as being visited by homosexual customers. Since he was saving money for dinner, he did not order anything there and also denied having met anyone. However, he confirmed that he performed a couple of songs at "Nordmann" free of charge.

[650] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 10.

At the hour of the curfew, he left the bar alone in the direction of the Reeperbahn and had his dinner at Schmuckstraße at a place called "Chinarestaurant" around 1:30am. Then he went home.[651]

Not being allowed to earn money while receiving social benefits, he would not have admitted to having received any remuneration for his performance. Perhaps he illegally showcased Indian songs for an extra income, making use of his perceived otherness and exotic appearance, like many others had done. This could have been a way to afford his late dinner at the Chinese restaurant, which was more expensive than cooking food at home. Moreover, in front of the police, playing the lonesome misfit who observed people in bars and performed songs for free could have been a strategy to avoid further questions about his activities as well as those of vulnerable friends and acquaintances.

This file tells the story of the social decline of a once-proud owner of a busy bar. Being bereft of his source of income and social environment, he may have led a lonely life. Most of the money he received from the employment office went into rent and alimentation for his child, leaving little for him to spend during the day. He passed his time roaming between bars and other venues, seeking distractions by watching other people play pool or gather socially.

In the course of the interrogation, Singh resolutely denied having interacted closely with anyone on that particular day. He claimed that he knew the accused person indicted in the trial but had not interacted with him. He insisted on having told the truth and emphasized that he had never stolen or betrayed anyone. To underscore the credibility of his statement, he claimed to be of "ur-aryan" descent and his consequent incapability of lying.[652] A positive reference to the notion, according to which some inhabitants of the subcontinent belonged to the 'Aryan race' complex, was not uncommon among South Asians during that time. It was mostly embraced by Brahmanical colonial elites to legitimize their superiority over the lower casts and classes[653] and by Hindu-nationalist circles in support of a Hindu dominated state like

[651] Ibid., pp. 4–5.

[652] Ibid., p. 10.

[653] Michael Begrunder, "Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Anti-brahmanische und hindu-nationalistische Rekonstruktionen der frühen indischen Religionsgeschichte," in *Arier" und „Draviden". Konstruktionen der Vergangenheit als Grundlage für Selbst-und Fremdwahrnehmungen Südasiens*, ed. Michael Begunder and Rahul Peter Das (Halle: Franckesche Stiftung zu Halle, 2002), p. 135.

the Hindu Mahasabha in Maharashtra.[654] However, the notion also had an identity-forming function beyond these circles and trickled down into Indian popular culture.[655]

As part of which social or ideological group Singh, born a Sikh, considered himself remains unclear. The reference to his alleged Aryan descent allows for several interpretations. First, claiming an Aryan identity could have been a strategy to avoid punishment. Being aware of the race politics of National Socialism, identifying as 'Aryan' seemed like the best option to talk one's way out of trouble. As it is known from the other sources, Singh was usually unapologetic when he felt like he was not treated justly, for example when he was confronted with the Nazi authorities during the raid. Following this pattern, he insisted on his version of the story and lent credibility to it by giving a contemporary justification. He was less confrontational than during other altercations but acted relatively compliantly, trying to convince the officer in charge rather than offending or threatening him. He might have felt more vulnerable at this point than before, having lost his means of income two years prior.

Second, Singh showed more than only political awareness and clever strategizing abilities in uncomfortable situations. His claiming of an Aryan identity could also be interpreted as a mindful appropriation of a heavily contested discourse about the origin of the "Aryan race" among German Indologists and Linguists. Originating from the 18th-century observation that Sanskrit and the German language had common roots, Indologists, from the early 19th-century onwards, investigated the origins of ancient languages and its people.[656] There existed the assumption that Aryans, or later "Indo-Germans", was the name of one of the early Germanic tribes believed to have authored one of the earliest Sanskrit scriptures, the Vedas.[657] Whereas some Indologists, like Max Müller, suggested that the Indo-Germans originated in central Asia and then split up during their migrations, one part settling in Europe and another in Southeast Asia, others claimed the origin of the tribe to be in Central Europe.[658] With the strengthening of racial prejudice in the 19th and 20th century, many Indologists believed that the Aryans lost

[654] PAAA, RZ 211, R 10 4777, Politische Abteilung, Politische Beziehungen Indiens zu Deutschland, Padmaraj Jain, Hony. General Secretary, All India Hindu Mahasabha (March 1939).
[655] Bergunder, *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit*, p. 136.
[656] Maria Schetelich, "Bild, Abbild, Mythos – die Arier in den Arbeiten deutscher Indologen," in *„Arier" und „Draviden". Konstruktionen der Vergangenheit als Grundlage für Selbst-und Fremdwahrnehmungen Südasiens*, ed. Michael Begunder and Rahul Peter Das (Halle: Franckesche Stiftung zu Halle, 2002), p. 41.
[657] Ibid., p. 42.
[658] Bergunder, *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit*, p. 136.

most of their 'civilization' and 'culture' on the way to Asia.[659] Although during National Socialism, the Indian Aryans were considered to be a degenerated version of their European counterpart by leading Indologists like Johannes Hertel, they were still assumed to be part of a 'superior' race cluster.[660] Hence, claiming an Aryan heritage would have resonated with the popular assumption that Indians belonged to the same race as 'Nordic' people.

Consequently, in a society driven by the desire to establish a world order based on White supremacy and achieved by the elimination of people belonging to what were considered inferior races, claiming an Aryan identity could have been a lifesaver. Even if Singh had believed in White supremacy, this way of thinking had no practical consequences. His bar was frequented by people of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as by people whose sexual preference were considered 'degenerated' in Nazi society. Therefore, he presumably used this rhetoric strategically to achieve his acquittal in the trial. Although he was cleared of all charges, the temporary arrest marked the beginning of a life in incarceration, as we will see further below.

From the court file, it is also understood that, after the closure of the bar, Singh worked as a daily wage labourer in the harbour. However, he was rarely hired and was often required to apply for unemployment benefits. By 1938, his identity papers included a "Fremdenpass" (alien's ID card) and a "Meldeschein" (residency permit) but no German passport. Like in 1927, he was still recorded as "stateless", meaning that he had never acquired German citizenship.[661] In addition to his financial difficulties, he had to pay alimentation of two Marks per day for his 'illegitimate' child with Antonie Meyer.[662] The Swiss dancer, who lived with him between 1936 and 1938, had cancelled the engagement allegedly over disagreements with respect to the education of their son, born in April 1937. Singh is said to have wanted to raise the child in traditional Indian fashion. His ex-fiancé moved out of their mutual apartment after the separation but stayed in the vicinity, living only a few blocks away, as alluded to before.[663]

The entire episode is an indicator of his social and economic decline. His financial and emotional wellbeing appears to have suffered in the late 1930s compared to the 1920s and

[659] Ibid., p. 137.
[660] Schetelich, *Bild, Abbild, Mythos*, p. 52.
[661] For 1938, see StAHH, 213-11, 60547, for 1927 see StAHH, 376-2, Gewerbepolizei, VII C c 1.
[662] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, p. 4.
[663] Ibid.

early 1930s. His second wife, Herta Dimme, whom he had divorced, had probably died in 1933 in a car accident[664] and the relationship with Antonie did not last either. His mother died in 1927[665], although we are unaware of the extent to which he held contact with his Indian family. After the closure of his bar, he struggled financially, having to pay his own rent and alimentation for his child from the low wages of a dock worker or the meagre unemployment benefits. The bar, which he had run for fourteen years, was his great pride, and its loss probably caused significant emotional pain.

Although he was not convicted, the general downward trend could not be reversed. He stayed out of work and his economic situation worsened, considering that Germany was in the middle of the Second World War at this point. Hamburg suffered severe bombings in 1943, when large parts of the city were destroyed. In July of that year, a massive fire storm raged in the city for ten days, burning down half of the houses and killing around 40,000 people.[666]

While the closure of the bar was clearly an important turning point in his life, there is a more general issue to be observed here. The life of a non-elite Indian migrant did not allow for strong safety nets. Self-employment meant no fixed pension which would have sustained him after retirement. With no family as a support structure and no savings account, the closure of his bar might just have increased the pace of this likely path to destitution, poverty, and mental health damage.

Singh's downfall was exacerbated by the outbreak of the Second World War. His living situation worsened with the rise of National Socialism in the early 1930s, putting an end to his migrant possibility. In addition to the restriction of the freedom of people of colour in general, Hardas Singh was affected particularly after the intensified persecution of homosexuals, which deprived him of his customers and brought the bar to the attention of the authorities. As the trials against male prostitution increased, his bar became more and more undesirable. While in the 1920s it was part of the Sankt Pauli shadow economy, with sex work and violence being part of everyday life, endured by the residents and tolerated by the authorities, these same characteristics were heavily criminalized and persecuted with the solidification of Nazi power. The formerly safe haven for Indian seafarers and refuge for

[664] "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.
[665] StAHH, 213-11, 60547.
[666] https://www.ndr.de/geschichte/chronologie/Feuersturm-vernichtet-Hamburg,feuersturm100.html, last accessed on 5.11.2021.

political exiles was exposed to inspections and raids, ruining its reputation as a safe space for individuals with a lifestyle outside the social norms of the time.

A particularly interesting piece of archival material is provided not by the German but by the British authorities. In July 1944, the IPI compiled a file titled "List of Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe", which includes 89 entries on South Asian individuals living abroad and suspected of collaborating with the Nazi authorities. Number 34 lists Hardas Singh.[667] While some of the information appears to be correct as it is supported by other evidence, the entry contains many questionable assumptions on the migrant. For example, the time during which he ran the bar is falsely dated between 1926 and 1933. Whereas this might be considered a trivial mishap, there are other, more significant statements of dubious nature. For example, it is claimed that his bar was the *"centre for secret dispatch [sic!] to India through Indian seamen of Communist propaganda"* and that Singh himself *"was probably working for the Comintern."*[668]

During the 1920s, Hamburg was one of the main ports from which red literature and weapons were smuggled to India. Quite a few Indians were known to have operated from here, as discussed in Chapter 4. These individuals, sincerely monitored by the British Secret Service, all figure prominently in the archival records, most of them having an entire file to their name. Singh, however, is never mentioned in any of these files. This is not to say that Singh never engaged in these kinds of transactions. As shown, he hid travelling communists and wanted seafarers in his bar and was probably sympathetic to their respective causes. Still, Singh was never affiliated with any revolutionary or nationalist Indian party but rather seemed to have severed all ties to his home country. Moreover, the bar being a stable source of income, he had no economic incentive to engage in the lucrative but also dangerous arms trade.

There is no way of telling with absolute certainty which version of his biography is closer to the historic truth. However, there are certain ways of reading the archive which make one version appear more likely than the other. Sometimes, two or more narratives even exist alongside each other, with no evidence to fully support either.

[667] "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe," IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 81.
[668] Ibid.

According to the findings of this research, Singh was no passionate Indian nationalist, at least not outspokenly. Since his return to India became impossible, he immersed himself in his new environment and became an integral part of the Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood.

Eventually, the Nazi authorities deprived him of his economic basis. One reason why Singh had fallen to disgrace with the German authorities, besides the obvious shift in ideology of the ruling party, is his personal refusal to cooperate. During the police interrogation and in the police report on his case, he did not succumb to their pressure but kept his composure, insisting on his innocence and eventually getting away with an acquittal.

None of this was known to the IPI agents, who, driven by the fear of a rebellion in their crown colony enabled by the import of weapons and ideological input from abroad, regarded every exile as a potential revolutionary.

After his release in April 1940, Singh again encountered a trial in February 1941. This time, he was accused of property damage at the district court of Hamburg Altona.[669] The case was closed without a conviction, but the Indian was transferred to a mental hospital in Rickling/Segeberg. He was admitted to the psychiatric clinic at the university hospital in Hamburg Eppendorf in May of the same year and transferred to the general hospital in Langenhorn in February 1942.[670] Here, he was diagnosed with "Geisteskrankheit" (mental illness) and again transferred to Rickling on May 4. He spent his last four years in the "Landesverein für Innere Mission in Schleswig Holstein" (state association for Inner Mission in Schleswig Holstein), an institution catering to mentally ill men since 1939. He died there on February 3, 1946.[671]

The information about this final tragic stage of his life, being moved from one mental institution to another, is stored in the archives of the International Center on Nazi Persecution, Bad Arolsen. His case was documented and recorded between February 1950 and June 1951 as part of the efforts of the International Tracing Service to locate all victims of National Socialism in Germany in order to facilitate the search for their relatives. It remains unclear if anyone was looking for Singh after the war or if his details were recorded as part of the general documentation agenda.

[669] Arolsen Archives, Copy of 0.1 / 36448949.

[670] Arolsen Archives, Copy of 2.1.2.1 / 70646327; Copy of 0.1 / 36448948; Copy of 2.1.2.1 / 70645447.

[671] Arolsen Archives, Copy of 0.1 / 36448950.

5.7 Summary

As has become apparent, every archival trace of Hardas Singh relates to an encounter — whether it was an encounter with his fellow migrants like Henry Obed, Syed Amir Hasan Mirza, or Amir Haider Khan, or with the local authorities in the case of his trial for robbery, the German military during the First World War, or the hospital workers. Each of these indicators, providing us with clues about his migrant life, was the result of an actual interaction between the Indian and somebody else. The entry into the "Notes of Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe" is the only piece of information that is not the product of a social interaction but knowledge generated on the basis of observation and assumptions.[672] Significantly, this source is also the most misguided one, as it suspects Singh of being a Nazi collaborator.

The life history of Hardas Singh, as it emerges from the sources, is not merely a product of Western representation of a migrant reality, but also a story shaped by the impact the migrant had on the perceptions of his counterparts. This observation is consistent with Rogue and Wagner's claim about reading and interpreting colonial records:

> Colonial knowledge was usually more than just the application of pre-conceived notions. Many colonial accounts emerged from situated bodily encounters that were unforeseen and unpredictable; encounters that mattered for the internal contents of colonial descriptions.[673]

This moment of surprise and unpredictability shaped the way people wrote about Hardas Singh. Khan's surprise about the communist sympathies of the female sex workers in his bar, Singh's unusual remark about his Aryan heritage, his insistence on living outside the prison camp in Wünsdorf and being allowed to move around freely or his cocky behaviour towards the Nazi officials who inspected his bar all left a lasting impression on the individuals he interacted with. This moment of irritation entered the written accounts of these encounters, regardless of the authors' agenda. Consequently, however distorted and elusive, the presence of the voice of the marginalized subject in these sources cannot be denied. Through a close-

[672] IOR/L/PJ/12/659, p. 68, July 1944, "Notes on Suspect Civilian Indians on the Continent of Europe".
[673] Roque and Wagner, *Engaging Colonial Knowledge*, p. 3.

range analysis of all the information available on this one particular individual and his surroundings, a palpable life story emerges, howsoever fragmented and even contradictory it still appears.

These encounters do not only bear witness to Singh's own understanding of the world he inhabited personally, but they are also markers of migrant possibility in a more general fashion. Some interactions are indicators of social and physical mobility, self-determination, and freedom, while others speak of the limits of migrant agency, social and economic decline, and insurmountable obstacles.

The first and perhaps most striking example of migrant possibility is his desertion from the British army. Shooting a White superior closed the door to his life in India but opened the door to a comparatively privileged existence in interwar Germany. As a voluntary renegade, he was treated with special consideration by the German authorities, which placed him in a favourable bargaining position vis-à-vis his new bosses. The altercation with the British officer allowed for physical and social mobility across the frontlines away from the colonizers towards a more self-determined existence.

Caused by the events of the First World War, he found himself in the liminal space between two belligerent nations, which allowed for a migrant experience otherwise unintelligible. When he crossed the frontlines, he crossed the boundaries not only of his allegiance but of his personal status and standing. He shifted from *sepoy* to propagandist, from captive to collaborator, from Indian villager to resident in the German capital, from farmer to shopkeeper. After the war, his situation became more precarious as he lacked the protection of the German state. He continued to inhabit liminal spaces, such as the Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood, (temporary) home to Indian *lascars*, the German working class, Chinese migrants, and Afro–Germans. The "Indian Bar" was another liminal space, as it provided a platform for male and female prostitution, homosexual encounters, and communist activity. Personally, Singh was torn between his Indian heritage and his new German home, combining a turban with a European suit, marrying a German woman, and raising their child in the Indian tradition.

Other encounters display how he made sense of this new freedom. His argument with another South Asian migrant, Henry Obed, about a German woman around 1923 shows how he enjoyed and actively pursued romantic freedom. Not recoiling from cross-racial intimate

relationships, he was married twice and engaged once to European women and perhaps even indulged in extra-marital affairs.

The vivid picture that emerged of the "Indian Bar" is a token for migrant possibility in the most crucial sense as it symbolizes financial independence. Being able to make a living was the most important pillar upon which all other freedoms rested. We learn about the success of the venue through various encounters that happened inside the bar, either between customers or between customers and the owner himself. Amir Haider Khan was impressed by Singh's perspicacity with respect to his political agenda, rendering his disguise as a common seaman obsolete. The fact that the bar was not only a refuge for political activists but also the preferred meeting place of male sex workers with their clients highlights how in the 1920s and early 1930s, the bar remained relatively untouched by local law enforcement. Fully integrated into the Sankt Pauli subculture, it allowed Singh to hide an Arabic seafarer liable for deportation in his bar and even to contact the British consulate on the latter's behalf. Just as the study of encounters demonstrates the scope of freedom Hardas Singh was able to exert during his time in Germany, the limits of possibility can be analysed through the prism of the actual bodily interactions the Indian had. The initial years of his stay in Germany were spent under the constant supervision of the German military authorities and in a state of constant transit. Although technically not a prisoner of war, he lived in the vicinity of the camp and had to perform propaganda work on their behalf. The campaign to Turkey for which he enlisted voluntarily took him on an unsuccessful trip into the Ottoman Empire from which he returned because he was considered a burden by the local commanders.

In the 1930s, when National Socialism in Germany became more and more virulent, targeted groups struggled to survive. Singh, too, felt the brunt of the changing political climate when two officers from the national health department raided his bar. Instead of treating him respectfully, like the German military did during the war years, the two men treated him with contempt. They called him a show-off and a pervert, who would look at young girls inappropriately.[674] However, even in this most condescending and patronizing encounter, there is a moment of surprise, which the officers were unable to hold back. Singh, in a cheeky manner, proposed to take one of the men out, on the condition that he wore his party uniform.

[674] StAHH, 213-11, 60547, pp. 3–4.

The limits that Nazi Germany put on his ability to live his life on his own terms becomes apparent in the nature of the social interactions he was confronted with after the closure of his bar in 1938. In 1940, he was accused of having stolen a coat. He was confronted with the alleged victim of the robbery and endured a police interrogation lasting for several days. He was a frequent visitor to the job centre and the unemployment office, asking for daily wage labour or unemployment benefits. The last six years of his life were shaped by meetings with doctors, nurses, and social workers, attending to him in various mental hospitals and rehabilitation centres. At this point, nothing of his initial freedom and independence was left anymore. He was completely at the mercy of the health authorities, locked up in a hospital ward to die a tragic and lonely death. The constraints of the migrant life had finally broken his spirit, which had allowed him to lead an outstanding and fascinating life for almost 30 years in Germany between and during two world wars.

6. Historic migrant biographies: The life story of Henry Obed

The life story of Henry Obed serves as an exemplary case study to discuss South Asian non-elite migration to Europe. The scope and diversity of the source material on the Indian allows for a close-range and detailed analysis of his biography, which is unusual even for people from a less marginalized background and with greater representation in the western archives. From the continuities and patterns of his migrant existence, visible through a birds-eye perspective, one can 'zoom in' to scrutinize the focal points and ruptures which directed his life course in unexpected ways. The combination of structures and contingencies converge into a fascinating story of the possibilities and limitations of South Asian migration to Hamburg and Antwerp in the interwar period. One variable which emerges as the most crucial analytical category for the assessment of the extent to which Obed was able to lead a mobile, independent, and self-determined life is the networks into which he was born into, as well as those which he acquired during his adolescent years. They always informed his choices, structured his routines, and functioned as a safety net in times of hardship. However, these networks were ambiguous in their capacity to promote his personal agenda or repel encroachments on his freedom, depending on their interplay with other variables such as the development of his business, his personal relationships, the power structures, and social relations he found himself confronted with as well as accidents and coincidences.

