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South Asian Soldiers and German Academics: Anthropological, Linguistic and Musicological Field Studies in Prison Camps

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Voice recordings in prisoner of war camps

The German Emperor is very wise.

He wages war against all kings.

When the war is over,

Many stories will be printed.

In India the Englishman rules.

We had no knowledge of any other king.

When the war began,

we heard of several kings.

In India this is a problem:

The people know nothing.¹

On 9 December 1916, Sib Singh, a Sikh from Amritsar (Punjab), spoke these words into the funnel of a gramophone that had been installed in the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf near Berlin. For the German academics who had set up the recordings, this self-composed text served as a typical example of the Punjabi language. It was recorded onto one of the 1,650 wax records made in German prisoner of war camps between 1915 and 1918 by the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission established specifically for this purpose. Prisoners from the Entente armies (Britain, France, Russia), their dependencies and colonies were chosen by the Commission to be the speakers. Most of the Asian and African colonial soldiers in German captivity were transferred for political reasons to special camps in the neighbouring towns of Zossen and Wünsdorf south of Berlin: here, in the ‘Weinberg Camp’ and the so-called ‘Halfmoon Camp’, they were to undergo political and nationalist indoctrination and be persuaded to rebel against their colonial rulers.

¹ Sib Singh from Amritsar/Punjab, “Story” in Punjabi, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 9 December 1916 at 5.15 (PK 610).

Promoted by the Prussian Ministry for Culture and financed by the Kaiser Wilhelm II Fund, the voice recordings were to serve linguistic research purposes and at the same time create a “voice museum of all peoples” in the words of initiator and organizer Wilhelm Doegen. Around the turn of the century, the linguist and language teacher Doegen (1877-1967) had strongly advocated the use of records for language lessons and, following the outbreak of the First World War, decided to use the prisoner of war camps for voice recordings in many different languages.² The academics entrusted with the task, many of whom were professors at Berlin University, began by questioning the prisoners about traditional songs and texts. For this reason many of the gramophone recordings, the majority of which are now kept in the Berlin Lautarchiv (Sound Archive), contain legends, fairytales, fables, religious texts and chants from individual ethnic groups. Texts freely formulated by the prisoners themselves, describing their personal situation in the German prisoner of war camp, revealing details of their biographies or the force of war-time circumstance that brought them to Germany are more rare. The passage by Sib Singh quoted above is one example: curtly he describes the effect that the outbreak of war in Europe had (on him) in India – the realization that kings existed outside of India, too. It also contains a clairvoyant or philosophical observation:

When the war is over,

Many stories will be printed.

Many stories did indeed come into existence when the war ended – with most versions of First World War history written from a European perspective. The awareness that non-Europeans involved in the First World War also wrote their story – history from a different perspective – has only recently developed.³ Up to date, the primary texts and documents from which the First World War is told have stayed the same: we find records kept by European war participants, the authorities and state institutions. Until now, the stories told by prisoners of war in German camps during the war have remained almost unknown – filed, as they are, in the sound archives of Europe, the home countries of the storytellers are unaware of their very existence. But it is these recordings that allow for a different perspective on history. They represent an alternative form of historiography.

² On Wilhelm Doegen, the Phonographic Commission and the Berlin Sound Archive, cf. the contribution by Jürgen Mahrenholz in this volume.

³ For historiography from an Indian perspective, cf., for example, Shahid Amin: *Alternative Histories. A View From India*, Amsterdam/Calcutta 2002.

The Scandalizing and Political Harnessing of the Exotic

The presence of fighting Africans, Asians, New Zealanders and other foreigners in Europe led to a strong reaction on the German side: shortly after the war broke out, the German press was rife with sensational reports alluding to the use of “cannibals” in enemy armies.⁴ It represented the deployment of colonial soldiers by the Entente states as military weakness and claimed it constituted a violation of the law of nations. In order to exploit the scandalizing in public of foreign prisoners for propaganda purposes, the German government consulted an expert: former diplomat Max von Oppenheim, a member of the ‘Information Office for the Orient’ (Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient) at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, suggested in his “Memorandum on revolutionizing the Islamic territories of our enemies” (*„Denkschrift betreffend die Revolutionierung der islamischen Gebiete unserer Feinde“*) of October 1914 that Indian prisoners, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, be indoctrinated without delay against their English colonial masters, because “of the countries to be revolutionized”, India was “by far the most important in terms of the ultimate success of the war”.⁵

Oppenheim detailed his plans: “Indian prisoners are to be presented as soon as possible to Mr. Walter or other people of trust so as to be thoroughly questioned by them about: their origins, the (military) formations they belong to, which Indians had at all come to Europe, their fellow countrymen in Egypt, who their officers are, the position of native officers, how the food supply for the Indians is organized in the enemy army etc. [...] Thereupon the Indian prisoners are to be transported speedily to a single prison camp in close proximity to Berlin, which, similar to that of the French Mohammedan soldiers, is to be completely cordoned off from other prisoners and any attempt by our enemies to influence them. They should, if possible, be separately housed according to religious community, race and caste. Already during the transport, in prison camps and in hospitals, religious duties and practices of individual Indian races should, to the extent possible, be taken into account. Most of them are vegetarians; Hindus are forbidden to eat beef, Mohammedans to eat pork. Funerals are to be carried out in compliance with their customs, and places for prayer [are to be] established. Furthermore, accommodation should, of course, be [sufficiently] warm.

⁴ Cf. Christian Koller’s contribution in this volume and Christian Koller: “Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt”. Die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik (1914-1930), Stuttgart 2001.

⁵ Memorandum on revolutionizing the Islamic territories of our enemies by Max Freiherrn von Oppenheim, Kaiserlicher Minister-Resident, October 1914, p. 85; political archives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IA-Weltkrieg, WK Nr. 11, R 20938, appendix to Volume 2.

