LANGUAGE OF MIGRATION

Self- AND *Other-* Representation OF Korean Migrants IN Germany

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INTRODUCTION

I attended a conference on the West Coast in 2007 where I gave a paper on media representations of Korean nurses. I was the last speaker in a panel on multiculturalism in Germany, and the small room was filled with about thirty to forty people. In my paper, I talked about how Korean nurses who had come to Germany as guestworkers had been exoticized and objectified in German newspaper articles in the 1960s and 1970s. I also explained that the language of German newspapers had become less discriminatory over the decades. I was pointing out discursive instances of what is called *positive discrimination*. Various newspaper articles, for instance, described the Korean nurses' physical features and their especially accommodating personalities. They were said to have long, black hair, almond-shaped eyes, and to behave in a naturally friendly, submissive, and demure manner. The Korean nurses received a "better" review than their fellow male countrymen working in German coal mines, but the media descriptions nevertheless de-individualized them and created expectations of these particular female guestworkers as non-confrontational human beings.

While I was reading my paper, I randomly looked up at the audience and noted a mass of expressionless faces before me. Still certain of the value of my scholarly contribution, I kept reading. As soon as I finished, a senior professor from a renowned university asked something to the effect of: "So, are you saying that we are not allowed to generalize anymore? I mean, I would be happy, if someone called me 'sweet'!" His comment drew some laughter and

nods of agreement throughout the room. Not at all expecting this type of comment and, frankly, somewhat taken aback by the almost mocking tone in which the question was asked, I replied that he may have missed the point of my presentation. The question truly perplexed me because I had included an explanation of the notion of positive discrimination in my paper. In a nutshell, the idea is that comments that seem to be positive can nevertheless also be discriminatory. A sweeping statement about the "naturally" sweet personality of Korean women, for example, generalizes them and takes away their individuality. However I argued that afternoon, my words fell, for the most part, on deaf ears. It took me weeks to recover from this academic confrontation, but I was not able to pinpoint exactly what it was that had shaken me so much. After all, the aforementioned scholar did not say anything that was overtly aggressive. He did not attack me verbally. He simply asked a question. Nonetheless, this man's single comment made me doubt the integrity of my research and its purpose.

It was not until a conference on Korean migration in Germany in 2008 that I regained my confidence in my research topic. A fellow German researcher with a migration background mentioned that incidents like the one I had endured had led to the need for discussions in "geschütztem Raum" ("protected space"), where migrants or scholars of migration could discuss relevant topics without having to fear mockery or discrimination. Later, I read Philomena Essed's seminal book *Understanding Everyday Racism* (1991) and realized that I had had a hard time responding to the aggression that I had encountered in that particular comment in 2007 because it was covert. A perfect example of what Essed calls *everyday racism*, or racism that is subtle and not straightforward, this incident eventually spurred my desire to continue with my research project. As Essed states in her book, racism does not have to be aggressive or physical to have an effect on its target. Indeed, the accumulation of such seemingly minor incidents can have a lasting and damaging effect on one's psyche and sense of belonging.

As I continued my research on media representations of Korean immigrants in Germany, I realized that the German media had been kinder to Koreans than to other migrants, especially the Turks. The second generation of Koreans in Germany was even presented as successful mediators between two worlds. They were said to be highly educated, noncriminal, acculturated people. As positive as such a statement may seem, however, media analyses have shown that it is quite common for host societies to distinguish between "desired" and "undesired" immigrants. In fact, research suggests that a host

society is often accepting and tolerant of "outsiders," as long as they commit to the rules and expectations of said host society. Politics also can feed into this state of affairs. A case in point is that the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a well established political party in Germany today, has recently demanded an intelligence test for immigrants.[1]

In spite of their favorable reception in the media, second-generation German-Koreans[2] have not felt more accepted than other minority groups in Germany. The fact of the matter is, the praise they have received as successful migrants has not made them any less members of a "migrant group." Indeed, they still feel very much like foreigners. They remain the *Other*, the non-German. How could it be that this group could not feel German, since the media had never focused on the negative side of Koreans and there had never been open racism towards them? Analysis of their autobiographical narratives shows that, although they may not have seemed as foreign and "controversial" as the Turks in Germany, they nevertheless have a non-German appearance (i.e., non-Caucasian). First and foremost, they are perceived as Asians. The relatively low number of Asians in Germany may contribute to the belief that an Asian-looking person cannot be German, but the second generation's lack of identification with the German society, in which they were raised, is more than merely a question of skin color.

Over the course of this book, I examine the manner in which Korean guestworkers have created not only a life for themselves in Germany but increasingly also their own distinct identity.[3] In Chapter One, I give an in-depth overview of the forms of discrimination treated throughout the rest of the book. Surrounded by and, to some extent, even created in reaction to forms of everyday racism, Koreans in Germany have found it challenging to claim for themselves the sort of hyphenated identity suggested in the name "German-Korean." This chapter discusses the manner in which analysis of the media can uncover racist images that otherwise might pass as descriptions of a generally accepted reality. I also explain how Critical Discourse Analysis

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1. CDU-law expert Peter Trapp demanded intelligence tests for immigrants in a newspaper article. He explained that Germany needed to benefit from immigration and thus Germany should be able to choose its immigrants (*Spiegel.de*, June 28, 2010).