The following chapter seeks to throw a light on these networks and the way they enhanced or reduced his chances of a fulfilling life. Through this microhistorical approach, the life story of a non-elite South Asian migrant can further be harnessed to make claims about subaltern agency. Instead of seeing traces of 'resistance' in every defiance of authority, Obed's biography is placed before the background of the historical processes without neglecting his story's uniqueness. Contradicting statements, inconsistent behaviour, and ambivalent decisions constitute a biography too complex for it to be subsumed under an often-proclaimed unanimous experience of domination and subordination.

The more source material I consulted, the more I struggled to find a pattern in. Obed's liminal existence. Categories such as resistance and collaboration, oppression and domination, guilt and innocence have proven to be of limited analytical value. Agency is omnipresent but often deflected by his marginalized position in a continuum of power relations. In other words, the

interplay of actors and structures determining the success or failure of the implementation of his personal agenda needs to be investigated.

Finally, this holistic approach exposes the pitfalls of more fragmented historiographic interventions. Scholars who have encountered Henry Obed in the course of their academic pursuits have often used his case to make one-sided statements in their respective field of study. For example, Michael Silvestri, in his otherwise brilliant book about revolutionary nationalism in Bengal in the first half of the 20th century, analyses Obed's activities only through the lens of the IPI files and only in his capacity as a *lascar*-cum-smuggler.[675] Like in the work of other historians who have come across the IPI files – Jonathan Hyslop, Benjamin Zachariah, and Ali Raza[676] – his involvement in the smuggling networks is overestimated, while other activities were neglected, such as his ownership of a transnationally operating trading company, leading to a skewed picture of a migrant's reality. Others, such as Etienne Verhoeyen and Mark Hull, by exclusively investigating the British MI5 and the Irish military documents, have focussed on his participation in a Nazi sabotage mission to Ireland during the Second World War and his subsequent arrest and imprisonment, which presents a very reductive and simplified picture of Obed's political outlook.[677]

6.1 Childhood and adolescent years in India

Henry Obed, alias Abid Hussein, Muhammed Hussain, and Mujtaba Hussain, was born on April 15, 1895, in Lucknow to a Muslim family.[678] His relatives were well established residents of the capital of the United Provinces whose political networks reached as far as Bengal. Obed himself sometimes claimed to be born in Calcutta, the capital of the presidency.[679]

Not much is known about his childhood. He presumably attended school until the second Matriculation Standard class in Lucknow but never graduated from any educational institution.[680] Although he left India in his early adolescent years, he stayed in touch with his

[675] Michael Silvestri, *Policing 'Bengali Terrorism' in India and the World. Imperial Intelligence and Revolutionary Nationalism, 1905-1939*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 248–251.

[676] See Hyslop, *Guns, Drugs and Revolutionary Propaganda*; Raza, *To Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble*.

[677] See Hull, *Irish Secrets*; Etienne Verhoeyen, *Spionnen aan de Achterdeur. De Duitse Abwehr in Belgie 1936-1945* (Antwerpen: Maklu, 2011).

[678] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 7. Their address is given as 165, Khayali Ganj; see also ibid., p. 105.

[679] TNA/KV/2/1296; NAI/File No. 7/36/35, p. 6; IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 141.

[680] NAI/File No. 28/45/37.

mother and brother and returned to his parental home in the 1930s and 1940s during business trips and for recreational purposes. His father, Muhammad Abaid, remains an elusive figure. There is some reason to assume that he and his family belonged to the upper-middle class with connections to even more elite political circles.[681] In 1948, their next-door neighbour, one Saligram Tandon, member of the UP Legislative Council, petitioned on Obed's behalf with Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, India's first Minister for Communications and an ally of Jawaharlal Nehru.[682] At this point, Obed was stranded in India without a passport, desperate to return to Belgium, where he had been living with his wife since 1924. Tandon claimed to have been acquainted with the Obed family for years and urged Kidwai to help him obtain the travel documents. The latter forwarded the request to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Home Minister and icon of the independence movement. Despite this powerful intervention, the Indian authorities refused to grant him passport facilities given his record as an arms smuggler, an episode to which we shall return later.

Reflecting on his own educational path, Obed claimed to have been drawn towards books from early childhood onwards. He devoured travelogues and stories of the adventures of the "American people", which inspired him to pursue a more enterprising lifestyle.[683] Having failed his class examination, he left his native town for Calcutta around 1915, where he worked as a proof-reader for the Persian-language newspaper "Hablul Matin" (Habl al-Matin) and got married to the daughter of a butler.[684] In addition to his youthful spirit of adventure, the passing of his father around the same time might have required him to drop out of school and leave Lucknow in search of work to support his family.[685]

6.2 Time at sea and seafaring networks

At the height of the "age of the lascar", Henry Obed found employment on a steamship vessel bound for New York.[686] His inexperience was probably off-set by the labour shortage in the

[681] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 141. On page 32 of the same file, his father's name is given as "Mochmed Abed", on page 101 as "Muhammad Abed".

[682] Salig Ram Tandon to Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, 13.9.1948, NAI, File No. 127:48-F I.

[683] NAI/File No. 28/45/37, "Emperor vs. H. Obed, 1935", p. 17.

[684] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 7.

[685] Ibid., p. 32. According to the files of the immigration bureau in Antwerp, his father lived from 1860-1920. See Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 98.

[686] According to Ravi Ahuja, the 'age of the lascar' lasted from about the 1890s until the mid-twentieth century. See Ravi Ahuja, "Networks of subordination – networks of the subordinated. The ordered spaces of

maritime industry during the First World War, caused by the absorption of sailors into war-related factory work on land. This gap, enhanced by the requirement of manpower to ensure the movement of battleships, was filled by the unskilled and unemployed. According to his own testimony, filed in the National Archives of India, he bravely withstood "*the horrors of war which grimly faced a sea-fearing man at the time"* and took the job of a saloon boy when he was only 18 years old.[687]

Other sources confirm his seafaring past. Several lists of "alien" crew members in the records of the U.S. Department of Labor bear witness to his maritime profession. In the post-war years, the ships' captain had to provide a list of all non-American crew members to the immigration authorities as per government orders. In April 1919, the SS "Sag Harbor" arrived at New York from Matanzas, Cuba. On the ship's alien crew list, Obed's assumed name, "Henry Obed", appears for the first time in the archival records.[688] Presumably, the Indian had traded his Muslim name for a more European-sounding one when he left the subcontinent in order to increase his chances of finding well-paid employment in the international labour market. He was hired in the capacity of a steward and thereby placed in charge of the meals and housekeeping. As part of the service team, he occupied a relatively privileged position and was paid much better than members of the engine room crew, into which most Indian (Muslim) seafarers were recruited.[689]

His entry for nationality reads "British" and his race, curiously, "Maltese". By adopting a British nationality from a European region (Malta), he was eligible to superior employment contracts as compared to the British Indian equivalent. British Indian nationals were usually hired as *lascars* under special contracts, so-called "Lascar Articles", which offered inferior payment and working conditions. They only guaranteed between a third and a fifth of the pay of European sailors, less accommodation space on board ship, and less rations.[690] By

South Asian maritime labour in an age of imperialism (c. 1890–1947)," in *Spaces of Disorder. The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia and the Indian Ocean*, ed. Harlad Fischer-Tiné and Ashwini Tambe (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 12.

[687] NAI/File No. 28/45/37, p. 17. If the birth year 1895 is correct, he was actually 20 years old.

[688] List or Manifest of Aliens Employed on the Vessel as Member of Crew, April 1919, ancestryinstitutions.com, last accessed 17.3.2021.

[689] Ravi Ahuja, "Subaltern Networks under British Imperialism. Exploring the Case of South Asian Maritime Labour (c. 1890-1947)," in *Space on the Move. Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, ed. Jan-Georg Deutsch and Brigitte Reinwald (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2002), p. 49.

[690] Ahuja, *Networks of Subordination*, pp. 12–3.

successfully masquerading as British Maltese, Obed was able to rise in the ranks of the ship's hierarchy.

Obed appeared again on the alien crew list of the SS "Spartan Prince" of the British Prince Line Ltd., arriving at New York from Hull in October 1920.[691] He was recorded as Henry Obed, aged 26, literate, of White race and British nationality. He was engaged in September 1920 in Hull as a purser, the head of the steward department. Besides overseeing meals and housekeeping, a purser had to attend to finances and provisions. Goan Christians and Muslims from Bengal were often hired in the 'purser's department' as stewards but usually not as pursers as such, since this position was reserved for Europeans.[692] That his race was recorded as "White" speaks to the socially constructed character of the category of difference. By being perceived as a Maltese or British national and hence being employed under European Articles, his 'race' had analogously turned 'European' as well. This resonates with David Roediger's findings, according to which Irish migrants to North America, as a collective category, had only become 'fully White' in the perception of their contemporaries when they escaped the stigmatized low-income sector of the national labour market and become an integrated and 'respectable' part of White American society.[693]

In late 1920, Obed was either discharged or deserted from the SS "Spartan Prince" and tried to make a living as a peddler in New York, selling statues of the Irish politician and writer Terence MacSwiney.[694] Compared to his previous occupation as a purser, this was clearly a loss of status. He had either been laid-off during the general post-war economic crisis in which seafarers engaged under British contracts were increasingly replaced by seafarers working under Asian articles[695], or he had decided to follow the example of many other Indian seafarers who quit their maritime professions to settle in the United States, as discussed in the Introduction. Considering his relatively well-paid position, a voluntary termination of his contract in favour of trading profession seems less plausible but not unimaginable.

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[691] List or Manifest of Aliens Employed on the Vessel as Member of Crew, October 1920, ancestryinstitutions.com, last accessed 17.3.2021.

[692] Auhja, *Subaltern Networks*, p. 49.

[693] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 133.

[694] For reference to the statues see IE/MA/G2/X/0375. For reference to his desertion / discharge see Silvestri, Policing 'Bengali Terrorism', p. 273. He discovered Obed's name on the "Index to Alien Crewman Who were Discharged or Who Deserted at New York, New York, May 1917-November 1957."

[695] S. G Sturmey, *British Shipping and World Competition* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), p. 296.

In May 1921, he again went to sea in the capacity of "chief steward" on the SS "Korean Prince", owned by his previous employer, the Prince Line Ltd. The ship commuted between New Orleans and Santos, Brazil but it also took trips across the Atlantic.[696] On January 27, 1922, he was admitted to the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital at Greenwich, where he was treated for gonorrhoea, a sexually transmitted disease also known as tripper.[697] After his recovery, he remained in London and stayed at Guildford Street near Russell Square, where he started what he called an "agency business" at 8 Queen Street under the name of Snow & Co.[698]

Obed himself spoke about his seafaring activities during an interrogation with the Irish Secret Service "G2" in 1940, providing corroborative evidence to the information on the crew lists. He claimed to have worked as a steward between 1914 and 1920, mostly on Prince Line ships.[699] He stated to have left his profession because employment was "low" after the war due to decreased shipping and he subsequently remained in the United Kingdom for about a year.

His business adventure in London was of limited duration and success. Attracted by the prospects of entrepreneurial opportunity, he left Britain for Germany only a few months later, as we shall see. Although this transition marked the end of his professional seafaring career, the maritime networks which he had built over the past six years were of vital importance for all his future operations. Looking closer into his life story will demonstrate how these networks were both the backbone of his successful migration as well as the reason for its eventual failure. The contributions of South Asian migrants to the global maritime networks have been analysed in Chapter 3 and 4. Accordingly, Obed made extensive use of his maritime contacts in almost all aspects of his life: his home was always near the waterfront, regardless of which city he resided in. His business and personal interests, which ranged across running a seamen's supplies store, trading animal cargo, smuggling contraband, spreading communist literature, and working his passage from the subcontinent to Europe as undocumented migrant, all required face-to-face interaction with Indian *lascars*. His first contact point in any

[696] List or Manifest of Aliens Employed on the Vessel as Member of Crew, May 1921, ancestryinstitutions.com, last accessed 17.3.2021.
[697] England, Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital Admissions and Discharges, 1826-1920, ancestryinstitutions.com, last accessed on 17.3.2021.
[698] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 1.
[699] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, statement of Henry OBED, 14. St. Aldegondiskaai, Antwerp.

new city, whether London, Hamburg, or Antwerp, was usually a place or person within the maritime infrastructure. When he shifted to Antwerp in 1924, for example, he lodged in the house of a seafaring compatriot before he felt safe enough to move into his own apartment and to be joined by his wife.[700] Even when he returned to Antwerp from India in 1949, his health having seriously deteriorated from a life in captivity and flight, the local police authorities still assumed him to be dangerously well connected with the seafaring community because the authorities assumed him to have travelled as a stowaway from Bombay to Marseille.[701]

6.3 Post-war years in Hamburg

The circumstances under which Obed migrated to Hamburg have been comprehensively outlined in Chapter 2. He legally entered the state's territory in June 1922, on a passport issued in London one month prior. He immediately resumed his economic activity and partnered in an Indo–German 'import and export' company dealing with motor and bicycle 'accessories' to India and Ceylon.[702] In addition, he operated an "Indian store" from his rented apartment, where he sold "*woollen, steel and fancy goods*"[703] to *lascars* on shore leave.

As has become apparent, the reasons for his spatial reorientation were mainly economic, at least according to his own perspective. He was attracted by the cheap price levels and the comparatively high value of foreign currency, which permitted him to make a small investment. He predictably settled in the multi-ethnic Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood amidst the Chinese and African inhabitants and the German working-class population, only a short walk away from the Elbe waterfront. His accommodation, located at Heinestraße 15 (today's Hamburger Berg), was on a busy street with locals, tourists, and travellers intermingling on a daily basis.

Despite arriving unaccompanied and without relatives or acquaintances in the port city, his maritime networks did not fail to facilitate his migration. He shared the flat with an Indian Muslim ex-seaman named Mubarak Ali and, briefly, with another Indian national named

[700] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 89.
[701] PK Antwerpen 2001 C 2517, Nota 329.
[702] IE/MA/G2/X/0375; TNA/KV/2/1296; IOR/L/PJ/12/78, p. 26.
[703] TNA/KV/2/1296.

Ibrahim.[704] With the former, he operated the aforementioned "Indian store", which was sometimes also referred to as a "cigarette shop and restaurant" and was known to sell liquor to Indian sailors on the quiet.[705] The third tenant was an emissary of the Indian revolutionary and founder of the Communist Party of India, M. N. Roy, assigned to investigate the potential of Hamburg as an exit port for smuggling activities.

About Obed's temporary stay in Hamburg, we only learn from British imperial sources. Even more critically, the information is drawn from interviews with *lascar* seamen who either were accused of having smuggled illegal goods into India or had been recruited as informers for the British Secret Service. These informers, often *lascars* eager to top up their depressed salary or increase their sense of self-respect, reported to the authorities anything unusual they observed during their voyage. Because of this strong imperial bias, some scholars would argue that this material is unsuitable, even unusable, for the investigation of a migrant biography from below. Arguably, all accounts delivered in an interrogation scenario are, in fact, heavily problematic. First, *lascars* on trial were often pressured to produce the information the colonial police expected from them. They had to perform the balancing act of satisfying their interrogators' thirst for knowledge while, at the same time, reducing their personal involvement in the crime to a minimum. They could neither deny their knowledge of the smuggling networks nor admit to their own complicity, which is why the statements are often vague and deflective, interrupted by gaps and inconsistencies in the narrator's memory. Second, some interviewees, especially those who had been hired for the purpose of espionage, might have actually been keen to prove themselves worthy of their engagement and thus added scandalous details to their observations or exaggerated the extent of the offence.

In spite of these limitations, these interrogations are a valuable source which must not be discarded due to their difficult nature. The sheer sum of first-hand accounts describing the smuggling network makes the existence of such networks plausible, with one singular smuggling event often narrated by several individuals independently. The exact nature and operation of the smuggling network is scrutinized in Chapter 4. It has been delineated how Indian residents in European port cities acted as intermediaries between the contraband-

[704] IOR/L/PJ/12/78.
[705] Ibid.

supplying hinterland and the smugglers at sea. Driven by the imperative to thrive economically, they regarded smuggling and selling contraband as an additional source of income to supplement their legal enterprises.

The extent of Obed's smuggling activities is assessed variably depending on the source and perspective. Although he was undeniably involved in the movement of contraband, his role and importance for the shadow economy tends to be exaggerated in academic scholarship due to a superficial and credulous reading of the archival material, as referred to earlier in this chapter.

Given his seafaring history, he may well have been aware of these networks and the concomitant opportunities even before he settled in Hamburg and reached out to the *lascar* community through his shop. He caught the attention of the IPI in 1923, when his address card was found in Calcutta in possession of Baroda Charan Dutt, brother of the Bengali revolutionary terrorist Ullaskar Dutta. Upon being questioned, the former declared that

> H. Obed was the assumed name of one Mohamed Hussain, of the Dacca district, who was now living in Germany and exported revolvers from that place through Indian seamen.[706]

In the same year, his name and address were again reported to the police, this time by an Indian merchant named H. Jayle, resident of England. He had heard about Obed's shop in Hamburg through an Indian acquaintance and requested a consignment of toys. Along with the toys, he received an unsolicited sample of cocaine.[707] Although the subsequent criminal investigations failed to verify that Obed had been trafficking drugs, he was now on the radar of Scotland Yard, the Hamburg police, and the British intelligence in Calcutta. As the observations intensified, more evidence emerged linking him to the shadow economy.

The most incriminating reports were obtained from two *lascar*s, both of whom were employed on the SS "Matiana" and interviewed in Calcutta in 1923. One of them, a saloon boy named Sheik Fella, stated that when their ship anchored in Hamburg, Abid Hussein and another shopkeeper had come and invited twelve members of their crew to join a meeting for Indian seamen on the premises of what he called a "Bolshevik Club".[708] It was attended by

[706] IOR/L/PJ/12/52, p. 45.
[707] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 8.
[708] IOR/L/PJ/12/52, p. 44.

Mubarak Ali, Ibrahim, M. N. Roy, and a Pathan called Khan, allegedly a deserter from a British regiment during the First World War. Besides the communist leader and the three flatmates, the seaman identified a Pathan deserter, who is also referred to as an "up-country man" in the source. Given the small size of the Indian community in Hamburg, this person might have been Hardas Singh. The saloon boy could have taken the Sikh for a Pathan, as both groups wore turbans and originated from the northern regions of British India, culturally very distinct from Bengal, where the crew members of the ship hailed from. Moreover, Sheik Fella reported that Obed, Ali, and the Pathan had all come to their ship to sell clothes and stationery goods, an activity Singh would have participated in while advertising his bar. Obed's and Singh's paths crossed again, albeit in a different context. They had allegedly courted the same German woman over several months in 1923.[709] I will return to this incident further below.

Whereas the prime objective of the meeting was to convince the *lascars* to smuggle red literature on behalf of M. N. Roy, they were also instructed to purchase revolvers and cartridges and smuggle them to Calcutta for a profit. Alarmed by these reports, the IPI sent an undercover agent to Hamburg to investigate the matter. During the 1920s, when illegal consignments of arms and drugs from German ports to India and China were perceived as a security threat, it was not uncommon for the British Secret Service to conduct these kinds of operations. In his memoirs, Amir Haider Khan remembers being addressed in a park in Hamburg in 1928 by a well-dressed but "undesirable" man in different languages. He immediately suspected him of being a British spy, since Hamburg, Berlin, and Paris were allegedly infested by anti-communist agents who worked for various state governments.[710] Khan pretended to be ignorant of all these languages and fled.