Both German and Indian agents⁶ are to be kept in the camp at all times to act as interpreters, to observe the people, to assess who could be of use to us, who would be suitable as a leader etc.”⁷

The above-mentioned Paul Walter, a former missionary, worked for Oppenheim and was dispatched to the West Front as an interpreter, where he received the Indian prisoners of war. The Indian Bela Singh was particularly impressed by him:

*When we arrived in the city of Marseille
We ate well. Thus, all were happy.
We were placed in cars and the major gave the order:
'Go now, oh Lions, in the trenches, go!
Fight the Germans, why do you walk backwards?'
For two months we sat in the trenches
A few lions had had enough of fighting
The German canons hurled their artillery with great force
All ran off as they noticed the force
I was a hindrance as I could not run away.
When the Germans saw me, they needed their entire strength against me.
They took me with force.
Where – they did not tell me.
We were very happy when we saw Mr. Walter.*⁸

Paul Walter not only functioned as a political intermediary who saw to it that the Indian prisoners of war were transferred to the Halfmoon camp in Wünsdorf, but also as an interpreter, since political contact of any kind required acts of translation – and every audio recording, whether in Wünsdorf or other camps, required translators and translations. The collection of recordings in today's sound archives was envisioned replete with translations – the Prussian Phonographic Commission made it its task to produce a written version of each voice recording in the respective native language, a phonetic notation, and a German translation. In many cases, however, this did not materialise and translations for numerous recordings are missing. The colonial archive is an archive of translations, according to Shahid Amin.⁹ In this sense the sound archive is an archive of potential translation, its

⁶ Lit. “Vertrauensleute”, i.e. “men of trust”.

⁷ Ebd., p. 128f.

⁸ Bela Singh from Kotli/Amritsar, “Poem” in Punjabi, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 8.12.1916 at 1.40 (PK 589).

⁹ Shahid Amin: *Alternative Histories. A View From India*, Amsterdam/Calcutta 2002, p. 28.

real source being the audio recordings that (time and again) could and should be translated anew and differently.

*When the war is over,
many stories will be printed.*

And when the war is over, many translations will have to be done of individual stories each of which bears witness of the period in its own way. Few of these stories reveal details about the situation in Wünsdorf camp from an internee perspective. Muzaffar Khan's account exists only in the written version of the time, as the record with his voice was broken before it could be templated.

I was thirteen years old when I went to school. [...] After five months I reached the second grade, a year later, the third and altogether I spent seven and a half years at school. After that I felt like doing [military] service and that's how I became a soldier [lit. 'naukar']. I was a recruit for eight months and worked two months with the soldiers in my company. Ten or twelve days later I heard that war had broken out and we were to leave in four or five days. We travelled by train and betook ourselves to the theatre of war. We stayed eighteen days on board the ship. After eighteen days we went ashore at Suez. I did regular service there for a whole year. From there I went to Cairo.

In Cairo we received orders a month later that our regiment was to go to France and fight. I fought there for three or four days, then I was captured and came to Lille. I stayed there for three or four months with Mr. Walter. I said to Mr. Walter that we wanted to go to our Indian camp because we would feel comfortable there and would have no trouble with food and drink. When we got there and saw our brothers, we were happy. Before that we had huge complaints, since the food and drink did not tally with our needs.

We can cook our own food here ourselves and in the company of our brothers it tastes really good. We are very grateful for that.¹⁰

Far more familiar than the personal case histories of Indian soldiers, the majority of whom had already been captured by the Germans at sea or in the theatres of war in France and had landed in the "Indian camp" in Wünsdorf, were the stories propagated by the German government. Only a few months after Max von Oppenheim's recommendation in his memorandum, the construction of a wooden mosque had got under way in the Halfmoon camp, which was dedicated in July 1915. (illustration: Postcard of the mosque) This was the first mosque in Germany, which was used not

¹⁰ Muzaffer Khan from Dhaka/Punjab, "Life course" in Hindi, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 31.3.1917 at 12.10 (PK 824). The record is missing – it broke.

merely for decorative but for religious purposes.¹¹ Postcards of the mosque were distributed in their thousands and, on the one hand, are in the same line with the ubiquitous exoticizing motifs found on colonial postcards. On the other hand, their purpose was to prove to the rest of the world the exemplary and liberal manner in which the German Empire treated its prisoners. Thus, at a time when its colonies in Africa and Asia had already suffered military defeat, the Empire portrayed itself as a “good colonial master”.

Field research in the camp

As a result of the political constellation, German academics were drawn to the Wünsdorf camps in particular: on the backdrop of the mosque, they presented themselves as sites where types of research could be carried out that had been conducted on ethnographic expeditions to foreign lands prior to 1914, or in the course of so-called *Völkerschauen* that had been performed in many parts of Europe and included the exhibition of ‘exotic human beings’. Hence the camps functioned as a substitute for the ethnographic field and became a sort of colonial laboratory, enabling “field research” under regulated conditions in the researchers’ home country. Field research is a method of gathering empirical data through observation and enquiry in a “natural” context. Ethnology sees this method as the systematic research of cultures or specific groups, where the research scientist travels to their native environment and over a prolonged period of time shares their daily lives. The researchers collect information by means of so-called participatory observation and occasionally surveys, whereby they endeavour to remain as “objective” as possible.