2. I purposefully use the expression *German-Korean* (instead of *Korean-German*) to mirror the German compound word *Deutschkoreaner* which focuses on being Korean rather than being German.

3. All chapters include sections of earlier published articles on this topic which were significantly restructured and updated for this book. Please see Roberts (2008a; 2008b; 2010).

(CDA) and the German variety of postcolonial theory shed further light on the complexity of the issues in this study.

In Chapter Two, I contextualize the initial migrant experience of first-generation Koreans in an examination of newspaper articles (mostly headlines) on guestworkers in general. Who were the many guestworkers, and how were they received? To understand the Korean experience as something distinct, one must first know the more general fate of guestworkers in the media. In creating this general media image, I collected data in 2008 from newspaper articles at the *Migration Archive* (*DoMiD*) in Cologne as well as from the online archive of the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. These articles span the years from 1955 to the present.

Against the background provided in Chapter Two, we can discern differences between Koreans and other guestworkers, and Chapter Three focuses on depictions specifically of Korean migrants. Covering full articles on Koreans in Germany, this chapter shows how the portrayal of Koreans varied, according to both gender and also generation. As mentioned above, the women received seemingly positive media coverage. However, it was discriminatory. Conversely, the media coverage of the Korean men, sparse though it was, must be categorized primarily as negative, much like depictions of other guestworkers at the time. Even though both the women and the men were needed in the German labor force and thus were advantageous to German society, for many years only the women appeared in the media as "desired" guestworkers. Later, when the second generation began to appear in the media, references to guestworkers had become more sympathetic to difficulties they faced, and the children of Koreans in Germany were celebrated as the model minority.

For several decades, the media had the final word on the life of Koreans in Germany, but eventually these guestworkers began to publish their own autobiographical pieces in German. Chapter Four analyzes such works of first-generation Koreans as *Zuhause: Erzählungen von deutschen Koreanerinnen* ("At Home: Stories by German Korean Women") (2006) and *Ich war koreanischer Gastarbeiter in Deutschland* ("I was a Korean Guestworker in Germany") (2001). With these texts, Koreans in Germany finally decided to speak up and voice their opinions about their past struggles. *Zuhause* (2006), edited by Heike Berner and Sun-Ju Choi, is a collection of essays written by Korean women who came to Germany in the 1960s and early 1970s to work. At the time, hospitals in Germany were in need of nurses. After a bilateral labor contract, South Korea sent initially 3,000 nurses to work in Germany for three years. In *Zuhause*, these women tell their stories of arrival, culture shock, and

acculturation. Similarly, the autobiography *Ich war koreanischer Gastarbeiter in Deutschland* (2001), written by K. S. Park, is a narrative of a Korean man who came to Germany in the 1960s to work in the coal mines. At the time, miners were also needed, and Germany gave contracts to roughly two thousand Korean men. Much like the narrators in *Zuhause*, Park describes his experiences during his first few years in Germany and the struggle with language, culture, and work. Both the women and the one Korean man attempted to create a new identity for themselves in Germany, but only the women succeeded. Of course, Park alone cannot be taken as a representative of all Korean men in Germany, but his book gives some insight into what it was like to be a Korean worker in the German mines.

Although it is easy to understand how the first generation, who had to cope with discrimination, never felt completely at home in their new country, it is less immediately apparent why the second generation also has not felt truly accepted by German society. Chapter Five looks specifically at one book and two films by second-generation German-Koreans. Martin Hyun's book *Lautlos—ja. Sprachlos—nein: Grenzgänger zwischen Korea und Deutschland* ("Silent—Yes. Speechless—No: Border Crossers between Korea and Germany") (2008) offers deep insight into the issues of the second generation. Cerin Hong's documentary *Ise Kyopos* ("Second-Generation Koreans Living Abroad") (2004) and Young-Soo Chang's documentary *Ißä-Dreimal Kyopo* ("Second Generation—Three Times Koreans Living Abroad") (2005) interview second-generation German-Koreans about their lives in Germany and about growing up *Kyopo* ("Korean(s) living abroad").[4] While they are indeed expected to move between two worlds, as mentioned earlier, members of the second generation feel marginalized in both. They see themselves as not belonging to Germany, partly because they believe that Germans do not see them as Germans but always as foreigners. In Korea, however, they are no less foreign. Ironically, whereas some of their parents were able to negotiate a hybrid identity for themselves, the second generation identifies itself as having what I call a "non-identity." That is, they are neither German nor Korean.

In summary, *Language of Migration* analyzes a variety of genres that depict Korean migration in Germany—namely, newspaper articles, autobiographical narratives, and documentaries—and deconstructs the language of these texts to provide a more layered picture of the discursively constructed identities of

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4. There are different ways of spelling the Korean loan word that refers to the second generation: *Ise, Ißä, and Isae*. However, the latter can be found more commonly.

this particular group. By applying methods of media analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and postcolonial theory to the intertextual and interdiscursive data, colonial discursive practices in *Other*-representions of Koreans in the German media and postcolonial forms of resistance in *Self*-representations of Koreans in autobiographical narratives in the German language reveal themselves. In the past research on migration and research on migrant literature were separate entities with little opportunity to cross, but these two research methods are brought together here in order to examine both sides of the discursive coin.