When the IPI agent inspected the Sankt Pauli district in 1924, he discovered that Obed had already emigrated to Antwerp via Amsterdam.[711] Prior to his departure, the Indian had married a German woman.[712] To make ends meet, he had reportedly run a cigarette shop

[709] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 77.
[710] Gerdezi, *Chains to Lose,* Vol. II, p. 633.
[711] IOR/L/PJ/12/72, p. 26.
[712] According to their marriage certificate, Obed married Carolina Margaretha Dora Homann on January 14, 1924, in Hamburg. See Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 9.

from his spouse's parental home. With regards to Ali, the agent's investigations revealed the following:

> […] Mubarak Ali turned up in Berlin saying he had been in trouble with the Hamburg Police. […] on arrival in Berlin Mubarak Ali went to Chatto,[713] who in turn sent him to a friend of M. N. Roy. To this man Mubarak Ali said that he used to live with Obed in Hamburg, and they ran a cigarette shop and a restaurant – they also sold liquor to Indian sailors. He said that they had sent at least 1500 pistols to Calcutta in two years through the lascars. The lascars used to sell them in Calcutta making good profit. This smuggling was for private profit and was not connected with any revolutionary party. He also said that Roy under the name of Das had asked Obed and Mubarak Ali to send literature to Calcutta, and subsequently Roy's agent Ibrahim had stayed with them for some time. They used to visit the docks and entertain the lascars; 500 copies of a book were sent to India through the lascars.[714]

We are confronted here with an extraordinarily detailed first-hand account of the smuggling business and its interconnection with the revolutionary networks. The migrant Indians are portrayed as its focal point, bridging the gap between the upper-class revolutionaries and the working-class seafarers. Obed and Ali not only had a shop and restaurant for *lascar* clients but they also visited their ships, incited them to smuggle arms and illegal literature on behalf of M. N. Roy, shared their flat with his emissary, and recruited *lascars* to join their secret meetings. It also becomes apparent how vulnerable and fragile this role left the intermediaries, who operated at the intersection of legality and illegality. Despite the protection of the Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood in which illegal transactions were, to some extent, normal, Obed and Ali felt compelled to leave the city when too much attention was drawn to their activities. The power imbalance between the migrant seafarers, who had come unaccompanied and enjoyed very little or no formal schooling, and the highly educated and well-connected political elite intellectuals such as Roy and Chattopadhyay, is also worth noticing. Ali's visit to the latter in Berlin was preceded by an altercation between himself and Roy, who had refused to help him obtain a valid passport. Frustrated, Ali threatened to expose the communists' illegal scheme to the Berlin police authorities. As a price for his compliance, he requested a passport, which would allow him to travel to the United States, where he

[713] Virendra Nath Chattopadhyaya, famous Indian anti-imperialist, who was at that time living and working in Berlin.
[714] IOR/L/PJ/12/72, p. 27.

claimed to have a brother.[715] Eventually, Chatto promised to procure him an Afghan passport.[716]

The exact reasons for which Obed left Hamburg are indiscernible. Perhaps the altercation with Roy made him realize that the port city had become unsafe for him and his new wife. Through his seafaring network, he may have been briefed about the presence of plain-clothes British spies at the waterfront and informers on ships.

According to an IPI memorandum, he was expelled for cocaine smuggling. The Hamburg police had forwarded this suspicion to their Belgian counterparts, who immediately resumed monitoring the Indian after his arrival but produced no evidence with regard to the sale of arms and drugs.[717] As delineated in Chapter 3, Hamburg was a major port for the legal and illegal export of cocaine during the 1920s. In reaction to the rumours about Obed having sent cocaine samples to clients abroad, the local police could have deprived him of his residency rights and threatened him with expulsion. This possibility of state action, however, does not prove his actual engagement in drug trafficking.

According to Obed's own statement, economic restrictions imposed by the German government had forced him to close down his seamen's outfitters shop in 1923 and compelled him to move to Antwerp at the beginning of 1924.[718] Either way, he was unable to turn his temporary stay into a permanent immigration. Faced with financial difficulties, personal problems with other migrants, accusations of drug smuggling, and police surveillance, Obed found that Hamburg had become too dangerous a city to live in. Whether it was the closure of his legal business or the repercussions from his involvement in illegal activities, which eventually prompted his departure is hard to determine. What we know, however, is that his compatriot Hardas Singh was confronted with none of these challenges in the early 1920s. His bar was doing well, and he was not yet on the radar of the local police or international intelligence services.

[715] IOR/L/E/7/1337.
[716] IOR/L/PJ/12/72, p. 28.
[717] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 76.
[718] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 50.

6.4 Interwar years in Antwerp

In January 1924, Henry Obed moved from Germany to Belgium.[719] The following 17 years of his life would have remained obscure had it not been for the records of the Antwerp immigration bureau. From 1840 onwards, all Belgian local administrations had to compile a personal file for each foreigner who came to reside within their municipality. Each newcomer was assigned a so-called foreigners' file (vreemdelingendossier), which captured the person's name, age, origin and brief ancestral history, marital status, and information on their employment and migration trajectories.[720] In Obed's case, the file also includes surveillance protocols and other legal and personal documents.

According to his registration sheet (bulletin de renseignement) at the immigration bureau, he carried a check book of £150 and intended to open a shop when he first arrived.[721] Should the business fail, he promised to return to his wife in Hamburg. Only a few months later, Carolina registered with the immigration office herself. She had forsaken her German nationality and entered as a British citizen with a passport issued in Hamburg in April 1924.[722] According to IPI documentation, she was born and raised in the port city and was still living in her parental home at Sternstraße 117 when she met her future husband.[723] She was described in the IPI files as having blue eyes and flax-coloured hair, representing the stereotype of a northern European female. Having been born in 1902, she was 21 years old when she married Obed.[724] Her father's occupation as a 'shopkeeper' and her place of residence being situated in a working-class neighbourhood are the only indications of her socio-economic background. There was no professional commitment and apparently also no cultural or racial prejudices which prevented her from following her husband to their new domicile after knowing him for about a year.

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[719] Ibid., p. 28.

[720] Hilde Greefs and Anne Winter, "Foreign Female Sex Workers in an Atlantic Port City. Elite Prostitution in Late Nineteenth-Century Antwerp," in *Migrants and the Making of the Urban-Maritime World. Agency and Mobility in Port Cities, C. 1570-1948*, ed. Christina Reimann and Martin Öhman (New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 197.

[721] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 121.

[722] Ibid., p. 122.

[723] In the records of the IPI (IOR/L/PJ/12/78 p. 26), the address is stated as Sternstraße 117, whereas the Antwerp immigration bureau recorded it as Sternstraße 27 (Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 122).

[724] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 28.

Alerted by the Hamburg police about his allegedly nefarious alliance with M. N. Roy, the Antwerp authorities observed Obed right from the beginning. In August 1924, they informed Brussels that the young couple had rented a flat in Kommekensstraat 6 and was selling "everyday products" in their shop.[725] Obed had bought the space from its previous owner for Fr. 5,000 and was behaving perfectly unsuspiciously.[726] Nevertheless, the Brussels authorities ordered the Antwerp police to continue their surveillance. In June 1926, the latter wrote the following report:

> He runs a store for smoking supplies and fantasy articles. He visits the docks frequently in search for compatriots, whom he wants to win as customers. There are no signs of him being involved in the sale of weapons or drugs.[727]

Obed and his wife eventually moved into their own home close to the waterfront.[728] They acquired a building permit from the municipality in 1927 for a property at St. Aldegondiskaai 14 and constructed a two-storey house. It had two rooms on the ground floor and three on the first.[729] Through the window-front facing the street, one could peer into their seamen's supply store.

The neighbourhood in which it was situated resembled to some extent their previous place of residence. The waterfront of Antwerp port had a lively entertainment sector, including *café chantants*, dance halls, and cafés catering to a broad social spectrum of sailors, dockers, artists and tourists.[730] Their house was situated near the red-light district, with the famous brothel in Burchtgracht for poorer customers only an eight-minute walk away.[731]

In continuation of his previous commercial agenda, Obed advertised his goods by visiting the ships which arrived from India, distributing his card among the *lascars*. As opposed to his time in Hamburg, Obed's financial situation stabilized quickly and he was able to expand his

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[725] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 91.

[726] Ibid., p. 90.

[727] Ibid., p. 78. The original text reads: "Hij baa teen winkel uit van rookbenoodigheden en fantazieartikeln. Hij bevindt zich veel aan de dooken, ten einde landgennooten op te zoeken, die hij tracht tot kalanten van zijnn winkel aan te wenden. Wij hebben niet kunnen veststellen dat hij zich zou bezighouden met den verkoop van wapens of verdoovigsmiddeln." The translation is by Siri van den Berg.

[728] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 36.

[729] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 37, p. 120.

[730] Greefs and Winter, "Foreign Female Sex Workers," p. 196.

[731] Ibid., p. 203.

business, venturing into the livestock trade. He started importing exotic animals from India in 1925, among them elephants, monkeys, and birds.[732] His supplier was a firm called Messrs Hussain Bux Ismail & Co from Karachi, who appointed him as their sole agent for Europe. Obed successfully marketed the rare creatures to zoological gardens across Europe and the United States and slowly acquired some wealth. He bought a second property in Ekeren, a suburb of Antwerp, around 1928, and he used its premises as a depot for his animals.[733] He lovingly referred to the place as "Villa Hindoustan".[734]

Two small advertisements in the "Gazet van Antwerpen" serve as further indications of his social advancement. In June 1933, he was looking for a housemaid for his family of two.[735] In February 1938, the "Obed Zoo" offered birds and dogs for sale, alongside cures for dog diseases.[736] They were to be picked up in their second shop in Rue de l'Hopital 38 (Lange Gasthuisstraat 38)[737], which they had opened in addition to their seamen's supply store.[738] By 1940, he owned two motor cars and a lorry in which he transported the animals from the docks to the depot.[739]

6.4.1 Indian networks in Europe

Despite pursuing a different career now, Obed was still strongly connected within the seafaring community. Besides supplying *lascars* with their basic necessities, he facilitated the migration of other ex-seafarers who wanted to establish themselves as peddlers or shopkeepers on the European continent. A dossier compiled by MI5 during Obed's internment in Ireland contains the transcript of an interview with a seafarer turned itinerant peddler from Peshawar named Sardar Bahadur Khan, recorded in 1940.[740] He was called for the interview because of a suspicious letter found in Obed's possession, which was signed by the aforementioned individual, whom Obed claimed to have known for seven years.[741]

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[732] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 50.

[733] This information was provided to me by Guido Staes in an e-mail exchange, 22.01.2021. The exact address was Statiestraat 15 / Rue de la Station 15/16.

[734] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 3.

[735] Gazet van Antwerpen, 15 June 1933, p. 8.

[736] Gazet van Antwerpen, 5 February 1938, p. 15 "Honden".

[737] Verhoeyen, *Spionnen,* p. 405; Gazet van Antwerpen, 5 February 1938, p. 15 "Honden".

[738] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 2.

[739] IE/MA/G2/X/0375.

[740] TNA/KV/2/1296, pp. 9–10.

[741] Ibid., p. 4.

According to Khan's testimony, he met the merchant in 1930 in Antwerp. Like Obed, he wanted to set up an Indian seamen's goods store and thus needed valid identity papers. In his application for a British passport at the British Consulate, he gave Obed's address in St. Aldegondis Kaai 14 as his current place of residence. Plans changed and Khan left for Dublin where he set up a hawking business before finally settling in Liverpool around 1936. From there, he got Obed in touch with another Peshawar migrant to Liverpool, Subkhano Deen. Wanting to become a peddler, Deen needed to give a guarantor's name to the English immigration authorities and was allowed to use Obed's, spelled Aubid Khan, as well as his address in his passport application in 1939. They had actually met in person fourteen years earlier, when the *lascar* had bought clothes from Obed's shop in Antwerp.

In the same year, Obed had countersigned two other passport applications, those of Mohamet Hanif and of Amir Mohamet, who both submitted their papers at the British Consulate in Antwerp.[742]

Obed's Indian contacts transcended the seafaring circles. Apart from his trading networks, which spanned the entire European continent, he also upheld relations with the Indian Muslim elite abroad. When he fled the subcontinent for the second time in 1949, he briefly resided with one Colonel Habib-ul Rehman in London, who had served in the Indian National Army the Second World War.[743] Lacking further archival evidence, one could speculate that he knew him through his Lucknow circles, which sheltered him during his forced return to India between 1947 and 1949. Among his close confidantes was the Lucknow-based member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council, Saligram Tandon, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, who interacted with high-profile leaders of the Indian independence movement.

6.4.2 Social mobility and struggle: Trial in Antwerp

A shared nationality, religion, or socio-economic background, however, did not automatically result in unconditional support or fraternization. On the contrary, the pressure of surviving in an alien and often hostile environment could very much find expression in resentment even towards members of the same marginalized group.

[742] Ibid.

[743] NAI/File No. 127:48-F I, Intelligence Bureau, 24.10.1949.

In February 1929, the Bombay-born migrant Peter Thomson accused Obed of having beaten him with a bullwhip while he was taking a walk through the neighbourhood.[744] He was accompanied by two Indian friends, Ibrahim Issup and Ali Ader, both recorded as "workers", who were later called in as eyewitnesses. According to the police files, Obed had forbidden Thomson to walk by his house and speak to his wife. When the latter defied the order, the accused fetched his whip, which was usually reserved for his dog, and smacked the plaintiff on the head. In his defence, Obed explained in Flemish that Thomson had made it a daily habit of coming to his street in order to bully him. He would "*show him the finger*", tell him to leave Antwerp, and abuse his wife.[745] Before their relationship turned sour, Thomson had been a regular visitor to Obed's shop.

From the information in the police records, we understand that Thomson and Ali both lived at the same address in a house close to the waterfront. Issup gave his testimony in broken English but Ali, despite having been called in as witness, never appeared at the Antwerp police station. This, in addition to their status as "workers", lends credibility to the assumption that the three Bombay-born migrants all had a seafaring background. They had homes close to the docks but were registered as Antwerp residents. Their names, except Thomson's, indicated a Muslim identity, and the non-appearance of Ali suggests a precarious socio-economic or legal status. They might have found in Obed a rival in the shop business, as many former *lascars* lived off the spending of their former colleagues, and therefore disliked his presence the port city. From the Antwerp immigration files we understand that Thomson lodged with Obed when he first arrived in the port city in January 1928[746] and Issup was still registered to be residing his address at the time of the trial.[747] Hence, they probably had known each other quite well and may have had a landlord–tenant relationship in the past.

Obed was sentenced to a fine of Fr. 10, a sum which barely affected the livestock merchant. It was only a small amount compared to other fines he accumulated between 1929 and 1934. Most of them penalized the animals' unlawful transport, their trespassing on private property, and false parking.[748] Although the financial loss was negligible, the incident stresses

[744] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, pp. 72–4.
[745] Ibid., p. 73.
[746] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 197850, p. 11.
[747] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 203541, p. 4.
[748] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 97.

the price of Obed's success. He encountered jealousy, even animosity, from his own countrymen, who otherwise could have been business allies or candidates for an origin-based support network.

6.4.3 Social mobility and struggle: The "monkey incident"

The animal business regularly caused issues for the migrant. A curious incident aroused the attention of the Antwerp public in 1939. On a Sunday in March, Obed had to transfer a newly arrived consignment of apes from the docks to the depot. Under obscure circumstances, one of the cages was opened and 30 apes escaped, creating a nuisance while they roamed the neighbourhood. According to an article in the "Gazet van Antwerpen", reprinted and illustrated in the journal of a Catholic youth club, the "Katholieke Arbeidersjeugd Ekeren",[749] the animals climbed on the roofs of the buildings, snuck into chimneys, hung in the trees, and ran across fields, much to the amusement of the local children.[750] The adults got very agitated as the escapees invaded the barns and homes. The Obed firm, in an attempt to ward off a severe financial loss, offered a reward for everyone who returned one of the animals to the depot.

In drawing our attention to this humorous mishap, the article reveals more than just an anecdotal insight into Obed's working life. It gives us an idea about the scope of the livestock business in the late 1930s and the way it was perceived by the Antwerp public. A consignment of 30 apes seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary for the Obed family business. Neither did the Indian origin of the apes' owner strike the press as remarkable. Whereas the escape of the exotic animals clearly mesmerized the reporters, there was nothing abnormal about a South Asian migrant running a large-scale animal business. Neither the youth magazine nor the "Gazet van Antwerpen" centred their piece around Obed's nationality. This stands in stark contrast to the descriptions we find of the Sankt Pauli dock neighbourhood, in which accounts of the multi-ethnic inhabitants and multi-cultural atmosphere dominated the media coverage.

Since the Obed family and business were so established by 1939, their neighbours were already accustomed to the sight of the couple and their trade. We know from other sources

[749] Catholic labour youth Ekeren.

[750] Doumentatiecentrum Antwerpense Noorderpolders, Jaarboek van KAJ, 3.3.1939, „Een apenhistorie te Ekeren."

that the cages on the premises of the "Villa Hindustan" were visible or at least audible from the street, normalizing their existence over time.

6.4.4 Social mobility and struggle: Trial in Calcutta

Despite these indications of success and acceptance, life was not without hardships for the Obed family in Antwerp. Frictions within the merchant community in India affected the operations of their business at home. When the owner of their main subcontractor died, Obed decided to continue with a new livestock dealer, one Tassaduq Hussain from Calcutta. Fearing the loss of the European market, Messrs Hussain Bux Ismail & Co's successors pressed him to reconsider his decision, but Obed remained firm.

Although the evidence originates from a rather unorthodox source, the late Hussain Bux was presumably more than just a business partner. On what appears at first sight to be Obed's grave alone, a withered inscription reveals a shared ownership of this tomb. It reads:

This is the monument
Erected
In the sacred memory
Of Mohammad Yaoub
Son of
Hussain Bux Councilor.
Merchant [???]
(India)
Who passed away
On 22 March 1932
Antwerp[751]

From these words carved in stone, we understand that the son of his partner had died in Antwerp. Perhaps in the absence of relatives in Europe, it was up to Obed to bury Mohammad Yaoub and take care of his tomb. Decades later, his wife did not find it impious to bury her husband in the same soil. A new tombstone was added, holding the name of the deceased and a blank space for "Carolina Margaretta Dora" herself, who had apparently planned to join her husband after her own passing. Why this plan never materialized remains an object of speculation.

[751] Grave of the Obed Family, Cemetery Schoonselhof, parcel W, South, Antwerp.

There are archival uncertainties about Bux' own passing. In a statement submitted during his arrest in Ireland, Obed, with his memory possibly clouded from the exertions of his incarceration, claimed that his partner had died around 1927.[752] According to Carolina, however, he lived for six more years. She verbalized her version in 1935 while trying to bail her husband out of a legal situation with the Calcutta police. To prove her husband's integrity as a businessman whose visits to India served the sole purpose of stocking up on their animal supplies, she claimed in a petition letter to the Foreign Minister:

> In 1930 when my husband was in partnership with a respectable person in Karachi, Mr. Hussain Bux, we went to India and met no difficulties whatever. In 1933 this partner died at Hamburg and my husband did not wish to enter into relations with his successor. From this moment trouble started.[753]

She further accused the designated successor of having started sending anonymous letters from Karachi to Calcutta and Antwerp to compromise the reputation of her husband with the objective of excluding him from the livestock export from India. Sensing Obed's precarious legal status as an Indian migrant in Europe and knowing about the colonial state's unrelenting desire to break up the smuggling network, he might have instrumentalized this complex constellation to promote his own interests.

There is, of course, a second way to read this situation, which does not necessarily stand at odds with the first but rather opens another perspective. Carolina's initiative in 1935 might have been an attempt to make the accusations against her husband appear like an act of revenge to deflect from the correctness of the charges. The subsequent paragraphs further elaborate on this possibility.

The loss of his partner was only the prequel to an even more challenging episode. As the previous paragraphs have indicated, Obed was threatened by the resentment of jealous business competitors. In addition, the IPI had, over the years, compiled a lengthy charge sheet and was waiting for the right opportunity to test the charges in court. It was only a matter of time before this alliance would strike against the merchant.

In December 1934, Obed went on one of his regular trips to India to make purchases for his livestock trade. After his arrival, he applied for a new passport, since his current one was due

[752] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, G2 interview 1941.

[753] NAI/File No. 7/36/35, p. 7.

to expire in February. On the grounds of his record of arms and drugs smuggling, his request was rejected. Moreover, on February 11, 1935, the Government of Bengal impounded and cancelled his passport and tried to enforce his expulsion from the presidency.[754] The driving force behind the scheme was the commissioner of the Calcutta police himself, Charles Tegart, who accused Obed of having violated the Bengal Smuggling of Arms Act, 1934.