Although the procedure had been aspired to for quite some time by European ethnologists, there was no theoretical basis for this type of research during the First World War – at the time it was in the process of being developed. The Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski is considered the “father of field research”. Equipped with a passport issued by the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, he travelled in 1914 to the Trobriand Islands in the South Seas. When the war broke out, the British troops stationed on the Islands interned him as a war opponent, in precisely the place where he had intended to study the “natives”. For three and a half years he was able to conduct his field research undisturbed, punctuated only by an occasional report back to the British colonial administrators. In 1922, Malinowski published the outcome of his research in a volume

¹¹ Cf. here, in particular, Gerhard Höpp: *Muslime in der Mark – Als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen, 1914-1924*, Berlin 1997; Margot Kahleyss: *Muslime in Brandenburg. Kriegsgefangene im 1. Weltkrieg*, ed. by Museum Europäischer Kulturen, 2nd ed., Berlin 2000.

entitled *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, in which he elaborated the methods of field research for the first time to a wide audience.¹²

The relationship between ethnological field research and war captivity also occupied leading German and Austrian anthropologists of the time. Rudolf Martin (1864-1925), professor of anthropology in Munich, made the following observation in 1915: “Indeed, due to the practice of our enemies to draw auxiliary forces from all sides, representatives of the most diverse peoples have come to Germany, who would otherwise never have put foot on German soil in such numbers”.¹³ Thus without any great effort, the “most diverse” strangers could – as previously in the case of the *Völkerschauen* – be explored in the academics’ own country without compelling them to undertake strenuous journeys to the native countries of the people concerned. Yet another euphoric reaction came from Rudolf Pöch (1870-1921), professor of the newly established and only chair of anthropology and ethnography at Vienna University since 1913: “The prisoner of war camps provide a hitherto unknown and unique opportunity for scientific research, they are an unparalleled *Völkerschau!*”¹⁴ For the researchers, the journey through the prison camp proved to be an inverse world trip; the camps served as a form of exhibition and an archive of ‘races’. The *simultaneous* presence of diverse nationalities attracted the particular attention of researchers involved in *comparative* studies: linguists, musicologists, sociologists, anthropologists and ethnologists.

In Austria, the impetus to conduct anthropological research in prison camps came primarily from the Anthropological Society and Rudolf Pöch. Body measurements and the accompanying photographic, phonographic and cinematographic recordings were for the most part financed by the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna and carried out between the summer of 1915 and November 1918.¹⁵ Unlike in Austria, where the focus was on a particular *discipline*, the German research group concentrated on a *medium*: the phonograph. Their main interest was the production

¹² Bronislaw Malinowski: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific : An account of native enterprise and adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1922 [German ed.:Frankfurt/Main 1979].

¹³ Rudolf Martin: “Anthropologische Untersuchungen an Kriegsgefangenen”, in: *Die Umschau*, Bd. 19, 1915, p. 1017.

¹⁴ Rudolf Pöch: „Anthropologische Studien an Kriegsgefangenen“, in: *Die Umschau*, Nr. 20, 1916, p. 988-991, here p. 989.

¹⁵ Cf., for example, Margit Berner: “Die ‚rassenkundlichen‘ Untersuchungen der Wiener Anthropologen in Kriegsgefangenenlagern 1915-1918”, in: *Zeitgeschichte*, Jg. 30, Heft 3, 2003, pp. 124-136; Idem: “Forschungs- ‚Material‘ Kriegsgefangene: Die Massenuntersuchungen der Wiener Anthropologen an gefangenen Soldaten 1915-1918”, in: Heinz Eberhard Gabriel/Wolfgang Neugebauer (eds.): *Vorreiter der Vernichtung? Eugenik, Rassenhygiene und Euthanasie in der österreichischen Diskussion vor 1938 (= Geschichte der NS-Euthanasie in Wien, Teil III)*, Wien 2005, pp. 167-198.

of sound, voice and music recordings as a first step in establishing a comparative sound archive. Felix von Luschan (1854-1924, Royal Ethnological Museum in Berlin, since 1911 professor of anthropology and ethnology at Berlin University) was called in as an expert on ethnology. He arranged for several young academic research scientists to take body measurements in prisoner of war camps; in comparison to the Viennese undertaking, however, this anthropological project was on a substantially smaller scale.

The Role of Heinrich Lüders

The person most concerned with Indian prisoners at the camp in Wünsdorf was Heinrich Lüders. As a professor at the Oriental Seminar of Berlin University and a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences¹⁶, he was the one responsible for research on Indian languages within the Prussian Phonographic Commission. He and his colleagues, Helmuth von Glasenapp and Professor Wilhelm Schulze, explored the relationship between so-called “Aryan” and “non-Aryan” languages. Lüders outlined his work in the manuscript for a lecture which he prepared during the war: “Among the Indian prisoners Sikhs, Thakurs, Mohammedans and Gurkhas can be found. The Sikhs speak Punjabi, Thakurs Hindi, Mohammedans Hindustani, and Gurkhas an Aryan language, either Khas or Gurkhali. In the course of the work, in which I included Mr. Schulze, it transpired that a large number of people among the Gurkhas still spoke their non-Aryan native languages. Almost nothing is known about these languages. The little we do know we owe to Brian Houghton Hodgson, who lived in Nepal from 1820-1847 occupying various positions, last as British Resident, and who has in every respect done more than anyone else in terms of knowledge of the country. However, the English did not continue Hodgson’s work, even though they have been recruiting their best troops from Nepal for over fifty years. The section on these languages in the *Linguistic Survey of India* clearly demonstrates how pitiable our current knowledge of the Himalayan languages is. Mr. Schulze and I realized that this provided us with an opportunity to make up for what the English had neglected to do, an opportunity unlikely to arise again for German scholars in the foreseeable future.”¹⁷

On the basis of the many dozen voice and song recordings supervised by these academics in the camp in Wünsdorf, Lüders saw fit to conclude that: “It seems that Khas, the superior language even though it may be badly garbled, has ultimately emerged as the winner; Gurung is dying out. Sanskrit, too, is on the winning side. The language of the aboriginal inhabitants has perished in the

¹⁶ Heinrich Lüders (1869-1943) was appointed to Berlin University in 1909 and at the same time made a regular member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences.