Obed was confronted with fifteen charges of arms smuggling from Hamburg or Antwerp to India, collected over a time period of almost ten years. Charge number 12 and 13 are presented here as *pars pro toto* and read as follows:

> 12. On or about 17.1.30 you acted as a broker of firearms and helped the members of the Indian crew in purchasing firearms from different shops at Antwerp. (Reference para. 15 of History Sheet).
> 12. [sic!] On or about 21-4-30 you assisted a fireman Serang of s.s. "Lahore" in purchasing as many as 18 dozen revolvers and pistols and a large number ammunition at Antwerp. (Reference para. 16 of History Sheet")[755]

It appears from these charges that Obed was not actually accused of selling arms himself but charged of having negotiated deals through his maritime networks in Antwerp. *Lascars* who came to his shop for seamen's supplies were allegedly also presented with the opportunity to buy revolvers, pistols, and ammunitions. The scope of the transnational arms trade, as outlined in Chapter 4, was extensive. Many rank-and-file crew members but also captains and senior officers from all nationalities participated in it. A central piece of evidence in the case was Obed's address card, which was found in the possession of arms smugglers in five cases.[756] As charge 10 illustrates, the card was used to convey coded messages containing the details of the order to the broker:

> 10. On or about that date you gave your card to a certain person to be presented to you with some secret signs for the purpose of taking delivery of revolvers and cartridges from you.[757]

[754] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 39.
[755] Ibid., p. 93.
[756] Ibid., pp. 92–3.
[757] Ibid., p. 93.

Despite the great number of charges, the compromising nature of the evidence, and the severity of the accusations, Obed was cleared of all charges at the end of the trial in April 1935. The two judges, T. H. Ellis and B. M. Mitra, argued:

> In the result we are unable to find that the subject is a smuggler of arms, or that he is resident within or habitually visits or frequents an area notified under the Act.[758]

Although they confirmed the sale of arms to Indian seamen in Antwerp, they did not consider this a violation of the Smuggling of Arms Act for the following reason:

> The sale and possession of firearms without license is no offence in Belgium, and there is nothing on record to show that the activities of the subject extend any further than the sale of arms to Indian seamen. It is these seamen who are the smugglers and the subject cannot be held liable just because he is their source of supply.[759]

Obed walked out of the trial as a free man. The verdict possibly caused a great deal of frustration to Charles Tegart and his team, who had invested a lot of energy (and probably money) in their effort to exclude him from the realm of their jurisdiction, knowing this would have meant the end of his trading career. The cancellation of his passport can be seen as their final attempt to encroach on his mobility. The result was devastating. Obed was denied new travel documents given his record as an arms smuggler and hence unable to return to his home.

His acquittal gives room for a more general comparison. Just as Hardas Singh found himself in a state of indefinite transit, at least in the beginning of his migration journey, Obed likewise straddled different worlds in which the same circumstances and experiences meant different things. In Antwerp, on the one hand, Obed was regarded as a drug smuggler from the first day of his residency. Although there was no evidence to sustain the accusation, he was put under constant surveillance by the immigration police. In Calcutta, on the other hand, there were multiple testimonies coming from different sources, which proved that he was, at least to some extent, involved in the arms and drug trade. Despite the weight of the charges, he was not found guilty, due to what could be interpreted as a gap in the legislation. How

[758] Ibid., p. 101.
[759] Ibid., p. 102.

smugglers made use of legal loopholes has been demonstrated in Chapter 4, when bayonets were quickly added to the list of prohibited items under the Arms Act in 1923 after several consignments of the weapon had already penetrated the Bengal border.

Another way to look at Obed's arms trade is not through the lens of loopholes but to consider his smuggling as a way of existing "in between". What was legal in Belgium was illegal in Calcutta, and he operated in the liminal, grey zone. As Andrew Macdonald has discovered in his doctoral thesis on the making of South Africa's international borders, it was quite common for Indian merchants to evade the migration restrictions by supplying false documents, permits and testimonies to their countrymen.[760] In the late 19th and early 20th century, the British colony sought to inhibit South Asian migration through the imposition of a literacy test for all newcomers and residency permits for all those who were already residing in the country In Natal, shortly after the introduction of the new legislation false "certificates of ability" proliferated[761] and an entire informal economy of residence permits evolved, linking the ports of the Indian Ocean.[762] Indian merchant houses were well versed in the handling of colonial paper bureaucracy and made use of the inefficient workings of the immigration authorities. Most permits were stand-alone documents and not recorded on any formal index. Hence, residency permits could be applied for at different Magistrate's Offices and then posted or carried out of South Africa.

Like Obed, these merchants operated in the liminal space between legality and illegality, making use of their transoceanic networks and connections to the application offices, docks, shipping offices, wharves, villages, and detention camps to secure papers for their fellow migrants. Obed appropriated the grey zone in between different legislative schemes and interpretations of his smuggling activities. Like the Indian merchants in South Africa, he made use of the incomplete and often ineffective border control, comprising of corrupt officials, understaffed customs offices, and informal agreements. Like the South African migration regime, instead of only being restrictive, predictable, and coercive, the Bengal customs authorities were in practice also erratic, permissive if it served their purpose, and sometimes enfeebled.

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[760] MacDonald, *Colonial Trespassers*, p. 53.

[761] Ibid., p. 57.

[762] Ibid., p. 60.

This insecurity about how his actions and deeds would be interpreted by the authorities or even his contemporaries probably were a source of great concern to the Henry Obed. There was no security regarding his legal status, which would give him peace of mind and enough room for manoeuvring to pursue his business. This conjuncture was one of the intangible limitations of his migrant possibility, which only became visible through a close-range scrutiny of his migration biography. A more distant perspective would not have allowed for an observation of his usage of loopholes and hence missed this elusive piece of historical evidence. Its impact on his migrant life, however, must not be underestimated. Unable to foresee the consequences of his actions, every step or decision brought the risk of more marginalization and restriction and was therefore always to be carefully calculated.

The records of the trial also provide biographic information about Obed. By the time he appeared in court, he was 40 years old. In a "History Sheet" assembled by the Criminal Investigation Department in Calcutta, three pseudonyms are listed: Abid Hussain, Muhammad Hussain and Mustafa Hussain. His caste is stated as "Musalman" and his occupation as livestock importer and dealer.[763] He is described as 5'5'' tall, with black hair, dark brown eyes, medium-sized lips, and a pointed chin. His complexion was considered fair with separate eyebrows, a hooked nose, irregular teeth, and large ears. His face was noted as clean shaven without a moustache, his mouth big, his forehead broad, his build strong, and his fingers regular. He dressed in "European" clothes and spoke English and Urdu. We must reflect upon the function of this description, which are dehumanizing and derogatory. The IPI recorded any potential markers which distinguished him from other individuals and would help the police to identify Obed in case of arrests or warrants. Hence, the strange-sounding size indications of his facial features, such as "regular fingers" are to be understood in comparison to other accused and convicted persons.

We also learn from this document about his brother, who lived in Calcutta at 2 Chitpur Ghat Lane.[764] The lane is located near the Hugli River in a central part of the city north of the Maidan. Obed probably received and shipped his cargo to Belgium via this address.

To counter the prosecution, Obed submitted a defence statement in which he rebutted the charges one by one. The document opens a door to his life in Antwerp and the intricacies of

[763] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 94.

[764] Ibid., p. 94.

his business for historians to analyse in hindsight. The claims made in the statement need to be dissected cautiously, of course, and cannot be taken at face value. Given the source's nature as a legal document, the statements were produced with the objective of clearing Obed of all charges by providing inconspicuous explanations for the reports linking him to the illegal economy. He presumably had omitted compromising information about his involvement in the *lascar* network and focused on stories which portrayed him as respectable and law abiding.

This bias does not, however, render the statements offered by Obed and his solicitors unusable for analysis. Their level of detail and the way they corroborate what we have learned about Obed from other sources make them an excellent piece of material.

The defence strategy presented Obed as the victim of a smear campaign started by jealous business competitors. His fast rise to a prominent force on the European livestock market had allegedly aroused resentment, which needed an outlet. In fact, a newcomer who turned the trading establishment upside down was often regarded as a threat to the long-standing merchant community and his perceived otherness a vantage point for discrimination.

In order to substantiate his point, Obed submitted a long list of business rivals who had been deprived of their income by his managerial talent. The narrative recapitulates the different stories here briefly, followed by their analysis in the context of Obed's defence strategy. Before his arrival in Antwerp, the seamen's outfit business was monopolized by three Jewish merchants who owned a shop named "Abdulla Bazar", which catered to Indian customers. Within a year, Obed had succeeded in enticing away the greater portion of their customers by visiting their ships and distributing his address card. They had to close down and re-open their shop on several occasions, bringing them to the edge of bankruptcy. In frustration, these merchants allegedly incited their loyal Indian customers to lodge false complaints against Obed in India with the objective of ruining his business.[765]

Two other Jews were accused of having conspired against Obed. Best and Eliazar were said to have controlled the Belgian livestock market before they were gradually ousted by the *"honest dealings and extensive business"* of the Indian migrant. Driven by jealousy, they were responsible for various false reports to the Belgian police.[766]

[765] Ibid., pp. 77–8.

[766] Ibid., p. 78.

Noticeably, these allegations follow a pattern: a group of Jewish merchants, holding a monopoly in their respective trade, were driven off the market single-handedly by the skilful intervention of the newcomer. Deprived of their source of income, they defamed an honest and hard-working migrant with deceitful means:

> The Jews became petitioner's natural enemies and they set up a number of their trusted Indian customers to lodge false reports against petitioners in India with the object of ruining petitioner and his business.[767]

Albeit not directly anti-Semitic in its content, Obed still made strategic use of anti-Semitic resentments which had contaminated European society for centuries. Even if he refrained from denouncing his competitors in the vocabulary reserved for Jewish people at the time, he still accused them, as an ethnically defined group, of scheming against him, using their power and influence to turn their loyal customers against Obed.

Just like Hardas Singh emphasized his 'Aryan' heritage and Pillai summoned Blumenbach's race theory, Obed drew on the stereotype of the greedy and insidious Jewish merchant to support his case. Whether this reflected his own understanding or only the way he instrumentalized a dominant and accepted ideology is impossible to determine and also not crucial here. The argument I want to make is that these stereotypes and resentments, which penetrated all layers of society, could be positioned against the oppressed group at any time. In Obed's case, they were used to deflect from another set of ethnic prejudices, those he had found himself confronted with.

The list of enemies further includes two compatriots: one Punjabi Muslim named Alladitta and Hardas Singh, the Punjabi Sikh whose life story has been unpacked in Chapter 5. Although the accusations roughly follow the same pattern, their animosity appears to be of a more personal, even emotional level and was less loaded with racist stereotypes. Alladitta used to be Obed's employee before he quit and opened his own shop. Not being able to withstand the competition with his former boss, he spread false rumours about the latter. Again, we find another migrant competing for the same economic niche, causing friction among members of the same marginalized group instead of fraternization.

[767] Ibid.

Singh, curiously, is alleged to have desired the same woman as Obed during his time in Hamburg. In Obed's words, they had *"serious disputes over a German girl for months in 1923."*[768] Singh threatened Obed with revenge and resorted to spreading false reports about his rival. Considering the short period of time Obed actually spent in Hamburg, the woman they had both been courting might have been Obed's future wife. This would explain why twelve years later, he still remembered this episode of his life vividly enough to turn it into an argument supporting his case. Obed had intimate knowledge about Singh, which suggests that prior to their altercation, their relationship might have been cordial, perhaps even friendly. He knew the bar owner had deserted the British Army during the First World War, a piece of information only shared in intimate and trustful conversation. Moreover, they had possibly both been involved in Roy's scheme and must have met during their visits of Indian crews at the Hamburg docks.

6.4.5 Social mobility and struggle: Loss of passport

As mentioned before, Obed's efforts to regain travel documents were in vain. After five months of rejected applications, he bribed his passage on a ship bound for Europe and arrived in Antwerp in September 1935.[769] In anticipation of the lockdown of the Suez Canal in the wake of the hostilities between Abyssinia and Italy, he had paid the captain of the s.s. "Wartenfels" of the Hansa Line Rs. 400 to employ him as a ship's hand.

Since his business required extensive travelling, he applied for a new passport from the British Consulate General in Antwerp in January 1936.[770] He planned to visit several European countries: Brazil, India, and the United States of America. Although the Foreign Office in London was ready to accept his application, arguing that Obed would refrain from further smuggling activities if he was allowed to pursue his legal business, the Government of India strongly opposed his request. In an express letter to the Secretary of State for India in London, they objected that even a restricted passport would enable him to expand his smuggling networks within Europe and the American continent.[771] They recommended to only grant him an emergency certificate valid for a single direct journey to India.

[768] Ibid., p. 77.
[769] Ibid., p. 39.
[770] Ibid., p. 32.
[771] Ibid., p. 46.

Unwilling to accept defeat, Obed hired a firm of solicitors called "R. Plunkett & Leader" in July 1936 to appeal the decision. In a letter to the Foreign Office in London, the solicitors reminded the Under Secretary of State of the inappropriateness of refusing his passport.[772] They drew the attention to his financial prowess and honesty by describing him as a *"man of considerable business standing ability, highly respected in Antwerp, where he is very well reported upon by the Belgian Authorities."*[773]

The Government of India, however, remained firm in their decision to not grant him any passport documents. In September 1936, Obed, in the company of his wife, appeared at the British Consulate in Liege and claimed to have lost his passport. He asked for a document, which would allow him to proceed to Germany, which was, however, denied to him as well.[774] In February of the following year, Obed launched one last attempt to obtain travel documents. He wrote a very personal letter to King George VI of England in which he explained his situation. He stated that he required a British passport not only to pursue his livestock business but also to travel to India during the winter months for his health and to visit his relatives at Lucknow.[775] He portrayed himself as a humble servant of the British crown and loyal subject of the Empire. He finished his petition with reverence to the king:

> I may add […] never me or any one of my relatives hav [sic!] been mixed up in any movement against the Crown in India or in any other part of the world. I ALSO TAKE OATH THAT I SHALL NEVER BE OTHERWISE THAN A FAITHFUL AND LOYAL SUBJECT TO YOUR MAJESTY.[776]

Although this allegiance to the crown was strategically employed to obtain a favourable verdict from king George VI, it does not seem completely out of character. Never had he openly expressed any anti-British sentiments. On the contrary, his British passport and status as British subject had allowed him to travel the world with very few restrictions. He had sojourned in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium and had visited India in 1930, 1931, 1934, and 1935. Neither the anti-colonial movement in India nor the rising fascist movement in Europe had attracted his loyalties, although his contacts in the shadow

[772] Ibid., pp. 50–3.
[773] Ibid., p. 53.
[774] Ibid., p. 66.
[775] Ibid., pp. 86–7.
[776] Ibid., p. 87.

economy often transcended or cross-cut ideological lines. As opposed to his compatriot Hardas Singh, who deserted the British Indian army and was assumed to have a favourable attitude towards the German government dating back to his time in German captivity, Obed did not develop any serious anti-British sentiments as far as the sources are concerned. With his relocation to Antwerp, he established his base in a more politically favourable environment, the diplomatic relationship between Belgium and England being untroubled by the preceding world war. His family, a well-to-do Muslim upper-middle class family with connections to the political elites of the country, was probably among the more moderate nationalist actors, if not even allied with the British against the more vigilant and Hindu-dominated anti-imperial outfits.

To his great disappointment, his perseverance did not pay off. The Secretary of State for India informed him about their inability to advise the king to grant his prayer.[777] This final verdict left him confined within the borders of Belgium, unable to make arrangements for his livestock business abroad, which used to be one of the cornerstones of his success. We know from the article in the Catholic youth magazine that consignments kept arriving in Antwerp until March 1939. Nevertheless, his business was hurt severely by this restriction, not to mention the emotional distress that being severed from his family in India must have caused him.

From the sources, we get a sense of how much the impediment of his mobility had damaged his trade. While stranded in India 1934/5, he was forced to ship an entire consignment of livestock worth Rs. 5,000 to Antwerp unattended. The neglected animals suffered considerably during the voyage, causing a significant financial loss.[778] In his absence, his wife also had to hire an assistant to run the business and raise a mortgage of Fr. 130,000 on their house to meet the expenses. He summarized his desperation in his petition letter to the king:

> During the last two years my competitors have already succeeded in killing practically my whole business. For lack of passport I lost most of my clients abroad involving great losses every year. It is a pity that my trade is going in the hands of foreign dealers instead of profiting to a faithful British subject.[779]

[777] Ibid., p. 88.
[778] Ibid., p. 52.
[779] Ibid., p. 86.

Empire loyalism is again used here strategically to persuade the king and his advisors.

Notably, Obed was not alone in his relentless fight for travel rights. With equally tireless dedication, his wife Carolina supported him by sending petition letters, one to the India Office in London and one to the High Commissioner of the Government of Bengal in which she expressed her dissatisfaction with the treatment of her husband by the authorities.[780]

The first letter, written in by the end of January 1935, addressed the Bengal government. Informed about the trial, Carolina insisted that the charges against Obed were entirely unfounded. Similar to the argument in the defence statement, she referred to the animosities between her husband and Hussain Bux' successor Ismail. Allegedly, the Karachi man was responsible for an anonymous letter to the Police Commissioner of Calcutta in 1934 as well as for a detrimental letter to the Antwerp police in the same year.[781] The new charges were forthcoming from the same corner with the intention to oust Obed from the livestock market.

In the second letter, sent by the end of February 1935, she inquired about the cancellation of Obed's passport upon arrival in Calcutta with the India Office in London. In only twelve lines she concisely explained the issue at hand. I showcase an excerpt here:

> As the Live Stock season is advancing; and my husband is very much needed here at Antwerp, I should be very glad You could insist with the authorities so that this matter is cleared immediately.[782]

It is possible that Obed and his wife had agreed upon a strategy with which to counter the allegations. They presented themselves as loyal, hard-working British subjects, the owners of a thriving import and export business bringing wealth to the crown, which they had built up from scratch over the past twelve years. The accusations were rooted in the jealousy of competitors who wished to take revenge and drive them off the market. Hence, passport facilities were a crucial precondition for the trade to operate smoothly since they ordered their animals from India and shipped them to clients all over the globe.

These two petition letters were not the last pieces of intervention Carolina drafted on behalf of her husband, as elaborated further below. Whenever he was in trouble, he could rely on the unconditional support of his partner, who stepped in and confronted the authorities when

[780] Ibid., p. 30; p. 54.

[781] Ibid., pp. 54–5.

[782] Ibid., p. 30.

he himself was unable to. She accompanied her husband on business trips to India and managed the zoo and the seamen's outfitters shop in his absence. Being a foreigner in Antwerp herself, Carolina exercised a lot of strength, intelligence, and commitment to fulfil this role.

6.5 Antwerp and the rise of fascism in Europe

Relatively little is known about Obed's life between 1937–1940. The information we find in the archive is scattered, fragmented, and often contradictory. To complicate the matter, the elusive sources have been interpreted by various historians and even journalists, and it is not always that their line of thought is convincing or their use of the material comprehensible.

We know that Obed took part in a sabotage mission coined "Operation Lobster I" on behalf of the German foreign intelligence service "Abwehr" in July 1940. Before the German invasion of the Low Countries[783] in May 1940, the German government had established an extensive network of spies, agents, and collaborators in this area. After the occupation of Belgium and the fall of France, they dissolved great parts of it, shifting their attention to Portugal and Spain. Alongside the German Foreign Ministry, the "Abwehr", an organization specialized in espionage and intelligence abroad, was one of the major players on the "counter-insurgency" field.[784] One of its branches, "Abwehr II western group" [Abwehr II], was in charge of the "western" countries, namely the United States, Great Britain and South Africa.[785] It was this branch which hired Obed around 1938.

Although "Operation Lobster I" prematurely ended in Ireland, its actual target was the United Kingdom. Before going into the details of the clandestine undertaking, I investigate how the Indian merchant had become an undercover agent.

As can be determined from the article in the journal of the "Katholieke Arbeidersjeugd Ekeren", Obed traded in animals until around March 1939. According to an Indian seaman turned peddler and distant acquaintance of Obed from Liverpool, Sardar Bahadur Khan, he even continued selling livestock after the turn of the decade. As Khan told MI5 in an interview

[783] Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

[784] For a detailed graphic representation of the organization, see Hull, *Irish Secrets*, Appendix II.

[785] Ibid.

generally regarded as credible, he had *"received a request from OBED about the possibility of supplying animals to the Dublin Zoo*"[786] during a brief visit to Ireland in early 1940.