¹⁷ Handwritten presentation manuscript by Heinrich Lüders, undated; Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Archiv, Heinrich Lüders estate, Nr. 14: Die Gurkhas und Nepal, Bd. I-II, here p. 13f.

entire north of India. A few relics can be found only in the remote valleys of the Vindhya, just enough to gain an impression of the language. Thus the relation between Khas and Gurung provides an exact parallel to the development of Sanskrit. And, in my judgement, therein lies the significance of these studies. [...] It will then be possible to establish whether the Himalayan languages have a Mundarian substratum, i.e., whether they have been constructed on a layer of the Mundarian or Kolarian language, the language of the aboriginal inhabitants. This would prove that the Munda peoples had at one time spread as far as the Himalayas. Gurung has not shown any indication for this hypothesis up to now. The question of how these tribes migrated to Nepal can then also be solved.”¹⁸ Simultaneously, both Lüders’ colleague Felix von Luschan and Rudolf Pöch from Vienna worked on the so-called Aryan question from the angle of physical anthropology. (Illustration: Lüders during sound recordings in Wünsdorf)

During his studies, Heinrich Lüders had close contact with Indian scholars who lived in Germany during the war and helped him with the written versions and translations of the texts. The name that crops up most on the written documents that accompany many of the recordings is Tarachand Roy, an Indologist lecturing in Germany, who worked temporarily in Wünsdorf and produced translations of a number of recordings. Lüders was less successful when he asked Ardeshir Vacha for help. A lecturer at the Oriental Seminar in 1918, Vacha, as an “enemy alien”, was under such heavy police surveillance that he was forbidden to leave Berlin: “I am not allowed to mix with captive Indians. It would cause great inconvenience, which you surely do not want. Otherwise, I am always happy to provide assistance in Berlin.”¹⁹

Unlike his colleagues, Lüders emphasized that the voice recordings in the camps were not confined to traditional texts, but included those of contemporary relevance: “Many, possibly the majority, were able to read and write; however, they had not learnt how to write their language as children, but during their period of service. Some were in a position to write down longer stories from memory; these were usually stories rooted in the twenty-five tales of the vampire, a classic originally written in Sanskrit but later translated into almost every Indian vernacular. Certainly, the majority did not have the confidence to tell a coherent story. Instead they preferred to sing a song, either alone or accompanied by others. Among the songs are several that were undoubtedly sung in ancient times at celebrations, particularly the Dashara festivities. However, the ancient material is inextricably intertwined with the very modern. Old verses are constantly altered, extended and copied until something utterly new emerges. The singer is at the same time always to a greater or lesser degree the poet, and people know that too; ‘if I want to sing a song, I make one up’, one of

¹⁸ Cf. ebd., p. 30f.

¹⁹ Letter from A. Vacha to Heinrich Lüders, dated 7.2.1918 (emphasis in the original); Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Archiv, Nachlass Heinrich Lüders, Nr. 85.

them admitted. Hence most of the songs we managed to record came into being during the war or, at least, were then recast into the form in which they were sung for us.”²⁰

As evidenced in the source material, Heinrich Lüders behaved to all intents and purposes with respect towards the prisoners in Wünsdorf. He is mentioned as a supporter in a protest letter of May 1916 from the India Independence Committee²¹ to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning a further academic project in the camps: “We learn that Professor von Luschan intends to carry out anthropological measurements among the Indian troops in Wünsdorf Lager and that he insists on doing this in spite of advice received from certain well-known Professors of the Berlin University.” The name “Lüders” was added here in handwriting – the professor had evidently criticized the intention of Felix von Luschan. At the same time, another member of the Phonographic Commission, Carl Meinhof, an expert on African languages, stated he had the impression “that Lüders is genuinely worried about how his Indians will react to the measurements”.²² The protest letter to the India Independence Committee goes on to say: “We wish to point out the extreme danger of the plan proposed to be carried out by Professor von Luschan and we think that the strongest possible official steps should be taken to prevent it. The Sikhs especially will strongly resist on religious grounds any attempt made by Europeans to touch any part of the body and more particularly the head. Further, such measurements are associated by Indians with criminals. We beg to warn the Government that the laudable scientific curiosity of German Professors will be attended with very unpleasant consequences.”²³

The threat met with little success. Captain Nadolny, in charge of the matter at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made the following note: “A number of people have volunteered for anthropological examinations. There is no objection to this. The Indians have been informed.”²⁴ A few months later, body measurements were indeed carried out on Sikhs in the “Indian camp” in Wünsdorf – the files in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs give no indication whether further protests took place or not.

²⁰ Heinrich Lüders: “Die Gurkhas”, in: Wilhelm Doegen (Hg.): *Unter fremden Völkern. Eine neue Völkerkunde*, Berlin 1925, pp. 126-139, here p. 135f.

²¹ Cf. contribution by Heike Liebau in this volume.

²² Letter from Carl Meinhof to Felix von Luschan, dated 5.6.1916; Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlaß Felix von Luschan, Akte Meinhof.

²³ Letter from the India Independence Committee to Baron von Wesendonk/Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated 31.5.1916; Auswärtiges Amt Berlin, Politisches Archiv, PA-AA WK 11s, R 21256, Bd. 12, Bl. 271.

²⁴ Ebd., Bl. 272.

Physical Anthropology

Felix von Luschan, who was the Phonographic Commission's expert on ethnology, had advised his doctoral candidate, Egon von Eickstedt (1892-1965), in the summer of 1915 to examine an "anthropologically interesting" group such as Indians for his dissertation. In December 1916, von Eickstedt finally received permission to conduct studies in the Wünsdorf camps, where he worked until March 1917. He carried out the usual body measurements on, among others, 'Kabyles', Moroccans, Arabs, Indians and Gurkhas. He was obliged in this respect to adhere to the standards for research in the camps mutually agreed upon by von Luschan and his former student Rudolf Pösch, who had studied in Berlin in 1900/1901. Both based their methods on Rudolf Martin's seminal *Lehrbuch für Anthropologie in systematischer Darstellung* (A systematic account of anthropology)²⁵. As a means of achieving a reliable "diagnosis of race", Martin recommended highly standardized body measurements and "somatoscopic" observations with reference to non-measurable human physical traits, such as shape and colour of eyes, skin colour and nose shape. The data was then statistically evaluated. In his work Martin accumulated and unified various methods of data collection, as well as measurement and calculation procedures based on a specific assumption: during the 1830s, the astronomer Adolphe Quételet discovered that similar to astronomical samples, the indices of physical traits in human collectives were distributed randomly around a mean value. Quételet concluded that the mean value of the "average man" corresponded to the ideal "homme moyen" in a human collective, from which the actual human traits deviated slightly but in accordance with the laws of nature. Thus the average human being corresponded to the (ideal) "type" in a human collective, which in the context of anthropometry would appear statistically as a Gaussian bell curve.²⁶