Nevertheless, there are indications which lend weight to the assumption that around the same time, he ventured into yet another field of activity. Whereas the smuggling of cocaine and arms by Indian seamen had decreased significantly by the mid-1930s, he reactivated his old maritime channels for a different kind of illegal transfer around 1938/39.

A few incidents attest this reorientation. In late December 1939, an Indian seaman from Hull, Khud Rheman, stopped an officer of the Hull city police on the street and reported his conviction according to which Obed and his wife were "*acting on behalf of the German Government*."[787] According to his testimony, "Habit Hussein" had engaged him in a suspicious conversation in which he had enquired about the destination and cargo of his ship, the SS "Ethel Ratcliffe." From this, the *lascar* understood that the couple was "*acting in the capacity of agents*."[788]

In April 1940, Obed was again reported to have asked an Indian saloon steward from the SS "City of Simla" about the movements of his ship.[789] The source of this information is the written records of the SNOW case, compiled by MI5 in the 1940s. SNOW was the code name assigned to Arthur Owens, the most important British double agent in the early years of the Second World War. According to the case file, *lascar* seamen who commuted between Antwerp and British ports were acting as couriers for Owens, delivering wireless valves and explosives to his London office.[790] One of these seamen confessed to an unknown informer inside the British intelligence service "*that he had come from ABEDH*", the name under which Obed was known in the *lascar* community.[791] According to the edited journal of Guy Liddell, a high-ranking MI5 officer who supervised all espionage investigations, including the SNOW case, it was *"established that the individual who sent the Lascar with the two valves for SNOW*

[786] TNA/KV/2/1296, Obed's Indian Contacts.

[787] TNA/KV/3/84, Hull City Police, Criminal Investigation Department, Aliens Registration Branch, 1st January 1940.

[788] Ibid.

[789] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 2; TNA/KV/2/452

[790] TNA/KV/2/452, pp. 2–3.

[791] Ibid.

is almost certainly Obed Hussein, a disaffected Indian, who has been residing in Antwerp for some time and is well known to Indian Political Intelligence."[792]

Another indication for Obed's Abwehr II collaboration is a curious telegram dispatched in April 1940 from an unnamed but known informer from Antwerp. It was originally written in German:

> SS "City of Simla" about 11.ooo [sic!] tons of weapons and ammunition as well as three big tanks arrived and unloaded from London. The cargo went in a port boat.[793]

Although this must remain speculative, his interest in the movement of the SS "City of Simla" and the location of the sender qualifies him as the potential author of the message. The explosives which were found in his possession months later during Operation Lobster I were observed to be "exactly similar" to those given to Owens in early 1940, which hardened MI5's suspicion that Obed had, in fact, received instructions from the Germans.[794]

In all, the archival evidence is too ambiguous to link Obed to the SNOW case with certainty. His employment as a German agent, however, can be substantiated with additional material from other sources. In October 1938, according to MI5, his name and address were found in the notebook of an Abwehr "agent provocateur", Clement Henri Hass.[795] Moreover, in January 1940, Obed welcomed Kurt Haller in the backroom of his Antwerp apartment. Haller was a delegate of Abwehr II who had come from Berlin disguised as a German diplomat.[796]

The historians Etienne Verhoeyen and Mark M. Hull both describe this opaque meeting between Haller and Obed in their respective monographs on German espionage in Belgium and Ireland.[797] The information in both cases can be traced back to a book written in 1961 by Enno Stephan about German agents in the Irish resistance.[798] In his work, which is more

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[792] Nigel West, *The Guy Liddle Diaries, Volume I, 1939-1942. MI5's Director of Counter-Espionage in World War II* (London: Routledge, London 2005), p. 78.

[793] BA-MA, RW49/557, p. 272. The original text reads: „V-Mann Gruppe II meldet am 20.4. aus Antwerpen: D. "City of Simla" ca. 11.ooo tons mit Waffen und Munition sowie drei grossen Tanks aus London eingetroffen und gelöscht. Die Ladung ging in Leichter." The translation is mine.

[794] TNA/KV/2/452.

[795] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 2.

[796] Verhoeyen, *Spionnen*, p. 406.

[797] Hull, *Irish Secrets,* p. 123.

[798] Enno Stephan, *Geheimauftrag Irland. Deutsche Agenten im irischen Untergrundkampf 1939-1945* (Oldernburg: Stalling Verlag, 1961).

journalistic than analytical and lacks any references to sources whatsoever, the German author quotes Haller directly but fails to mention whether he had actually interviewed Haller or used secondary material.[799] According to Stephan, Haller had smuggled six grape-shaped bombs in his diplomat's suitcase across the border. Obed, who is described here as trading in animals and exotic spices, was instructed to accommodate the explosives on board British ships, where they should detonate mid-voyage. This was supposed to be achieved with the help of Indian *lascars* who held anti-British views. Obed was supposed to identify them through his Indian networks and was further instructed by Haller in the functioning of the bombs. During his visit, a near-deadly accident happened:

> We were having a lively discussion' remembers Haller, shuddering even today, 'and turned our backs to the table. When I turned around, my breath was taken away in horror. A few cats from Obed's zoo had jumped onto the table undetected and were toying the live bombs between their paws. In the last moment I was able to prevent the 'grapes' from hitting the hard floor, where they surely would have detonated and ripped us all to pieces. [800]

This entire episode appears to be at odds with the way we have come to understand Obed's personality thus far. There is no corroborative evidence providing credibility to the interview. The only other source reference is an entry in the "war journal" of Abwehr II. It documents Kurt Haller's journey to Belgium in the time period in question on behalf of the espionage organisation with the objective of supplying agents with propaganda and sabotage material.[801] His meeting with Obed is not recorded there.

Nevertheless, there are a few archival traces which hint towards Obed's engagement with the Abwehr II even before he was recruited for Operation Lobster I. For instance, he cooperated with two Franco-friendly Spanish brothers, Juan and Eugène Elias, who had been shipping war material to Spain since 1936. According to Verhoeyen, who unearthed the information in the

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[799] Ibid., p. 154.

[800] Ibid., p. 154. The original text reads: "Wir unterhielten uns angeregt", erinnert sich Kurt Haller, noch heute schaudernd, „und wandten uns dabei von dem Tisch ab. Als ich mich wieder umdrehte, stockte mir vor Entsetzen der Atem. Ein paar Katzen aus Obéds Zoo waren unbemerkt auf den Tisch gesprungen und rollten spielerisch die scharfe Bombe mit ihren Pfoten hin und her. Buchstäblich im letzten Moment konnte ich hinzuspringen und verhindern, daß die „Traube" auf den mit Fliesen belegten Fußboden fiel, wo sie mit Sicherheit detoniert wäre und uns alle in Fetzen gerissen hätte." The translation is mine.

[801] Verhoeyen, Spionnen, p. 290, information from SOMA, AA 1222, Kriegstagebuch Abwehr II, 16.1.1940.

CegeSoma[802] archives, the brothers had been instructed by Obed to place bombs on ships anchoring in Antwerp on behalf of the Abwehr.[803]

Shortly after the SS "City of Simla" left Antwerp's shores, Obed left his home under unclear circumstances and came to Lille.[804] MI5 reasonably assumed that he had been apprehended by the Belgian police prior to the German occupation and later released when the German forces were controlling France.[805] Obed himself told the Irish military a rather different version of the events leading up to his recruitment for the Operation Lobster I:

> His [Obed's, SvJ] story now was that on the German invasion of Belgium he was arrested as a British subject by the German authorities and placed in a concentration camp. His wife (German-born) told the German officers that he was an Indian, hence had no love for the British, and was a nice man anyway. Even though he was at first suspect, owing to his nationality and because there had been "two incident" - a bombing raid by the British near his house, and the burning of a railway wagon near his ship – which made the Germans regard him as a British "fifth columnist", the appeal made by his wife and the fact that one of the German officers was a relative of hers effected his release. There were a number of men waiting to go to England "to do damage", and Obed was summoned before some German officers and asked to get with "two boys" to England, apparently to arrange contacts for them there with his compatriots.[806]

Given Obed's entanglement in German intelligence operations, his confusion for a British undercover or double agent seems far-fetched. His wife's intervention on his behalf, on the other hand, is very well imaginable. Devoted as she was, she might have tried to convince the German authorities of his disinterest in all matters political. Ideologically, she had little reason to support the National Socialists. In order to effect her husband's release, however, she could have acted as a sympathizer and invoked her alleged ancestral relation with one of the officers to assure the German captors that Obed had no affiliations with the British.

In exchange for his freedom, the German officers asked him to join their sabotage crew:

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[802] The Study- and Documentation Centre for War and Contemporary Society (CegeSoma) is the Belgian expertise centre for the history of 20th-century conflicts.

[803] Ibid., p. 290.

[804] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 2.

[805] Ibid.

[806] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, Arrest by German Military.

> Obed said 'no, no, not England' and they were 'very angry'. It would appear that he was again placed in the concentration camp. Shortly after he was again asked to go with the 'two boys', this time to Ireland, and he said 'yes, I go to Ireland.[807]

In the light of his difficulties with the British intelligence, his reluctance to go to England seem credible. When the Germans rhetorically changed the destination to Ireland, though the island was actually only considered a stop-over of the planned mission, his resistance was broken.

The question remains why Obed joined the Abwehr in the first place. From a personal point of view, there is not much which could have interested him in a collaboration with the German fascists. From what we have understood so far, he was preoccupied with his animal business and had worked hard to establish a reputation as a respectable citizen of Antwerp. He was committed to his wife, who accompanied him on visits to India and managed the family business while he was on solo trips around the globe. By working for the Germans, he risked losing everything. His favourable relationship with the Belgian police deteriorated as he dove deeper into the illegal economy, making him susceptible to pressure from outside.

He also was no follower of the National Socialist's ideological and political vision. He was neither a fierce opponent of British rule in India nor did he understand himself as racially superior by an acclaimed Aryan heritage, a notion, which had drawn many of his compatriots into supporting the Third Reich. Perhaps he had developed sympathies for the Flemish collaboration, who were quite active in his neighbourhood. A sense of loyalty and gratitude towards the city of Antwerp, where he felt safe and at home, could have incited his acceptance of the local fascist movement but not so much made him a supporter of the German fantasies of world conquest.

Given these circumstances, he was presumably either pressured or blackmailed into taking the sabotage assignment. His already fragile position as a South Asian migrant to Belgium, wanted by the British Secret Service and under frequent attacks from his rivals, deteriorated under the increasingly authoritarian climate in pre-war Europe.

His criminal record gave the Abwehr significant leverage in their recruitment efforts. The prospect of internment and extradition made him agree to their offers. In this specific historic constellation, his vulnerability as a colonial subject, in combination with his

[807] Ibid.

disenfranchisement as a South Asian migrant, became too much of a liability. His smuggling activities, which had initially helped him to obtain economic independence, became the Achilles' heel of his marginalized existence.

In the end, neither the Belgian nor the British authorities but the National Socialists were responsible for the termination of his migration. The Belgians had ignored his semi-legal activities as long as they did not run contrary to their national interests. With regard to the British, he was still able to ward off their attacks on the infringement of his mobility in 1935, when his support networks and financial prowess were still reasonably potent. He was able to bribe his passage to Antwerp on a German steamer, benefitting from his maritime networks and experience as a seafarer. In the late 1930s, with his business declining and authoritarian regimes rising, he needed the latter's endorsement in order to survive. Although his situation became increasingly humiliating in the years to follow, his agency and dignity remained untouched.

6.6 Espionage mission and captivity in Ireland

Given its transcontinental outlook, the meaning of Operation Lobster I in the context of the Second World War is understood differently by various state actors. Documents on the failed insurgency mission are stored in the British Library in London, the National Archives in Kew, in the National Archives of India in Delhi, the National Archives of Ireland, and in the Irish Military Archives. The print media also took an interest in the matter, adding to the pool of sources. As part of a series of German intelligence operations in Ireland during the Second World War, the material attracted the attention of military historians. Characteristic of their top-down perspective, their work focuses on the unpacking of the military strategy and the assessment of the feasibility and pitfalls of the scheme. To add another layer of analysis, this chapter looks at the operation 'from below' by investigating how Obed made sense of his experience in Ireland.

In summer and autumn of 1940, Abwehr II, on behalf of the German government, periodically dispatched small groups of agents to neutral Ireland from the shores of the occupied countries.[808] Allegedly, the island provided a safe passage to England as its border was less heavily guarded. They were supposed to gather intelligence data on the state of Britain's

[808] Hull, *Irish Secrets*, p.120.

defence infrastructure and explore the feasibility of a landing in Ireland of the German combatant forces. In their delusion and bigotry, they underestimated the abilities of the Irish counterintelligence and the extent of their cooperation with the British Secret Service.

Operation Lobster I sent three undercover agents across the Celtic Sea.[809] The team comprised the Indian and two Germans, Herbert Tributh and Dieter Gärtner. The latter two were born in German Southwest Africa, present-day Namibia, and educated and trained in Germany. The trio first met in the French seaport town of Brest on June 25, where they were introduced to one another by two other German agents masquerading as engineers.[810] Whereas the exact details of their mission remain obscure until today, they were presumably requested to perform a series of sabotage operations on English targets. For this purpose, the 'engineers' handed them eight incendiary bombs, four tins of gun cotton, six detonators, six lengths of safety fuse, two reels of insulating tape, two cutting pliers and currency totalling £829.[811]

Obed had not received any formal military training and was unaware of the details of the mission. His role was to 'guide' the team on account of his assumed superior knowledge of the English language and awareness of the cultural peculiarities and customs of the British and Irish people.

As nobody volunteered to provide them a fishing-boat, the team appropriated one from a French skipper. The *Soizic* was navigated by an experienced German captain and former sailing champion turned Abwehr agent named Christian Nissen, who hired a French sailor to complete the crew.[812] They left Brest harbour in the night of July 2, 1940, and arrived near the Irish coast on Saturday, July 6, in the evening hours around 8 or 9pm. A lighthouse indicated their position to the captain, who steered the trawler eastward until they reached Toe Head, County Cork, on the southern Irish coast around 3 am the following day. MI5 employees reconstructed their landing based on agents' testimonies recorded the 1940s:

> At about 3 o'clock in the morning of Sunday, 7th July 1940, an Indian and two German South West Africans put off in a dinghy from a boat some three miles off Toe Head, Co. Cork, Eire. They put their suitcases, with explosives in them, 3 lifebelts and 2 oars into

[809] Hull, *Irish Secrets*, p. 121.
[810] Verhoeyen, *Spionnen,* p. 406.
[811] Hull, *Irish Secrets,* pp. 124–5.
[812] Verhoeyen, *Spionnen,* p. 406.

> the dinghy and TRIBUTH rowed them ashore. After getting ashore they met a boy on a bicycle and asked him for the nearest bus stop, eventually boarded a bus, and travelled to Cork, where they were arrested.[813]

According to this summary, the mission failed before it really started. Shortly after their dinghy touched shore, they were spotted by residents of Toe Had as they wandered around the beach. On their way from Skibbereen to Dublin, their conspicuous appearance and amateurish behaviour gave them away quickly. According to Kate O'Malley's research, Obed's thick Indian accent added to their noticeability.[814] The boy on the bicycle, who was rewarded with a bar of chocolate for his cooperation, later told the Irish police "Garda" that Obed had referred to the candy with the pronunciation "Chock-ol-ate".[815] When they arrived in Cork, they were already awaited by a group of local policemen.[816]

Obed, in spite of his years of seafaring experience, perceived the journey on the eleven-meter-long fishing-boat as very unpleasant. In July 1941, he described the ordeal of their passage in an interview conducted in Mountjoy Prison:

> This craft had an engine, but the propellor was missing. The German Officers would not wait to have the propellor fitted, so the voyage had to be accomplished by sail. On board, in addition to the three [Obed, Gärtner and Tributh, SvJ], were a Frenchman and a German. The latter was apparently in command, but he knew very little about navigation – 'he could not find Ireland.' After being hove to or beating about off the Irish coast for two days, they eventually made it to 'Iskibbereen.' When it was observed to him that he was fortunate that he did not accidentally land in England, he agreed strongly. – 'I was call on Mohammed and Moses and Jesus and all![817]

The report captures the Indian intonation with which Obed pronounced certain English words such as the Irish village Skibbereen. When he realized that they had arrived at their rightful destination, he praised the luminaries of three different world religions out of relief. In addition to its undeniably humorous ring, the statement speaks to the religious syncretism Obed embodied but also used strategically to demonstrate his cosmopolitanism.

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[813] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 1.

[814] Kate O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire. Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-64* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2008), p. 141.

[815] Ibid.

[816] Hull, *Irish Secrets,* p. 124.

[817] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, The journey.

6.6.1 Internment in Ireland

The following years of Obed's life are perhaps the most unsettling. Like his compatriot Singh, he was interned for his alleged collaboration with the enemy of a nation at war with another. Both spent the duration of an entire world war in an incarceration facility far removed from their family and friends. Neither of them had been invested in geopolitics, the struggle for racial supremacy or other factors leading up to the hostilities but had been instrumentalized by the belligerent governments. Neither of them fully recovered from the exertions of their incarceration.

6.6.2 Arrest and trial

After their arrest in Cork, the trio were handed over to the Irish Military Intelligence G2. They were taken to the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham, Dublin, for medical examination and initial questioning. As O'Malley has argued convincingly, Obed tried to gain the favour of his Irish interrogators by mentioning his familiarity with Éamon de Valera, nationalist politician and future president of Ireland and Terence MacSwiney, another famous nationalist, whose statues he had sold during his stay in New York in the early 1920s.[818] Although this part of his testimony was considered authentic, his credibility diminished in the eyes of his captors when he was incapable of pronouncing French words despite having resided in Antwerp over the last 16 years. He did not hush over his marriage to a "German Aryan wife" and willingly alluded to his successful livestock trade. Perhaps to avoid further questioning on his already complex identity, he reported his religion as "Hindoo".[819]

At first, Obed denied any involvement in the clandestine operation. As opposed to Tributh and Gärtner, he pleaded "not guilty" in the trial following their arrest and maintained to have travelled to Ireland in the capacity of a merchant.[820] Knowing that the two Germans would hardly corroborate his story, he rather stubbornly insisted to have left Antwerp in fear of the German occupation. To escape the invaders, he had withdrawn all his assets from the Bank of Commerce and joined a group of refugees on their way to Brest. Upon arrival, he stated to

[818] O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire*, p. 141; IE/MA/G2/X/0375, Drimeleague Case.
[819] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, Drimeleague Case.
[820] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 4.

have found an American captain who agreed to take him to Ireland for £50, alongside Tributh and Gärtner. His intention was to open a bird shop in Dublin.

Although he later repealed this narrative and confessed to have come to Ireland on behalf of the German sabotage mission, the level of detail with which recounted his flight from the fascist forces leads one to assume that he had at least hoped to abort the mission prematurely and find refuge on the island. His wife, to some extent, was complicit in the plan:

> He […] withdrew his money from the Bank de Commerce about the beginning of May, 1940, his wife doing the same. He obtained his in English notes, and she hers in United States dollars.[821]

He further stated:

> […] that whenever large sums were due to his land, he had them lodged to an account at Barclay and was therefore able to draw out several hundred English pounds from the Banc du Commerce in Antwerp, which he says [sic!] from agent for Barclays.[822]

It appears as if the couple had prepared for a possible confiscation of their funds by the German army. To avoid financial rock bottom, Obed reconnected with his networks in England and Ireland, intending to hold out the war in exile. When it became apparent that all currency notes found in his possession were in sequence with those found on Tributh and Gärtner, this part of his testimony was discarded as implausible.

In the trial in front of the Special Criminal Court in Dublin on July 25, 1940, all three conspirators were sentenced to penal servitude for seven years for violating article 3 of the Emergency Powers Order of 1939, section 5 of the Emergency Powers Act of 1939, and section 4(1) of the Explosive Substances Act of 1883.[823] They were first interned at Mountjoy Prison in the Irish capital and later transferred to Athlone military barracks.

6.6.3 Time in prison

In Mountjoy, they shared their cell with other captured German agents and convicted affiliates of the Irish Republican Army [IRA]. Whereas Tributh and Gärtner easily adapted to

[821] Ibid.

[822] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, Drimeleague Case.

[823] NAI/Criminal charge and disposition sheet, S/12013.

their new environment, Obed became an outsider. Sharing neither the political convictions nor the 'race' of the Nazi prisoners, he was singled out as the target of their bullying and other enmities.[824] One of the Irish inmates, Cecil Grant Rossbain, observed in 1942 that *"[…] he was very unpopular with all the other German agents interned with him, probably because he talked too much."*[825]

In reality, it was rather his 'otherness' than his loquacity, which caused the upset. Tributh and Gärtner blamed him for the failure of their mission, and Hermann Görtz, the self-proclaimed leader of the German squad, accused him of betraying his escape attempts.[826] In addition to being framed as a traitor to the German cause, he was stigmatized for his perceived racial inferiority. Walter Simon, a former high-ranking German spy, noted in a letter to his wife Elizabeth, using a racial slur common at the time, that he had an altercation with Obed because the Indian "*insisted on playing nigger music*" in the dining room, claiming that he had just as much right to play music than they had.[827] Captain Joseph Healy noted in one of his reports that Obed was just "*not popular with the others*", and Wilhelm Preetz, another former German agent, even attempted to beat him up.[828] The reason for the altercation was a disagreement on political matters. According to a minute from S.I.S. to Cecil Liddel, an official working for the British Secret Service and who preceded his younger brother Guy Liddell as head of MI5, the two parties had an argument because *"[Obed] unexpectedly praised the British Government."*[829]

Although Obed undoubtedly suffered at the hands of the other inmates, there were instances of cameraderie and comic relief as well. Walter Simon told his wife how Tributh was regularly angered by Obed's attempts to cheat at their afternoon game of croquet. While everyone else allegedly took his fraudulent ways with good humour, Tributh threatened to physically assault Obed but backed out at the last second, which left everyone else laughing.[830]

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[824] Hull, *Irish Secrets*, p. 243.

[825] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 8.

[826] Hull, *Irish Secrets*, p. 243.

[827] IE/MA/G2/2468. The original text reads: „Als ich eines Abends im Essraum sitze, die anderen auch besteht Obed darauf, Niggermusik aufzuspielen. Ich halte mir zuerst die Ohren zu, dann machte ich eine Bemerkung. Obed aber meinte dass er soviel Anrecht habe zu spielen wie ich." The translation is mine.

[828] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, Internees and convicts, German, in Mountjoy Prison 10.2.1942.

[829] TNA/KV/2/1296, S.I.S. to Mr. Cecil Liddell, Mountjoy Prison, June 19, 1942.

[830] IE/MA/G2/2468.

6.6.4 IRA contacts

To escape this oppressive situation, Obed developed a more cordial relationship with some of the Irish inmates. Early into his sentence, he befriended the IRA member Joseph McDermott, whom he had met during a concert at Mountjoy. The latter offered to have him a new suit tailored by his father for a special price. According to Obed, he agreed to the deal because it enabled him to afford the garment. He wrote:

> *[H]is colleagues were having suits made by Kingstons, and a prisoner named MacDermott said his father was a tailor, and would be cheaper."*[831]

The family stayed in touch after McDermott's release around 1941. He was visited by the IRA man's fiancé and sister, who ran small errands on his behalf and, most crucially, allowed Obed to use their Dublin address for his correspondence with his wife. By channelling the letters this way and having them delivered during their visits, he hoped to bypass the censor of the Irish military. When confronted about this breach of prison code, he claimed to be a respectable man in Antwerp and said he would hence prefer his acquaintances not know about his prison sentence.[832]

The fraternization did not go unnoticed by the prison authorities. They were quick to conclude that Obed held ideological sympathies for the IRA. This notion was amplified by the report of a journalist named Kirwan, who visited Mountjoy for the "prisoners' welfare purposes" in 1942:

> Kirwan states that among the prisoners in Mountjoy Obed has a reputation of being the most dangerous and an adept organiser. Obed was a great friend of an I.R.A. man named McDermott who was serving a sentence in Mountjoy but has now been released following the death of his mother. McDermott now resides at 1 Carlingford Terrace, Drumcondra, over Crowe's shop and Kirwan states that suspicious strangers have been noticed calling to McDermott at this address.[833]

This allegation stands before the background of the German–Irish cooperation and Indo– Irish entanglements during the interwar period and in the Second World War. German progressive

[831] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, His present contacts.

[832] Ibid.

[833] Ibid., Report from Kirwan, Journalist, Carlingford Road, 22.5.1942.

forces but also nationalist groups had a history of supporting the IRA against the British, mainly by supplying firearms. The Indo–Irish connection was also established along the lines of their mutual rejection of British imperialism. Scholars of these entanglements have alluded to the possibility that Obed had extended his illegal networks to IRA circles as early as 1922. O'Malley insinuates his ownership of a firm in Hamburg, which smuggled arms to India on behalf of M.N. Roy and with the financial aid of Moscow.[834] The same firm allegedly also supplied Roddy Connolly, founder of the Communist Party of Ireland, with arms for his political struggle. Although Connolly and Obed could have met through M.N. Roy's revolutionary networks, there is nothing in the sources which indicates a larger cooperation. On the contrary, Obed appears to have been disinterested in pushing the communist agenda. Describing Obed as an "*industrious arms and drug trafficker*"[835] speaks to the notion that O'Malley generally overestimated his role in the smuggling network, especially his affiliation with the revolutionary circles.

There was even a brief moment in which the British authorities considered Obed to have been dispatched to Ireland not to sabotage English targets but to liaise with the IRA. Albeit socialist in its general outlook and thus not very attractive as an ally for the National Socialists, the emergence of the fascist "Blueshirt" movement within the organization during the 1920s made a cooperation thinkable.[836] Obed's alleged involvement in such a scheme, however, had no basis in reality but was fed by the Indian himself. Towards his fellow convicts he boasted:

> he was travelling through Ireland with supplies for the I.R.A." and that "the Germans were to supply small arms and money to the I.R.A. who were to commit sabotage against British troops and municipal undertakings in N. Ireland.[837]

There is no evidence which suggests he was actually assigned to link up with the Irish forces. Obed presumably just preferred to present himself as part of a heroic struggle for national self-determination rather than of an amateurish Nazi mission.

As time passed, the prison authorities grew even wearier of the fraternization between some of the IRA members and the 'German' prisoners, including Obed. In May 1942, the German

[834] O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire*, p. 18.
[835] O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire,* p. 18.
[836] Hull, *Irish Secrets,* p 39.
[837] TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 8.

group was collectively transferred from Mountjoy to Athlone prison, causing great dissatisfaction among the internees.[838] The Athlone military barracks were located in the centre of the Island, about 150 kilometres away from Dublin, without much contact to the outer world. For Obed, this transfer was particularly painful because it left him alone with the Germans and complicated his exchange with his Dublin-based supporters.

6.4.5 Resistance in prison

Unwilling to accept his situation, Obed tried to secure the betterment of his internment conditions. He used a variety of strategies, ranging across bargaining with the prison authorities, to petitioning with local dignitaries and going on a hunger strike.

In a first attempt to improve his situation, he asked for an interview with the Mountjoy prison authorities in July 1941. He asked Superintendent Carroll to use his influence over the other officers to have him prematurely released. He offered to reside in Dublin itself and regularly report to the police. While the other inmates thought him to be with a tailor, he gave a lengthy assessment about their background, contacts, political affiliations, and unlawful activities and also answered questions about his own contacts and correspondences. For example, he disclosed Wilhelm Preetz' attempt to avoid the censor by mimicking his cipher techniques. He demonstrated how the German used candle wax to write a secret message on a piece of paper, which would later be deciphered by spreading surplus graphite powder from a sharpened pencil over it.[839] Moreover, he provided G2 with classified information about Operation Lobster I, which was in demand since Tributh and Gärtner had chosen not to disclose any.

His reasons for wishing to be released were his poor physical health, his sensitivity to the cold Irish winter and his disregard for all matters political or criminal. He described himself:

> […] very peaceable man, with nothing to do with politics – they are for the big people, and I am a little man – my politics is my business – the police in Antwerp know me for eighteen years, that I am a nice man.[840]

[838] Ibid., S.I.S. to Mr. Cecil Liddell, Mountjoy Prison, June 19, 1942.

[839] IE/MA/G2/X/0375, His present contacts.

[840] Ibid., Reason for application.

When his situation did not improve, he wrote a petition letter to the Irish Minister for Justice, Gerald Boland, in February 1943. The latter, although he was a republican, took a hard line against the IRA and was responsible for the detention of several foreign agents. He preferred Ireland's neutrality in the war over the anti-imperialist struggle. Obed asked Boland for permission to either return to Belgium or reside anywhere in Ireland. His line of argument runs synchronously with the one given in the 1941 interview. He denied having any sympathies for German fascism and underscored his poor physical health:

> This internment wears hard on me for the last few months and the climate is very much against me and is I fear endangering my health: this together with the fact that I am kept in company with a number of Germans, who are differently disposed than I am politically, makes things much harder for me. I am more or less ostracized by them, they seldom ever speak to me or I to them we have nothing in common. I am by no means a sympathiser of Hitler, and they know this.[841]

Obed's deteriorating health continued to be a major concern for him. According to the medical officer Lieutenant B. Sullivan, who examined him in February 1943, Obed suffered from chronic bronchitis.[842] He complained of chest pain, cough and swelling of the feet. The officer diagnosed an unusual increase of the heart rate when exposed to exercise and agreed that the climate in Ireland had an adverse effect on his condition.[843] Others were more sceptical about his suffering. Mullins Jas, a member of the prison staff, reported a conversation he had with Obed in December 1943:

> When I entered Obed's room I asked the escort who was with me to get me a pint of warm water and in his absence enquired of the patient how he was feeling, and he told me that there was nothing wrong with him, (or words to that effect) but he wanted to get to the Hospital out of the Internment Camp. He also requested me not to mention this to the Medical Officer, but I regarded it my duty to report the matter, and on returning to the medical hut I made my report to the M. O.[844]

As he grew more frustrated with the internment conditions, Obed decided to go on a hunger strike. In early 1943, he started refusing food. Although the prison authorities suspected his

[841] Ibid., Obed to Boland, 5.2.1943.
[842] Ibid., B. Sullivan, Extract from medical journal, 5.2.1943.
[843] Ibid.
[844] Ibid., Mullin Jas to Medical Officer, 22.12.1943.

protest to be fraudulent (there were sugar, apples, biscuits and cheese found in his cell)[845], they were alarmed enough to take into consideration a bargain: in return for an exchange from Athlone to another facility, Obed offered to sit for yet another interview in which he promised to correct some of his earlier statements regarding the sabotage mission.[846] During the negotiations Obed changed his mind and demanded parole as a price for his cooperation, cancelling the deal.

As the altercations between Obed and the other internees intensified, Obed was eventually transferred to Curragh in early 1945.[847] Still under the strictest supervision, he was first admitted to the General Hospital for medical treatment and later (in July 1945) to the facility's infirmary ward for his convalescence. An x-ray examination confirmed the diagnosis of a "*chronic bronchitis in lower zones*", with high blood pressure, "*breathlessness on exertion*" and a "*cough which is worse in the mornings*" as symptoms.[848] By the end of the year, while still being treated for his lung disease, he applied for *"recreational privileges"* with the hospital authorities. Whereas the security objections were considered negligible, the authorities were reluctant to establish a precedent in case he was to return to Athlone.[849]

As these instances of protest have shown, Obed bargained relentlessly for the betterment of his internment conditions. His actions resembled those of his compatriot Hardas Singh, who displayed the same kind of determination during his own confinement. Sensing an opportunity, Singh tied his willingness to help with the translation of Gurmukhi script samples to certain promises. He demanded his release from the prison camp and permission to reside in the city. Two decades later, Obed still had the same kind of ambition to counter the power imbalance and maintain a certain amount of self-respect and dignity. He offered to disclose sensible information about his fellow prisoners, the insurgency mission, and even himself in order to negotiate a transfer from the despised Mountjoy and later Athlone military prison. He was extremely resourceful in his choice of protest strategies, employing traditional Indian techniques such as hunger strike (even if forged), but also more bureaucratic means such as petitioning with high-ranking dignitaries. This refusal of victimization brought him the

[845] Ibid., Phone memo from Captain. Power, 3.4.1943.
[846] Ibid., Letter from Commandant J. Power, 16.4.1943.
[847] Ibid., Letter from Dan Bryan, January 1945.
[848] Ibid., Vincent Ryan to Officer Commanding, 13.2.1945.
[849] Ibid., Colonel Dan Bryan to Provost Marshal, 5.11.1945.

reputation of being an inconvenience, even a threat. He was often depicted as a crook, bending the truth to his advantage, or accused of deceitful behaviour such as storing food in his cell during a hunger strike or fooling the prison staff. To complicate the matter, certain rumours were often spread by Obed himself in conversations with his fellow inmates, the prison staff, and the military authorities. Although the medical officer diagnosed a lung disease from which he would actually never fully recover, he repeatedly claimed to be fine and even admitted having exaggerated his pains. Sabotaging his own credibility, he also overstated his importance in the IRA network.

The conclusion to be drawn from these ambiguous observations is perhaps the impossibility of painting a black and white picture of subaltern agency. Often-used categories such as complicity or resistance do not apply here, as complicity was often forced upon the individuals and resistance omnipresent. Often, resisting the authorities meant revealing incriminating information on others, be it fellow convicts or migrants. Contradicting desires lead to contingent behaviours, not always in line with how we would like to understand and represent the marginalized. People can be insidious, brave, calculating, morally superior, and fraudulent at the same time. As a more fruitful approach, I suggest a departure from these categories and instead take their biographies as a vantage point for the analysis of power structures. The analysis of coping strategies in the context of extreme power imbalance and oppression can shed a light on the functioning of these power structures themselves.

6.6.6 The emotional world of Obed

To further elaborate on Obed's understanding of his situation, the following paragraphs analyse his most intimate legacy: his personal correspondence. The G2 files contain an exchange of four letters between Obed and Carolina. As the censor usually only conveyed selected material to the military authorities, only one of them is retained fully. The others are incomplete or even piecemeal. Nevertheless, they provide unique insights into the nature of their friendship and into the way Obed made sense of his prison experience. A second set of two (incomplete) letters from Obed to Carolina are archived in the files of the Antwerp immigration bureau. Although their provenance is unclear, they were probably either intercepted by the Antwerp police authorities on their way to the recipient or had been sent to Antwerp from Dublin for the sake of data exchange.

In compliance with the censor rules, they wrote to each other in English. According to the Irish military archives, Obed exclusively corresponded with his wife but MI5 sources also list one Miss Philomene van Mierlo from Antwerp as well his "Amma" (mother) as his international contacts.[850]

The first letter chronologically, posted in February 1942, is a written reply to a letter sent by Obed from Mountjoy prison to Antwerp in December 1941. Despite the constraints the censor might have put on their willingness to express themselves freely, its intonation is heartfelt, sincere, and emotional. Because of this quality, it is cited here fully:

> My dear Henry,
> Many, many thanks for your letter dated 20-12-41 I received yesterday. I am so glad to get a long letter from you, but was very sorry and down hearted when I read the contents. My darling you should never keep anything secrete [sic!] from me, you know I love only you in this world, I even left my family and my country for you, and if there is a way, I will even come myself to get you free, I will try my best. You are right this is only a misfortune of war, it is not good to live in a foreign country in war time, you should not have been so frightened and stay home, nobody would have trouble [sic!] you, here are still a lot of foreigner [sic!] free. But nobody thought it would take so long. I only hope the war will soon be over. I am so glad to know, you found somebody over there to cheer you up, please give my compliments to Mr Mac Dermott and his family I will also write them a letter in a few days. Please Henry write me everything about yourself, and tell me what you have to do there, and for what reason they keep you there. I hope you have received all my letters by now, and you are in good health please dont worry to [sic!] much let us live in hope, to be together again soon. Here everything is still the same, it is very cold over here. Robert and his wife was [sic!] also very sorry to hear about you they send you their best compliments, his wife came at once to cheer me up. Theresia is still with me, she is a very good girl, she also thinks a lot of you, and often said Mr Obed should not have left us. Now I will close my letter hoping to hear from you soon again, all my love and lots of kisses.
>
> For ever yours, Liddy.[851]

This piece of exchange is striking on a number of levels. As a precursor to its analysis, one must consider the extent to which Obed and Carolina were aware of the proceedings of the censorship and how much it altered their expressions. Given their history of negotiations with various types of police and other government authorities, they were well versed in the art of communicating across surveillance lines. Their congruent statements during Obed's trial in

[850] Ibid., Phone memo from Commandant J. Power, 2.4.1943; TNA/KV/2/1296, p. 10.
[851] Ibid., Carolina to Obed, 4.2.1942.

1935 give reason to suspect a silent agreement about the legitimate form and substance of their correspondence. One of their common strategies was to communicate in Hindustani, an option barred by the Irish censor. In summer of 1940, Obed had sent a letter written in his mother tongue, which was intercepted. When presented with this piece during the aforementioned interview of 1941, he *"was hesitant about the translation of it, either because, as he said, he had not his spectacles with him, or because he had made a reference in it to 'the two other men who are in jail here also.' He was shown another letter, written in Eastern characters, which he read and translated with considerably less hesitation."*[852]

It does not become apparent whether the second letter was also addressed to his wife or just a test piece to scrutinize his reading abilities. The censor apparently was unable to differentiate between Urdu and Devanagari script and labelled them reductively as "Eastern characters".

The existence of Hindustani letters leads one to suspect a codified correspondence between the couple. Perhaps he had requested her to corroborate his alleged exodus from Belgium as part of a crowd of refugees and his unintentional stranding in Ireland. The choice of words and sincere expressions of concern, however, rather suggest her ignorance about the reasons for his departure from home. She appears to be of the opinion that Obed had overestimated the hazardous potential, which the German occupation had posed to their life in Antwerp. Referencing to other 'foreigners' still residing in the port city unperturbed, she found his concerns alarmist in hindsight.

Somewhat in dissonance with my earlier representation of their partnership, Carolina appears to be uninformed about the sabotage mission. She struggles to make sense of his imprisonment and is irritated by a "secret" Obed had kept from her. Perhaps she had just recently learned about his involvement in Operation Lobster I through one of his previous letters. Despite this breach of trust, she affirms her love and affection for her husband. To substantiate her vows, she reminds him of her abandonment of family and fatherland for his sake.

Her words are expressive of a longstanding companionship and strong emotional bonds. In addition to her serious grief about their separation, her concern about his poor health and unfair treatment in prison is heartfelt. She is delighted about his friendship with MacDermott

[852] Ibid., interview 1941, his present contacts.

and enthusiastically conveys the greetings of a certain girl named Theresia, possibly their housemaid, who apparently resided with the Obed family. She finishes the letter with another avowal of her loyalty and eventually reaffirms their eternal bond with the parting vows "for ever yours, Liddy."

The other three samples of G2 censored correspondence include an inquiry from Carolina about food parcels in 1944,[853] a partial transcription of a letter from Obed posted around mid-1945 from the MacDermott family address, (which he apparently still used despite being transferred from Dublin),[854] and a one-line telegram from Obed in December 1945.[855] Although short and selective, they provide further insights into Obed's emotional disposition during his imprisonment. In mid-1945, he wrote to his wife from Curragh:

> I think the sustained loss, suffering, and partial separation are only temporary trials, which in this life, I suppose, we must expect, therefore, bear with confidence otherwise they will overwhelm us.
> When I am returned home you can be sure that I will try my utmost to make your life more happier than before.
> With regards myself, I am in excellent health, but I am still at the same place as before.[856]

Notwithstanding their long separation, he still reciprocated her affection and tried to improve her spirits. He promised to make up for the time lost and assured her he would return home after the war.