Like numerous successors of Quételet, Martin agreed with this perception. But he did not limit data calculation to mere measured variables but included tools such as indices, the ratio of two measured variables. This mathematical approach suggested that human "race elements" or "biotypes" could be defined by evaluation of the measurements. Human "races" had been presumed by nineteenth-century European research scientists to be inherently permanent and reliably classifiable. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, experimental genetics led to the assumption that existing "race types" were heavily mixed. Eugen Fischer (1874-1967), who had qualified as a professor for anatomy and anthropology in 1900 and became professor for anatomy at the University of Freiburg in 1918, was a leading figure in this new branch of science. Fischer's study of the "Rehoboter Bastards" revealed that only certain characteristics were inherited but not

²⁵ Rudolf Martin: *Lehrbuch für Anthropologie in systematischer Darstellung*. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der anthropologischen Methoden für Studierende, Ärzte und Forschungsreisende, Jena 1914, p. 7.

²⁶ Adolphe Quételet: *Anthropométrie, ou mesure des différentes facultés de l'homme*, Bruxelles 1870.

the entire “race type”.²⁷ Hence the combination of human “races” would not produce new “races”, but rather “crosses” of those already in existence. It must therefore be possible – according to the logic of physical anthropologists – to deduce from the “mixed” populations the “original races”, i.e., the assumed “basic race types” which are no longer existent in their “pure” form in the present. They saw it as their task to disassemble the heterogeneous “peoples” into their “racial components” or “racial elements” by means of a series of measurements and mathematical procedures. Since they housed representatives of several, potentially related, “peoples”, prisoner of war camps seemed to be the ideal research area.

Once von Luschan had obtained permission for his doctoral candidate, Egon von Eickstedt, to carry out body measurements in Wünsdorf within the scope of the Phonographic Commission, the plan was implemented, despite misgivings by the India Independence Committee and a formal objection by Heinrich Lüders. Using the classic tools of physical anthropology, von Eickstedt went about the “types” von Luschan classified as interesting per remote diagnosis. He gave each person a serial number and wrote down the prescribed body measurements on standard forms. Between January 1916 and February 1917, he measured a total of 1,784 people in sixteen German prisoner of war camps and classified them into sixty-six different “peoples”. While the reports Pösch published in Vienna were couched in a clinical and success-oriented language (not least in the interests of applying for further funds), von Eickstedt’s letters from the prisoner of war camps to von Luschan in Berlin describe the many difficulties related to his examinations: disturbances in the data collecting process caused by the inability to establish the identity and ethnicity of the prisoners with certainty; many of those examined deliberately gave false information, attempted to escape measurement and had to be individually bribed; some measurements, such as the “height of ears on the head”, were not defined precisely; supplies were not forthcoming, etc.

Even the production of “typical” photographs became a problem. The doctoral candidate had to take photographs in the camps of whatever he saw or felt as “typical”, regardless of measurement results, since he lacked the funds to photograph all of the people he had measured. In retrospect he reports to von Luschan in 1919: “I photographed about fifteen Sikhs. I tried to capture the average type. [...]”²⁸ In the course of evaluation, however, he was forced to admit that his photographs, “taken years before discovering the race elements”²⁹, did represent imperfectly. He therefore resorted to two other sources of images originating in the Wünsdorf camps: on the one hand, drawings by the Jewish artist Hermann Struck, who had published them under the supervision and guidance of Felix von Luschan in 1917 in the booklet “Kriegsgefangene. Hundert Steinzeichnungen

²⁷ Cf. Eugen Fischer: *Die Rehoboter Bastards und das Bastardisierungsproblem beim Menschen*, Jena 1913.

²⁸ Letter from Egon von Eickstedt to von Luschan, dated 1./3.8.1919; STBBNLL.

²⁹ Eickstedt, “Rassenelemente der Sikh”, 1920/21, p. 355.

von Hermann Struck” (Prisoners of war. One hundred stone drawings by Hermann Struck)³⁰ and, on the other hand, photographs from the 1916 propaganda publication “Unsere Feinde” (Our Enemies) by camp commandant Otto Stiehl.³¹ In the 1921 edition of Eickstedt’s dissertation on “Racial Elements of the Sikhs”, the text does not contain any reference to the difficulties with regard to mathematically or visually capturing the ‘types’.

When the war is over,

Many stories will be printed.

For example the story about the Sikhs being a “heterogeneous” population with two “racial elements” or “biotypes” and three numerically lesser “type groups” or “phenotypes”.³² Von Eickstedt depicted his research results on seventy-six Sikhs from northern Punjab as coherent. He had, he wrote, measured each individual and analysed the data statistically according to Rudolf Martin’s recommended methods³³ – in other words he had calculated the mean value and standard deviation for individual measurements and their ratios. Initially he had assumed that the Sikhs from northern Punjab were a “homogeneous” group in terms of “racial elements”. However, his graph results did not indicate a uniform bell-shaped curve with one conspicuous peak – which according to Martin was evidence of a “racial element” – but two peaks. To render this finding unambiguous, von Eickstedt undertook several complicated measures, such as the inclusion of geographical data, to demonstrate that Sikhs – contrary to his assumption of a “homogeneous” group – were, in fact, a “heterogeneous” group containing two “racial elements”. (Illustration: von Eickstedt’s multi-peak curve)

One primary argument against the validity of von Eickstedt’s work is the underlying and questionable notion of human “races” or “racial elements”. Secondly, his selection was far from representative. Even in mathematical terms, the group was not large enough, nor was it accidental (a prison camp did not allow for the random selection of Sikhs, since only soldiers of a certain age group were interned), making the applied statistical methods mathematically untenable. Von Eickstedt’s work on Indian prisoners of war was nonetheless successful in as much as it advanced

³⁰ Kriegsgefangene. Ein Beitrag zur Völkerkunde im Weltkriege / Einführung in die Grundzüge der Anthropologie von Prof. Dr. Felix von Luschan. Hundert Steinzeichnungen von Hermann Struck, Berlin 1917. Published by permission from the Royal War Ministry.

³¹ Otto Stiehl: Unsere Feinde. 96 Charakterköpfe aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern, Stuttgart 1916. See also the contribution of Margot Kahleyss in this volume.

³² Cf. Eickstedt, „Rassenelemente der Sikh“, 1920/21, p. 366.

³³ Rudolf Martin: Lehrbuch für Anthropologie in systematischer Darstellung. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der anthropologischen Methoden für Studierende, Ärzte und Forschungsreisende, Jena 1914.

his academic career. When his research was complete, he went on to work, for example, at the University of Freiburg and the Natural History Museum in Vienna. From 1926 to 1929, he and his wife conducted an anthropological expedition in India: “The plan for my Indian expedition [...] began to take more concrete shape when, during the war, I was asked by the German government to examine coloured prisoners of war, including Indians.”³⁴ During the 1920s, von Eickstedt travelled to central India, and particularly around the south of the country. He also travelled to Birma, Ceylon and the Andaman Islands, where he carried out anthropometric measurements, took “type photographs” and collected ethnographic items. His subsequent publications brought him international recognition.³⁵ He was also invited to hold the inaugural lecture on his Indian expedition at the first assembly of the newly established (German) Society of Anthropology in 1929.³⁶

In 1929, von Eickstedt was appointed to the Institute of Anthropology at the University of Breslau, where he held the chair from 1933 until 1944, and pursued a brand of anthropology mingled with “race history” and “race psychology”. He combined his attempts at typecasting, which were still based on body measurements, with attributions of “racial characteristics”, which was borrowed from a form of ethnogeny or “somatomorphology” that had emerged from within the humanities. He thus turned against the assumption of eugenicists like Eugen Fischer that human races were exclusively predetermined by their genetic dispositions. Von Eickstedt undertook a second expedition to India from 1937 to 1939, availing of the opportunity to visit China, the Philippines, Malaya and Indonesia. The results were published in “Rassendynamik von Ostasien” (Race Dynamics in East Asia) in 1944.³⁷ Egon von Eickstedt, who had proffered his services to the national socialist party but was never accepted, is seen in German anthropology as the founder of the “Breslau School”, whose methods he taught at the University of Mainz, where he held a professorship from the end of the Second World War until 1961.

In the course of his prisoner of war studies, Egon von Eickstedt became acquainted with Rudolf Pöch. The Viennese anthropologist was also interested in measuring Africans and Asians, but he lacked the relevant “human material” in the Austrian-Hungarian camps. Von Luschan therefore invited his former student on a research trip to Wünsdorf in 1917. In August, September

³⁴ Egon von Eickstedt: “Überblick über Verlauf und Arbeiten der Deutschen Indien-Expedition 1926-1929”, in: Tagungsberichte der Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde 1929, Band 1, Leipzig 1930, pp. 63-84, here p. 63.

³⁵ His publications on “Negritos” and the “Negrito question” also appeared in the *Anthropologischen Anzeiger*, the *Ethnologischen Anzeiger* and the popular science journal *Umschau*.

³⁶ Egon von Eickstedt: “Überblick über Verlauf und Arbeiten der Deutschen Indien-Expedition 1926-1929”, in: Tagungsberichte der Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde 1929, Band 1, Leipzig 1930, pp. 63-84.

³⁷ Egon von Eickstedt: *Rassendynamik von Ostasien. China und Japan, Tai und Kmer von der Urzeit bis heute*, Berlin 1944.

and October of 1917, Rudolf Pöch and his assistant Joseph Weninger, conducted examinations in the Wünsdorf camp, financed by the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Small presents used as bribes facilitated their work with the prisoners. This explains the inclusion in the expense account of “100 cigarettes – 6 Mark” on 10 August 1917, “presents for prisoners” valued at 50 pennies on 21 August, and an “item for prisoners – 2 Mark 29 Pennies” on 5 September and so on.³⁸ On the other hand, assistance for the Viennese researchers came in the guise of the commandant of the “Weinberg camp”, Captain Otto Stiehl: he allowed his head to be cast in gypsum to set an example and dispel prisoners’ fears.³⁹ Pöch and Weninger had used this particular anthropological method along with describing, measuring and photographing the internees in Wünsdorf. In 1916, Pöch filmed the standard casting procedure in the Reichenberg camp (in what is now Liberec), recording for study purposes the method of physical anthropology he had perfected.⁴⁰

On return to Vienna prints were made of the negatives produced in Wünsdorf – casts of “Arabs, Indians, Negroes and Anamites”, as listed by Pöch. Pöch and Weninger had practice in producing casts for exhibition purposes, since busts of Russian prisoners of war had been exhibited in the prisoners of war department at the Ministry of War within the scope of the large Viennese war exhibitions in the summer of 1916 and 1917. Production in this case meant “destroying” or “opening” the gypsum eyes and moulding in artificial eyes, as well as painting the busts in natural colours.

Pöch undertook to collect material on “Indian and Southeast Asian peoples” in order to gain more insight into “the vast problems of race relations and mixes”.⁴¹ Apart from the “Berber question in Northwest Africa”, he was particularly interested in “the distribution of West Asian elements in India”⁴², stimulated by the question of possible Persian and Central Asian elements in the Indian population.

³⁸ Invoice for examinations of Arabs, Indians and Berbers (August to October 1917) in Wünsdorf, 26.6.1918; AÖAW, Subventionen, math.-nat. Klasse, Karton 6, Akte 478/1918.

³⁹ Letter from Pöch in Vienna to von Luschan, dated 27.2.1918; Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Nachlass von Luschan, Akte Pöch, Bl. 271.