To avoid further upset, he obscured the real state of his physical health and kept his admission to the hospital secret. From there, he also posted the aforementioned telegram in which he requested that Carolina not worry because he was "well".[857]

The approaching termination of the war changed the tone of their correspondence. Whereas the ordeal and despair of his confinement were palpable in the wartime correspondence, a letter posted in March 1945 sounded much more confident and carefree. By this time, he had been transferred to "No. 3 Internment Camp" located near the Department of Defence in Dublin. The pending surrender of Germany and its allies demanded diplomatic negotiations

[853] Ibid., Carolina to Obed, 18.1.1944.
[854] Ibid, Obed to Carolina, mid 1945
[855] Ibid., Obed to Carolina, 17.12.1945.
[856] Ibid., Obed to Carolina, mid 1945
[857] Ibid., Obed to Carolina, 17.12.1945.

about the future of the POWs, and Obed's case proved to be one of the more delicate ones. In spite of the changed situation, his letters still went through the hands of military officials. Perhaps not entirely in accordance with his actual state of mind, he claimed the business would soon run smoothly again.[858] In anticipation of his return, he asked his wife to occasionally send him "*some Belgian News Papers, say for* instance, *'Het Gazet Van Antwerpen'"*[859] so that he could follow up on the post-war developments in Belgium, as well as a *"hand made sleeveless pullover, which you told me to have knitted for me long ago"*. Most crucially, however, he urgently requires her to *"go to the police head quarters and request a certificate of my conduct there, for the whole time I was living in Antwerp, and send it to me by registered post."*[860] He trusted the document to facilitate his return home, a hope, which turned out to be optimistic.

6.7 Repatriation to and escape from India after the war

The termination of hostilities brought the issue of repatriation on the agenda of international politics. As compared to the German and Dutch agents in Irish custody, the Indian's case proved to be particularly complex. Since the intricacies of multilateral diplomacy have been explored in detail by O'Malley, a summary suffices here.[861] The British government was anxious to prevent Obed from re-entering Belgian territory, where they suspected him of wishing to resume his smuggling activities.[862] The safest option, in their opinion, was to send him to India, and hence they arranged for his repatriation. Unfortunately, the journey was not supposed to take him through England, from where they believed he would, in the capacity of a British Indian national, appeal his extradition. The Irish government, for the sake of international credibility, was determined to send him anywhere but the British Empire, where they feared he might face further persecution.[863] After two years of laborious negotiations, the Government of India consented to partially cover the costs of the repatriation and agreed to refrain from taking any legal actions against Obed.[864] Since British

[858] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, pp. 53–4.
[859] Ibid.
[860] Ibid.
[861] O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire*, pp. 142–4.
[862] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 137.
[863] Ibid, pp. 111–2.
[864] Ibid, p. 114; p. 123.

subjects could not be forcefully deported from Ireland, especially if there were no charges pending against them, he was eventually 'persuaded' to accept his repatriation voluntarily.[865] The British government made sure to keep the information about the illegality of his detention after the expiry of his sentence out of his reach and lead him to believe that a trial for treason awaited him in the UK if he eloped there. In the absence of a broker, Obed agreed to the repatriation, the terms of which probably seemed utterly obscure to him. In December 1947, he boarded a ship in Liverpool and reached Bombay a few weeks later.[866]

The decisions, of course, were all made over Obed's head. He was determined to return home and actively worked towards this goal.[867] To set the stage, he asked the Irish Foreign Minister Frederick Boland if he "*might not be allowed to return to Antwerp to his wife and children."*[868] In addition to a made-up family, he procured an authentic "certificate de bonne vie et moeurs" from the Belgian police, issued in June 1946, and other valid identity papers.[869] When these efforts were in vain, he applied with the Belgian Legation in Dublin for a "laisser passer", which would permit him to enter Belgian territory even without a British passport. Upon the intervention of the imperial government, whose officials already had other plans, his request was denied.[870]

Back in India, Obed returned to his ancestral home in Lucknow. He arrived in the midst of the communal riots and massive displacement of both Hindus and Muslims during the partition of British India into two separate states in August 1947. Muslims who had chosen to remain in the territory of the newly founded Indian state instead of migrating to Pakistan faced severe discrimination from the Hindu majority, even in cities with a longstanding Muslim tradition such as Lucknow or Delhi. Obed expressed the distress he felt in this tense political climate in an uncharacteristically moody letter to Carolina, which he sent from Calcutta in November 1949:

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[865] Ibid., p. 154; p. 149; p. 150.

[866] Hull, *Irish Secrets*, p. 255; IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 168; PK Antwerpen 2001 C 2517, Nota 329. His name appears on the list "Names and Descriptions of Passengers Embarked at the Port of Liverpool" The Empress of Australia (P&O/Canadian Pacific Steamships Limited) left for Bombay on 4th December 1947, ancestryinstitutions.com, last accessed on 17.3.2021.

[867] IOR/L/PJ/12/477, p. 142.

[868] Ibid., p. 149.

[869] Ibid., p. 170, a certificate of good conduct.

[870] Ibid., p. 169.

> I am having a rotten time in India, being a Muslim and Musalman men are regarded here as suspect.[871]

And further:

> Write to me a long letter telling me all about yourself, how you are spending your time in my absence? Recently your letters are very short.

In addition to his fear, homesickness, and jealousy, the death of his mother earlier that year might have added to his overall discomfort.[872]

As one of his first encounters with the new regime, he was ordered to reimburse the costs of his 'voluntary' repatriation to the Indian government in cash, which he did in August 1948.[873] He subsequently felt entitled to rightfully apply for a new passport with endorsement for Belgium. Having exhausted all other options, he wrote a petition letter to the newly elected first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, in February 1948. Printed in O'Malley's monograph, it throws an interesting light on his persuasive efforts. To rebut the objections Nehru might have had on account of his wartime imprisonment, he explained his motives:

> Malik Rauf of the Berlin Radio then came to me and told me that all Indians must do something for the motherland and remarked 'Plight of England is an opportunity for India'. I was much impressed and gladly agreed to work for the motherland. I was asked to go to Éire to assist Irish National Army against Britain, as Germans had good relations with it. I accepted the suggestion and secretly reached Ireland with other co-workers.[874]

In this nationalist and heroic diversion from the actual events, he set a precedent which we are going to encounter again in his subsequent attempts at securing travel documents. Not only did he fashion himself as a patriotic Indian, devoted to the cause of independence but he also changed the narrative in a way, which gave him back some agency. He had not passively joined an amateur sabotage mission but had actively taken part in a military campaign for the freedom of the motherland alongside his 'co-workers'.

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[871] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 51.

[872] Ibid., p. 98.

[873] Salig Ram Tandon to Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, 13.9.1948, NAI/File No. 127:48-F I,

[874] O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire,* p. 144, cited from: Obed to Nehru, 18 Feb. 1948, IMA/G2/X0375.

Contrary to O'Malley's claim, the letter did not have the hoped-for result.[875] It was rather only the beginning of another energy-sapping round of petitions, inquiries, and applications vis-à-vis the Indian government, which eventually left him with no option but to clandestinely escape the subcontinent.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Obed was supported by an elite network in Lucknow. In November 1948, Saligram Tandon, Member of the Legislative Council, urged Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, the first Minister for Communications, to endorse his application for travel documents, which had previously been refused by the local (Lucknow) police.[876] The former attempted to set Obed's wartime record straight by referencing his anti-colonial attitude:

> He was interned at Eire during the world war, as he was against the British.[877]

Kidwai forwarded the request to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Home Minister and leader of the independence movement. Sympathetic to Obed's cause, he made an interesting remark:

> Will it be possible to review the case and if there is no record of Anti-National activities Anti-British activities may be ignored and a Pass Port issued.[878]

Despite this intervention, the Indian authorities refused Obed's application on account of his previous record as an arms smuggler. In consultation with the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations and the Intelligence Bureau in Delhi, the Home Ministry decided not to grant him passport facilities to travel abroad. In a minute to the Home Ministry, IB gave a straightforward explanation for their outright refusal:

> In view of the present deteriorated communal situation in the country and the existence of several subverssive [sic!] movements it will be undesirable to allow Obed to go back to Belgium to indulge in his nefarious trade again.[879]

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[875] Ibid.

[876] Salig Ram Tandon to Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, 13.9.1948, NAI/File No. 127:48-F I.

[877] Ibid.

[878] Ibid., Kidwai to Patel, 23.09.1948.

[879] Ibid., Intelligence Bureau.

In the above two citations, we can see how the young Indian state already emulated the governing rationale of its colonial predecessor. Anti-national became the new anti-British and the containment of communal tensions replaced the prevention of anti-imperial uprising as a pretext for the rejection of travel documents to an inconvenient individual from the Muslim minority.

After an application with the U.P. government and the Chief Commissioner of the Delhi police had also been rejected, the Indian government believed it had quenched Obed's desire to emigrate.[880] They were all the more petrified when they found out that the troublemaker had left the country once again in June 1949.[881] IB suspected him to have escaped via Dacca to West Pakistan, which would have been a national embarrassment. To complicate the matter, his wife had applied for a passport with endorsement to India and a couple of European countries at the Indian embassy in Brussels around the same time, arguing that she derived her nationality from her husband and was hence entitled to these documents.[882] She was now in charge of the livestock business and needed to travel to the United Kingdom, Holland, France, Germany, and India to connect with her clients.

Had Obed actually obtained a new passport from Pakistan, he would have forsaken his Indian nationality, meaning that his wife's entitlement to an Indian passport would be equally invalid.[883] A myriad of inquiries with the Pakistani government was supposed to clarify the issue, but Karachi was in no hurry to respond.

Before the Ministry of External Affairs could react to the incoming rumours about Obed's arrival in London, the refugee was already on his way to Belgium.[884] Their frustration for being unable to prevent the security leak is perhaps best captured in a minute from Ranbir Singh, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

> He somehow escaped to Pakistan and from there went to Belgium via London. Obviously he must have obtained a travel document from the Govt of Pakistan. This has not been confirmed since the Pakistan Govt have not replied to our letter in spite of having been

[880] NAI/S. No. 1-24 1224, Ministry of External Affairs to I.B., June 1949.
[881] Ibid., I.B.
[882] Ibid., Ministry of External Affairs to I.B., June 1949.
[883] Ibid. I.B., December 1949.
[884] Ibid., I.B., 24.10.1949.

> reminded repeatedly. Without their reply it is very difficult for us to determine the present nationality of Mr Obed.[885]

When Obed was arrested in Antwerp on March 17, 1950, for entering the country illegally, and Pakistan finally denied any intervention on Obed's behalf, the anti-Muslim conspiracy collapsed.[886] To the Indian government's dismay, Obed was again their liability. Having missed the opportunity to strip the inconvenient merchant of his freedom of movement by turning him into a Pakistani, they again considered his repatriation.[887]

Given his poor state of health, the months-long flight with multiple stopovers must have been extremely taxing. Whether Obed actually took the detour via East and West Pakistan cannot be determined. According to the Antwerp immigration authorities, he stowed away on a steamer in Bombay and alighted in Marseille, a story much more consistent with his past escapes.[888] In the light of contradictory archival evidence, his itinerary also remains an object of speculation. His last vital sign before he eventually reappeared at his old home in Antwerp on March 15, 1950, was his letter from Calcutta dated November 1949.[889] According to the foreign police, he entered Belgium by train via Marseille-Paris-Brussels, where a deportation-notice already awaited the refugee.[890] Perhaps in order to avoid the pending arrest, he immediately left the country and presumably resided with Col. Habib-ul-Rehman in London. In December 1949, his wife informed the immigration office in Antwerp:

> At present, my husband Mr Henry Obed is in France and within a few days I am expecting him home. As soon as he is home he will certainly call on you.[891]

Only two days after their reunion, Obed was arrested by a paramilitary police force. He had intended to register with the foreign police (his old entry had been deleted in 1941)[892] but

[885] Ibid., I.B., 24.4.1950.

[886] Ibid., Express Letter from Embassy of India, Brussels, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 1950; ibid, High Commissioner for India in Pakistan to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 1950.

[887] Ibid., Reference to Express Letter from Embassy of India, Brussels, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 1950.

[888] PK Antwerpen 2001 C 2517, Nota 329.

[889] Ibid.

[890] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 44 (22.11.1949).

[891] Ibid., p. 46, Carolina Obed to Smeyers, 1.12.1949.

[892] Ibid., p. 48.

was dismissed because of his criminal record and lack of papers.[893] He was taken to Brussels, where he found himself once again in police custody.[894] His wife called the Indian embassy but was given a negative answer on account of his past activities against the state. She would not accept the rejection and *"protested that her husband was a patriotic Indian and that it was only the British who were after him."*[895]

Her argument is consistent with previous references to his alleged nationalistic feelings. She was, however, unable to convince the consular authorities, who were under a lot of pressure from the Indian government to deny him any assistance whatsoever.

Instead of receiving diplomatic support, Carolina was interrogated about her husband's escape route from India, a puzzle which the Indian government was still determined to solve. Pleading ignorance, she refused to give any information.[896]

After a couple of weeks in the Brussels detention centre "Klein Kasteeltje", the migrant was given an ultimatum by the Minister of Justice to exit Belgian territory by September 14, 1950.[897] On account of his poor health, the order was postponed several times. In January of the following year, the harbour police informed the foreign police that Obed was still residing in the country. He was in the possession of a medical certificate confirming his lung disease, which required him to take complete rest and refrain from traveling or other physical exertion.[898]

Obed never fully recovered from his illness; it had weakened him considerably. Irrespective of the cancellation of his work permit, his physical condition would have prevented him from returning to his pre-war occupation. His wife, who had already taken over the seamen's supply store and the animal business, was now also given the task of nursing her husband.

6.8 Return to Antwerp and death

According to a resilient rumour, which has penetrated many historiographic works on the Indian, Obed became the victim of a homicide. Hull and O'Malley both claim with some

[893] PK Antwerpen 2001 C 2517, Nota 329.

[894] NAI/S. No. 1-24 1224, Express Letter from Embassy of India, Brussels, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 1950.

[895] Ibid., Express Letter from Embassy of India, Brussels, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 1950.

[896] Ibid.

[897] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, pp. 40–3.

[898] Ibid., p. 112.

conviction, but in total disregard of the archival landscape, that Carolina herself had taken her husband's life. Hull's take on his final years runs as follows:

> Based on his earlier history with illegal weapons, his application was rejected and he accordingly made an application directly to Nehru once India became independent from Great Britain (1947). In the end, both he and his German-born wife were granted Indian passports and Obéd was finally free to return to Antwerp. His story, like that of Hermann Görtz, ended tragically. In 1952, Henry Obéd was murdered by his wife – allegedly after she discovered an affair between her husband and the daughter of a police official.[899]

As a thorough and comprehensive reading of the sources has shown, Obed had neither been granted passport facilities in 1947 nor had he been murdered in 1952. My intention is not to expose Hull as a deficient scholar but to exemplify the challenges historiography faces in light of contradicting archival material and to underscore the potential of microhistory and historic biography as tools of understanding history. By taking into account all material available on a singular issue – in this particular case, the records of the Antwerp foreign police as well as local newspapers, which took an interest in the curious circumstances of the migrant's death – an entirely different picture emerges.

On February 20, 1951, Obed had bought a portion of sodium sulphate from the pharmacy nearby, where he was a regular customer, in order to relieve occasional constipation. On the following day, he consumed one teaspoon of the salt with his morning coffee and immediately afterwards complained of agonizing stomach pain.[900] As the treatment with an antidote powder from the pharmacy and shots of Ephèdral und Synopèn from his regular physician failed to improve his condition, he passed away in the presence of his wife on February 21, 1951, at 11:45 am on a resting bed in his kitchen.[901]

The physician, Dr Sohie, was quick to assume poisoning as the cause of death and Francois Valcke, a police officer and good friend of the Obed family, ordered his colleagues to investigate the matter.[902] During the interrogations, it turned out that an employee of the pharmacy had accidentally packed toxic sodium fluoride in the container for medical sodium

[899] Hull, *Irish Secrets,* p. 255; O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire*, p. 144.
[900] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 104.
[901] Ibid., pp. 104–5.
[902] Ibid., p. 104.

sulphate, which the vendor subsequently sold to the customer, unaware of the confusion.[903] The case was taken up by the public prosecution and Obed's body was delivered to the morgue for an autopsy, which confirmed the unnatural cause of his death.[904]

The local press observed the proceedings at the criminal court of Antwerp with interest. Between February 1951 and October 1952, three feature-length articles illuminated the investigations and arguments exchanged in the court case. Eventually, the owner of the pharmacy was sentenced to six months of imprisonment and the instalment of Fr. 351,366 compensation to Carolina Obed, who had sued for Fr. 2,300,000.[905] Despite having managed the livestock trade as well as the waterfront shop by herself for the past ten years, she substantiated her claim with the devastating consequences her husband's death had on her financial situation:

> […] the victim ran a big business with wild animals for zoos and circuses and was further a ship merchant.[906]

She kept the seamen's supply store after his passing but gave up their house in St. Aldegondiskaai and shifted into their former animal depot in Statiestraat 15, Ekeren in 1964.[907] The property was acquired in 1986 by Carl Peeters (not from Carolina Obed, though), who sold it to a lawyer in 2008.[908] Henry Obed is buried in Schoonselhof cemetery in Antwerp. The blank space left on the tombstone next to his name, evidently intended for his wife, remains empty until today.

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[903] Ibid., p. 107.

[904] Ibid., p. 105; Gazet van Antwerpen, 24 February 1951, p. 5 "Geval van vergiftiging" (Case of Poisoning).

[905] Gazet van Antwerpen, 20 May 1952, p. 5 "Boetstraffelijke Rechtbank van Antwerpen. Noodlottige Vergissing" (Criminal Court of Antwerp. Fatal mistake); Gazet van Antwerpen, 29 October 1952, p. 4 "Boetstraffelijke Rechtbank van Antwerpen. Noodlottige Vergissing in de Apotheek" (Criminal Court of Antwerp. Fatal mistake in the pharmacy).

[906] Gazet van Antwerpen, 29 October 1952. The original text reads: "Eerst de burgerlijke partij, de weduwe Obed, bij monde van Mter Dillen, die betoogt dat er geen twijfel nopens de doodsoorzaak van het slachtoffer kan bestaan en die een schadevergoeding van 2.300.000 fr. Vraagt, onderlijnende dat het slachtoffer een zeer uitgebreide handel in wilde dieren voor dierentuinen, en cirkussen dreef en tevenns nog >shipshandler< was."

[907] Felixarchief, vreemdelingendossier, 177196, p. 3. The translation is by Siri van den Berg.

[908] This information was provided to me by Guido Staes in an e-mail exchange, 22.01.2021.

6.9 Summary

Summarizing the life story of Henry Obed is not an easy task. The turbulent years in Hamburg, his rise to prosperity, his espionage career, and his tragic death make for a truly unique biography of a South Asian migrant. In the cases of Hardas Singh, most sources were testimonies of an encounter between the Indian and other individuals. For Obed, this claim cannot be made as the material is much more diverse. There were encounters with police and military authorities, compatriots, and customers but also intelligence reports, newspaper articles, and police files which collected information on the Indian based on observations or investigations.

What stands out are the great variety of networks in which Obed was involved throughout his migrant years. Perhaps the most important sort regarding his successful settlement, were the seafaring networks. His first contact with the maritime world was established in 1915, when he signed on as a *lascar*. He maintained these contacts throughout his time in Hamburg and in Antwerp until 1940. Indian seafarers were his clients and his informers, his partners in crime and his enemies. They patronized his seamen's supply store and secured him a living but also threatened him by asking him to leave Antwerp and brought forward compromising allegations against the merchant. Eventually, it was through the activities of *lascars* involved in the SNOW case, which could be traced back to Obed that he became a prime suspect of being an agent for the Germans.

His Indian networks extended beyond the *lascar* community and beyond Antwerp. He was in touch with former seamen in England and Ireland and maintained communications with his family and friends in India. These contacts came in handy when he was forcibly repatriated to India and needed a safe place to stay during the communal riots of 1947. His escape from the subcontinent was aided by another Indian acquaintance of his residing in London, in whose house he was allowed to hide from the police.

Another important network was his cordial relationships with local women. Like Hardas Singh, he resided with a European resident of Sankt Pauli when he first came to Hamburg. Besides marrying a Hamburg native, who became his partner in life, he befriended various women in Antwerp. Among his contacts in prison in Ireland, with whom he held regular correspondence, was a lady friend from Antwerp, and his letters from prison were brought to him by the wife and daughter of an inmate he befriended during his stay in Mountjoy. While the nature of his relationships with male acquaintances were of ambiguous character, with such men often

framed as competitors or even enemies, his female contacts were always described in a positive manner.

The most ambiguous networks were the smuggling networks. Already during his time in Sankt Pauli, Obed got involved in the secret dispatch of communist literature on behalf of M. N. Roy, an operation which possibly led to his departure from the port city. It brought him to the attention of the IPI, who henceforth observed him relentlessly. They were aware of his smuggling activities from Antwerp for years and kept a close record, which finally culminated in his arrest and trial in Calcutta.