⁴⁰ The films made by Rudolf Pöch can be found in the Austrian Film Archive. Cf. Andrea Gschwendtner: “Als Anthropologe im Kriegsgefangenenlager – Rudolf Pöch’s Filmaufnahmen im Jahre 1915. Film P2208 des ÖWF 1991”, in: *Wissenschaftlicher Film. Zeitschrift für alle Bereiche der wissenschaftlichen Kinematographie*, Nr. 42, Wien 1991, pp. 105-118.

⁴¹ Letter from Rudolf Pöch to the Imperial Academy of Sciences, dated 2.7.1917; AÖAW, Subventionen, math.-nat. Klasse, Karton 6, Akte 461/1917.

⁴² Letter from Pöch to von Luschan, dated 14.8.1918; Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Nachlass von Luschan, Akte Pöch, Bl. 279.

The issue of whether, and if so when, Indo-Germanic Persians migrated to the Indian Subcontinent, especially the North Indian region, was part of the then controversy surrounding the origin of the Indo-Germanic peoples – and, at the same time, was assumed to be the key to the so-called Aryan question.⁴³ In the years that followed, not only science but politics also was to concern itself notoriously with this topic. Interestingly, after the war neither Pöch nor Weninger pursued the topic in their work, most probably because Egon von Eickstedt had already published his work on “Racial Elements of the Sikhs”.

Further Paths: Rumania, Düsseldorf, the Cemetery

Both Egon von Eickstedt and Rudolf Pöch were keen to continue their studies on Indian prisoners in Wünsdorf in 1918. At this point, however, there were very few Indians left in the German “Sonderlager” (special or separate camps). In the course of the 1917/1918 winter, about 130 Indian civilian prisoners (sailors) were transferred from Wünsdorf to Großenbaum camp near Duisburg to work in the Hahn steel mill company⁴⁴. From April 1917, the majority of the Indian internees, the sepoys, were transferred to prisoner of war camps in occupied Rumania along with African internees.⁴⁵

When the academics working in Wünsdorf learnt of these plans, Heinrich Lüders in particular filed a protest, since they implied a disruption of ongoing activities: “Under these circumstances and for the time being one might conceive of temporarily holding back those people who seem most eligible for voice recordings. It is to be feared, however, that this would greatly damage the work. Both academics in this situation are dependent on the good will of the prisoners. Their readiness to tell us everything they know, which is certainly the case at the moment, will undoubtedly dwindle with those who are retained. Believing that the comrade he is separated from has drawn a better lot than himself, he would be reluctant to participate in the work, knowing it to be the reason for his apparently less advantageous position. Should, however, health considerations [...] render it necessary to transfer the prison camps, the Academy would appeal in deference to the [...] work that at least the Gurkhas not be sent across the German or Austrian borders.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Cf. also two articles by Josef Weninger: “Über die Verbreitung vorderasiatischer Rassenmerkmale”, in: *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 48/49 (1918/1919), pp. 41-44; and “Die physisch-anthropologischen Merkmale der vorderasiatischen Rasse und ihre geographische Verbreitung”, in: *Mitteilungen der geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 63 (1920), p. 15.

⁴⁴ Cf. the article by Franziska Roy in this volume.

⁴⁵ See the contribution by Ravi Ahuja, to this volume.

⁴⁶ Handwritten draft by Heinrich Lüders on the back of a letter from Carl Stumpf dated 28.12.1916; Archiv der Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Nachlass Heinrich Lüders, 7, Bericht über die Sprachforschungen im Kriegsgefangenenlager Halbmond in Wünsdorf.

Nonetheless, when most of the South Asians were transferred to camps near Monastirea and Marculesti in southern Rumania, occupied at the time by the Central Powers, both Egon von Eickstedt and Rudolf Pösch travelled to the camps in Morile and Turnu Magurele to continue their measurements. In the meantime, the renowned German Africanist, Leo Frobenius, was also active in Rumania and in contact with the prisoners of war interned there. In his notebook⁴⁷, however, he did not record any scientific information or specific notes on the prisoners. Only a series of photographs reveals conditions in the camps.

*When the war is over,
Many stories will be printed.*

When the war is over only those who survive will be able to print stories of survivors and of the dead. Stories of dead prisoners of war are condemned to silence as long as the recordings have not been heard. Some prisoners spoke into the phonograph shortly before their death. Jashahadur Rai, a Gurkha, was one of them. When he was recorded on 6 June 1916, he was twenty-three years old.

*Every drop of rain results in the sea overflowing.
We came to Germany on the orders of the British.
Listen, listen. Now listen,
We came on the orders of the British.
Three forces of water in a Nepali village.
Water flows without pause.
Three forces of water in a Nepali village.
Water flows without pause.
We are not dying but even alive we are not living.
The soul is crying out.
Listen, listen. Now listen to what I'm saying.
Like bubbling water
My feelings are bubbling within me.
Can you assuage these feelings?
Listen, listen. Now listen to what I'm saying.
For two paisa you can get a packet of Kaopalmar cigarettes
And light them with matchsticks.*

⁴⁷ Notebook on "Rumania 1917" by Leo Frobenius; Frobenius-Institut der Universität Frankfurt/Main, Archiv, LF 321.

*On the other side in Hindustan,
There is a beautiful mountain with a lot of greenery.
The love that existed will be stifled,
My soul tells me.
Listen, listen my love.
My heart says this with conviction.
Just as the flowers bloom in the yard,
Similarly the heart blooms too and becomes happy.
The attack in the war of the 14th year,
The world is shocked at the event.
It was summer then
And the atmosphere made it hot too.
At least provide me with a fan for some air.
I do not wish to live in Europe,
Please reach me to India.⁴⁸*

Entertainment Industry: War Exhibitions and Cinema

While scientific research in Wünsdorf had to be cut back by the end of 1917, the camps were increasingly opened up for other purposes. Earlier media activities in the special camps were limited to political propaganda. Hence a four-minute film entitled *Bayramfest im Mohammedaner-Gefangenenlager Halbmond und Weinbergslager in Wünsdorf bei Zossen* (Bayram festival in the Mohammedan Halfmoon and Weinberg prison camps in Wünsdorf near Zossen) was made in 1915, and can be found today in the Federal Film Archive in Berlin.⁴⁹ The first part of the film shows Indians, Algerians and “Gumiers” pouring out of the mosque that had been constructed in the Halfmoon camp, whereby the presence of German guards makes it evident that these are not documentary images from a Muslim country. The second part of the film was shot at a festivity in the Weinberg camp and shows scenes of a mostly ethnographic nature: a ritual sheep-killing by Mohammedans, and “religious practices and customs” and “religious dances” among the Indian

⁴⁸ Jasbahadur Rai from Sukim/Darjeeling, “Gurkha song, own words”, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 6.6.1916 at 4 o’clock (PK 307).