This ambiguity can be framed as a constant state of liminality in which Obed operated in. He made strategic use of liminal spaces, either physical, legal or emotional. His smuggling activities could only go on unimpeded for such a long time because the Indian and Belgian laws did not correspond. His places of residence were always close to the waterfront, where the maritime world of Indian seafarers met the merchant community engaged in global trade, both vital for his business objectives. He married a German woman but kept in touch with his mother in Lucknow throughout his life, even when he was imprisoned in Ireland. Making strategic use of the possibilities opened by these spaces "in between", he was able to climb the social ladder, overcome obstacles and defy enemies. Living in these spaces also meant, however, being continuously torn between worlds, navigating different sets of rules and regulations, crossing boundaries, shifting loyalties, and being in a constant state of flux.

Although the trial and subsequent impounding of his passport were turning points in his career, leading to the decline of his business and impediments to his mobility, it was only one step in a long sequence of unfortunate incidents with which he, the migrant, was confronted with. Not being able to obtain Belgian citizenship, he remained disenfranchised and without a social security network to shield him from random arrests and threats of expulsion. He was at the mercy of the British consular authorities, who, after a point, refused to grant him any travel documents. Neither was he eligible for any retirement fund nor did he have access to health or unemployment benefits, which made the disintegration of his business all the more dangerous for his migrant status. In addition, he encountered German racism and British chauvinism, making his time in prison but also his every-day life, a constant struggle.

In the light of these challenges and disadvantages putting limitations on his migrant possibility, his social relegation and eventual imprisonment might appear inevitable. Like Hardas Singh, Obed's socio-economic decline really picked up in the late 1930s, depriving him

of his means of income and subsequently of his freedom. Obed, too, spent the first half of the 1940s in a closed institution, which he, however, survived. After his release, he could not follow up on earlier achievements. Ravaged by diseases and the strains of his incarceration, he was unable to pursue his business properly and needed long-term nursing care from his wife. He possibly felt disillusioned and discontented by the limited returns of all his efforts and deprivations, but he nevertheless fought until the end.

7. Conclusion: Beyond non-elite South Asian possibility

As this thesis draws to a close, I summarize and reflect upon the most important findings of my research. Taking a microhistorical and qualitative approach, the aim of this thesis was to investigate the possibilities and limitations of a non-elite South Asian migrant pursuing a relatively independent, self-determined life in northern Europe. The historic biographies of Hardas Singh and Henry Obed, which have been constructed and then revisited repeatedly through the use of various archives and sources, expose a fascinating but little-known world. Their lives were eventful and complex but also marginalized, oppressed, criminalized, and exploited. Before their tragic deaths, both had lived a long life on their own terms, building up businesses, marrying, travelling, and overcoming obstacles of various designations.

According to historic biographical analysis, the degree of their success was determined by the networks they were associated with. Both were engaged in numerous socio-economic networks, ranging from the Indian communities in their respective places of residence, through political circles, merchant communities, to migrant quarters and the local female population. These networks enabled them to sustain themselves financially and socially, acquire customers for their business, supply goods for their trade, receive emotional support, arrange housing, and build the social security network which the state failed to provide. As much as these networks allowed them to settle and live life, they also threatened and marginalized their migrant existence. Smuggling networks guaranteed a second income but made them susceptible to expulsion and deportation; the Indian community was not always benevolent but could be jealous and even hostile, as they were competing for the same economic and social niches. Indian seamen could be customers as well as informers, messengers, or denunciators. The colonial state which Singh and Obed had tried to escape, the former by shooting a British officer and the latter by deserting his employment for the merchant marine, was always looming in the background, ready to take revenge on their disloyal subjects. Obed had been under constant surveillance by the IPI and local police authorities, and even Singh appeared in the files of the secret service as a potential revolutionary and Nazi collaborator.

The more imminent danger, however, was posed by the authorities of the state they had chosen as their new residence. Depriving them of employment opportunities, citizenship rights, social security, unemployment benefits, health care, residency rights, freedom of

mobility, and rights of political expression, the state pushed them to live a life on the margins of society. No matter how successful they were in their private and public endeavours, they were always just one step away from having it all taken away. This insecurity which I have described as a state of indefinite transit, physically and emotionally, took a toll on the migrants' physical and mental health. Hardas Singh, after being stripped of his source of income, spent the final years of his life in a mental hospital, disillusioned and desolate, while Obed suffered from a chronic lung disease which he contracted in prison.

This close-range analysis was supported by an extensive scrutiny of the social, economic, and political environment the migrants acted in. The analysis dissected the social space of the Sankt Pauli docklands as a space for non-elite South Asian migrants. The vibrant, multi-ethnic neighbourhood housed Chinese and African migrants alongside the German working-class inhabitants, predominantly employed in the harbour. The local population was diversified by a floating population of international seafarers, among them many Indian *lascars*. This milieu allowed for the settlement of Indian migrants. The South Asians gathered at the International Seamen's Club in Neustadt run by members of the communist party in Hamburg and in Hardas Singh's "Indian Bar" where they sought amusement and diversion. Just like the migrants depended on the maritime workforce as customers, the seafarers were fond of the recreational possibilities and shopping opportunities offered by their compatriots on land.

There were, however, limitations to the possibilities these spaces offered to Indian migrants. Especially during the rise of Nazi rule, certain localities ceased to be safe havens as they were raided and shut by the authorities. Even before the onset of fascism, the migrant spaces were mostly enclaves in a potentially hostile environment. Racism was prevalent in the 1920s, as derogatory contemporary descriptions of the Sankt Pauli underworld and the Chinese community have shown. Their marginalization was enhanced by the exclusionist politics of the maritime trade union. Instead of acting in solidarity with their workmates based on their collective experience of exploitation by the shipping companies, South Asian seafarers were regarded as low-wage competition and potential strike breakers.

Moreover, the Indian presence in Hamburg was shaped by the economic situation of the early 1920s. We encounter an interplay of possibilities and limitations, of advantages and disadvantages for South Asian migration. A strong incentive for the exclusively male Indian itinerants for moving to the port city were the financial opportunities the ruinous German economy added to their migration efforts. Anyone in possession of foreign currency could

invest profitably in the light of the devaluated German Mark, and the Indians particularly benefitted from their trade connection to the subcontinent.

They found themselves confronted with exclusionist policies and regulations derived from the will to create a culturally and racially homogenous nation state. The so-called "Inländerprimat" gave German nationals an advantage on the labour market, and the non-availability of German nationality and citizenship limited the employment choices of the migrants, who required special survival strategies. Since passports and registration with the police upon arrival had become mandatory, the newcomers could be monitored by the state at any time and their movement could be impeded if necessary.

Despite these exclusionist tendencies, in the early 1920s, the democratic reality of the Weimar Republic also enabled inclusion. Social benefits were granted to foreigners who fit certain criteria, did not disrupt the political peace, and, most importantly, did not burden the social security system of the state. For South Asian migrants, this meant that they had to become financially independent as quickly as possible. Since industrial labour and public offices were closed to non-nationals, self-employment, preferably where they could take advantage of their transnational networks, was the most promising option.

The rise of National Socialism closed this limited space of opportunity, which had been opened for foreigners in Hamburg in the interwar period. The second half of the 1930s saw the destruction of the Chinese community in Hamburg as well as the end of South Asian non-elite migration. After the war, neither of them returned until, in the 1950s and 1960s, a new generation of migrants arrived under entirely different circumstances and with different objectives.

To be able to make a more general statement about non-elite South Asian migration, this thesis compared the experiences of Hardas Singh and Henry Obed to lower-class and colonial migration to Germany and to non-elite South Asian migration to other countries. In the 1920s and 1930s, quite a few *lascars* deserted in New York and settled permanently in Harlem. They became part of the larger migrant community and often married women from the Caribbean. Like the Hamburg migrants, they opened shops and restaurants but also worked in the hotel sector. In Great Britain, seafarers only really started arriving in the 1930s. Like the migrants to Germany, they were confronted with an exclusionist, racist migration regime, the most prominent manifestation of which was the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Act of 1925. Like in Germany, foreigners had to register with the police immediately after arrival

and, in the British case, prove that they were (British) colonial subjects. In Hamburg, the amendment to the "Hafengesetz" (Harbour Act) of 1897 in 1925 ruled that ship captains had to provide a list of all crew members, containing information about their 'racial' identity, which had to be sanctioned by the harbour police before the sailors were allowed to aboard their vessel and enter the city. Its objective was to undermine "illegal" seaborne migration and was especially aimed at Chinese seafarers, who had started deserting in Hamburg in greater numbers around that time.

The Chinese migrants settled in a part of the Sankt Pauli district which became known as the "Chinese quarter". They opened laundry services and vegetable shops, restaurants, bars, and dance halls open to an international clientele. The night clubs were especially popular with the more open-minded visitors of the amusement district. Co-habitation, partnerships, and marriages between the Chinese men and German women were common, as the immigrants were regarded economically responsible and reliable husbands.

The other noteworthy colonial migration arrived from the former German colonies, especially from Cameroon. Incited to come to Germany as apprentices during the brief colonial period, some migrants stayed in the country after the First World War had closed the passage from Africa. Unlike the Indian and the Chinese migrants, the Cameroonians did not mingle much with the local population. They had their own community centres and businesses and did not form partnerships with the local female population. What they had in common, however, was the necessity to capitalize on their perceived otherness and venture into economic niches in which they would make money from performing or commercialising exoticism: Singh named his place "Indische Bar – Neu Haarlem" with a caged bird hung at its entrance, Obed imported and sold exotic animals such as monkeys and elephants from the subcontinent, and the African migrants often performed on the Reeperbahn as jazz musicians.

To weave these different histories of migration into the socio-political currents of the time, and to arrive at valid conclusions about the possibilities and limitations of non-elite South Asian migrants to Belgium and Hamburg, a methodological approach and historiographical tools were required. When I started my research, I was unsure whether the volume of the archival material would suffice for a historic biography. The sources were dense but only covered a few years of the migrants' lives. When prolonged visit to the archive materialized in a substantial collection of source material, the prospect of analysing their entire life trajectories became increasingly promising. The benefits of this approach are manifold.

Through the lens of the life story of one single person, one can understand the workings of society at large, an objective imperative to this investigation. The method is particularly feasible when researching people on the margin. A close-range analysis of an individual, whose trace would normally be missing from the historical records, can give valuable insights into an otherwise obscured world. In this dissertation project, the unique experiences of the marginalized are paramount. Instead of assuming a unanimous experience of domination and subordination as characteristic for oppressed people, this method seeks to focus on the infinite particularities of human perception.

In addition to historic biography and life-writing as methodological tools, this thesis applies the ideas of microhistory as instructed by Carlo Ginzburg and his colleagues and students. In the absence of quantifiable data, the experiences of the marginalized could be approached via a historical investigation at extremely close range. Like Ginzburg's world of the 16th-century miller Menocchio, the worlds of Obed and Singh as preserved in the archives formed a relatively well-defined, small object, which can almost be scrutinized in its entirety. Through comprehensive analysis of all material available about a single individual, the networks of its social relationships became tangible.

Following the paradigm of the "exceptional normal", coined by Edoardo Grendi, it became apparent that a truly exceptional document or series of documents can be more revealing than a myriad of stereotypical documents. The biographies of Singh and Obed are tokens of the historic realities of other individuals from the non-elite strata of society, which are often lost in the documentation of the elites. They allowed the exploration of a hidden world and to disclose the agenda of particular lower-class people, giving them the attention otherwise reserved for upper-class protagonists.

7.1 Networks

The life stories of Hardas Singh and Henry Obed proved to be excellent set pieces to analyse the possibilities and limitation of South Asian non-elite migration. They were involved in various networks which had an impact on the security of their settlement. Both had intimate contact with the floating Indian seafaring population which regularly populated the shores of Hamburg and Antwerp. For Obed, who had been a *lascar* himself for approximately five years, these contacts were particularly crucial. He always lived in the vicinity of the docks in order

to be able to reach out to the seafarers as customers for his supply store but also for his less legal transactions. Whenever ships from India arrived in Antwerp, the sailors approached Obed for information about the sale of contraband.

Hardas Singh also profited from his *lascar* networks. He visited the docks regularly and distributed his address card among the sailors and invited them to come to his bar. These customers guaranteed the profitability of his business and allowed the place to become a nodal point of a different network altogether. The bar operated within the communist network and temporarily functioned as a refuge for activists who sought cover and employment opportunities among the seafaring crowd.

Another important social network for both Singh and Obed were their engagements with the local female population. Obed's marriage to a German woman provided him with emotional support as well as practical help for his business endeavours. Whenever he was absent on business trips, his wife oversaw the tasks at home. Singh likewise interacted with European women based in Hamburg. He was married and divorced to Herta Dimme and later engaged to a Swiss dancer with whom he had a child, and he lived in the flat of a German landlady.

Another important survival mechanism was their involvement in the shadow economy. Obed was known to the police as a notorious smuggler, although the extent of his immersion in the illegal trade was probably exaggerated. He traded in arms, ammunition, and drugs and catered to clients in India and England. His maritime networks helped him to find carriers for the contraband, usually Indian seafarers who hoped to top up their insufficient wages. Singh was also accused of smuggling arms and ammunition, but he was never charged on any of the alleged crimes.

As much as these networks helped Singh and Obed to settle permanently and even move up the social ladder, as they generated income, provided housing, and enriched their private lives, they also posed a constant threat to their migration status. Operating within the shadow economy meant a regular transgression of the current laws, which made them susceptible to police observation and persecution. The IPI watched Obed from afar, sending their informers to spy on the migrant and then have them report their findings when they returned. The Hamburg and Antwerp authorities likewise collected surveillance material on the trader. The cancellation of his passport in 1934 delivered a severe blow to his business project, as he was thereafter unable to continue his operations, to which mobility was key.

Similarly, Singh's bar had always been situated in the grey are between legality and illegality. Sexual encounters between men had been made illegal since 1872 and the national socialist lawmakers aggravated the punishment in 1935. Hosting male prostitution could have easily resulted in the closure of the bar. In 1938, the authorities overhauled the establishment and deemed it to be filthy and violent. They accused the owner of tax evasion and fraudulent accounting, resulting in the closure of the bar. Deprived of his source of income, he was forced to take up daily wage work at the port but rarely managed to find employment.

7.2 Liminality

A second analytical concept this thesis pursued is that of liminality. I have argued that the migrants often found themselves in "liminal spaces", which could be of a geographical, political, legal, or emotional nature. To begin with, the First World War opened up such a liminal space, creating an environment in which it was possible for Singh and Obed to settle in Germany. The former was able to join the German army and thereby gain the right to legally reside in Germany after the war, probably receiving financial support from the government. The hostilities created an increased demand for Indian maritime labour, which allowed Obed to sign onto a British vessel without prior training as a seaman. In the wake of the severe economic crisis hitting Germany in the aftermath of the war, his possession of foreign currency allowed him to buy a shop at a relatively low rate and immediately start a business. Since both maintained networks bridging Europe and India, they operated between different legal systems. While trading in cocaine and weapons was illegal in India, there was no such restriction in Germany or Belgium. When Obed helped ship weapons bought in Antwerp to Calcutta, he did so within the confines of the local law. Hence, when the Indian authorities tried to convict him for the breach of the "Bengal Smuggling of Arms Act", they had to drop the charges since he had not actually committed a crime.

Singh's bar also operated on the margins of legality. It catered to people with all kinds of marginalized identities and was therefore on the radar of the authorities. In the social milieu of the Sankt Pauli neighbourhood, in which certain transgressions of the norm constituted the ordinary reality, it could thrive relatively undisturbed. Only when the persecution and exclusion of 'deviant' lifestyles and dissenting behaviours became more rigid during national socialist rule did the bar have to close its doors. Neither did Obed's business survive the grip

of National Socialism over Europe. When he was requested by the Abwehr II to employ his maritime networks for the smuggling of explosives to England in 1939, his insecure legal and social status left him with no option to decline. He became part of a hopeless espionage mission which forced him to abandon his livestock business and depart to Ireland, only to spend the war years in an Irish military prison. He returned disillusioned and chronically ill, having contracted a persistent bronchitis.

Lastly, Obed and Singh's personal lives and identities were marked by liminality. They had settled in Europe but always lived in the vicinity of the docks, married local women but kept in touch with their Indian families and customs, combined Indian headwear with European suits, lived in their new domicile for decades but never mastered the language. Both had received a certain degree or training in their childhood but never finished school and were part of neither the traditional working class nor the Indian elite. This impossibility of categorizing or fixing their identity provided them with the opportunity to constantly reinvent themselves, thriving in the absence of restraining norms and rules. However, they also lived in a constant state of transit, often lacking social, financial, legal, and emotional stability.

7.3 Open questions and reflections

As much as I was able to piece together the biographies of Singh and Obed, many questions remain unanswered, and many puzzles unsolved. It seemed as if with every code deciphered, two more riddles emerged, which were even more complex than the previous ones. Moreover, many observations remained vague and speculative. For example, it was not possible to illuminate the connection between the Indian smugglers and the pharmaceutical industry. Where the drug dealers got their supplies from needs to be the subject of another historical investigation. The ultimate reasons for Obed to move from Hamburg to Antwerp and later to work for the Abwehr remain equally opaque. Why he was recruited and why he agreed to follow through with the instructions he was given by his German employers cannot be determined. There will always remain blank spaces in any historic biography, no matter how many sources the researcher is able to procure. After all, not all our thoughts, actions, emotions, fears, and hopes are traceable.

Lastly, there must be room for some reflections and moments of self-doubt. How much did I really do justice to the lives of Henry Obed and Hardas Singh? Did I represent them in a way

they would have endorsed, or did I produce just another distorted reality, a condescending and simplified picture of their lives? In the Introduction I subscribed to Stephanie Smallwood's agenda of recognizing the "epistemological instability" or "epistemological anxiety" of the western archive and to unveil the story of the marginalized contained in the archive's rhetorical strategies of silencing and concealing other historical truths. I claimed with some conviction, evoking the authority of senior scholars, that it was possible to hear their voices in even the most purpose-driven documentations, such as police interrogation reports, surveillance reports, and court protocols. Did I, with my intimate, or one could say intrusive, depiction of their life story, contribute to a better understanding of the workings of the exclusionist state, the expanding European migration regime, and the restricted labour market, or did I just work towards my own academic advancement? We know from other accounts that some victims of state violence and oppression actually did not wish to have their stories revealed. They perceived scholarly efforts as an intrusion into their private lives, even as attempts to disturb their healing process by opening up old wounds.[909]

Eventually, it is not up to me to answer these questions. This thesis as a contribution to the study of migration, of networks, and, most importantly, of liminality. The cases of Indian non-elite settlement tell the story of lives, not only at the margins, but also between different systems of oppression, exclusion, and subjugation, and also of possibility, agency, empowerment, and upward social mobility. In the liminal space between the jurisdiction of two different states, where certain actions were forbidden in one but allowed in another, Obed was able to transfer contraband from Belgium to India. In the battle between various state powers for domination, Hardas Singh was able to transcend enemy lines, switch loyalties, and forge new allegiances. What might have been an act of desperation with an uncertain outcome developed into an opportunity of re-settlement, of starting a new life abroad. The First World War opened a liminal space for both migrants, volatile and unstable at first, which manifested into a chance to develop and grow, thrive, and struggle, in the interwar period. They occupied many of these in-between spaces, physically and emotionally; they were married to German women and stayed in touch with their family in India, they lived close to the waterfront but were settled on land, they operated in the shadow economy and

[909] See, for example, Han Kang's intervention on the Gwangju massacre of 1980, in: Han Kang, *Human Acts*, (London: Hogarth Press, 2017).

oscillated between poverty and wealth, prison and freedom, exclusion and acceptance, oppression and independence.

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8. LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

Abwehr II	Abwehr II Western Group
DDG "Hansa"	Deutsche Dampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft Hansa
DVB	Deutsche Verkerhrsbund
GRT	Gross Registered Tons
HBV	Hafenbetreibsverein
IIC	Indian Independence Committee
IPI	Indian Political Intelligence
ISH	International of Seamen and Harbour Workers
Interclubs	International Seamen Clubs
IRA	Irish Republican Army
KPD	Communist Party of Germany/Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
NfO	Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient
POW	Prisoner of War
TOI	Times of India