⁴⁹ Bundesfilmarchiv Berlin, Titel M 308/3 *Weltkrieg 1914/18* (World War 1914/18), shot by Bild- und Filmamt (Filmliste Nr. 1), (Zensurkarte von 1923 / Prüfnummer 5580). From what we know today another film, *Bilder aus dem mohamedanischen Gefangenenlager Halbmondlager zu Wünsdorf bei Zossen* (Pictures from the Mohammedan Halfmoon prison camp in Wunsdorf near Zossen) (Zensurkarte Prüfnummer 5574), did not survive.

internees, as the intertitles explain. This second part, devoid of guards, resembles contemporary ethnographic documentary films or films of the *Völkerschauen* in Europe. The latter attempted a twofold staging of what is “typical” of an ethnic group i.e., the performance itself and the performance on camera. The exhibiting of foreign peoples was reframed by the camera and transported to yet another performance context, e.g., a cinema. Instances of this date back to the early years of film: in 1894, Edison had summoned a troop of Indians from Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show to dance in front of the projectors in his studio; in 1895, the Lumière brothers filmed so-called “Kanakas” in Lyon. What was shot in Wünsdorf in 1915 had all the hallmarks of a prison camp *Völkerschau*. Produced for propaganda purposes, the film thus shifts to the realm of entertainment. (Illustration: stills from Wünsdorf film: mosque and/or dancers)

The sometimes almost undecipherable mix of academic, popular cultural and partly commercial ambitions and activities was characteristic of the situation at the special camps in Wünsdorf. It was fuelled, on the one hand, by the intention of scandalizing and staging a public spectacle of “enemies” from “exotic” countries present in Europe and, on the other, by the scientific will to carry out comparative research on various ethnic groups. Although the political measures introduced in so-called “special camps” as early as 1914 were treated confidentially, it was not possible to conceal from the public the fact that they accommodated thousands of “exotic” people. Photographs show that citizens of Berlin arrived by train to stare at the prisoners as though in a zoo. (Illustration: spectators in Wünsdorf)

On the scientific front, the director of the Municipal Museum of Anthropology in Leipzig, Karl Weule, presented a slide show in 1915 entitled “Die farbigen Hilfstruppen unserer Gegner auf den europäischen und kolonialen Kriegsschauplätzen” (The coloured auxiliaries of our opponents in the European and colonial theatres of war). In his written concept, he claimed that the World War was a war of nations, of the “entire world”, against the German Empire and its allies, and thereby made use of current phrases from the German popular press: “There the spiteful, devious Japanese, here the English, French and Belgians, with their white and black contingents – in reality we are fighting the whole world, since even the redskins in North America have dug up their hatchets to carry off German scalps.”⁵⁰ According to Weule, the danger here was that so-called “primitive peoples” such as Africans made deals with so-called European “civilized nations”. This in turn meant that should the Allies be victorious, the prevailing imperialist world order would collapse: “The supremacy of this white race over all others has hitherto been unquestioned and untouchable. Since England pulled in the Japanese [...] it is no longer the case. [...] Far worse and far more fatal, however, is the racial crime of the English and the French with regard to the blacks. [...] How is

⁵⁰ Karl Weule: »Die farbigen Hilfsvölker unserer Gegner. Eine ethnographische Übersicht«, 2 Teile, in: *Kosmos*, Bd. 12, 1915, Heft 6, pp. 205-209; Heft 7, S. 249-253, here Teil 1, p. 205.

England going to account for having German men whipped in the Bismarck Archipelago in front of or even at the hands of blacks? [...] The terrible and menacing question now arises as to how individual European powers, and hence we ourselves, are supposed to control from now on a coloured subordinate race that has lost all respect and reverence for the hitherto idolized whites through a system of measures such as those chosen by our opponents.”⁵¹

Scientists, and especially ethnologists, not only collaborated on written documents in the press and in popular culture. Theodor Wanner, chairman of the Handelsgeographischer Verein (Association for the Geography of Commerce) at the Linden Museum of Ethnography in Stuttgart, for example, was brought in to design diorama and ethnographic scenes for the “Württembergische Kriegsausstellung” (Württemberg War Exhibition) in 1916. In the propagandist “German War Exhibitions” that travelled from city to city in 1916 and 1917, “enemies” were to be presented as military opponents, not prisoners. This led to a combination of the figure serving as “model”, a hanger for the uniform, and a specific type of physiognomy, as a “race type”. J.F.G. Umlauff, a company located in Hamburg since 1868 and specialized in the production of hyperrealistic “race types”, was a suitable partner for this concept. Between spring 1916 and spring 1917, it delivered “enemy” figures in scenic arrangements to “German War Exhibitions” in Stuttgart, Dresden, Hamburg, Halle, Frankfurt am Main, Hanover and Flensburg. Several groups were likewise planned for the “Württemberg War Exhibition”: 1. Germany, 2. Allies (Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey), 3. Russians, 4. French, 5. English, 6. “Coloureds” (colonial troops), 7. Belgians, 8. Montenegrins and Serbs.⁵²

Plans for the Stuttgart war exhibition saw groups of British and French “auxiliaries” assembled under the category “coloureds”. The British troops were envisaged as “3 stalking Gurkhas, 3 Indians. The Gurkhas are to be demonstrated as stalking under a wire barrier put up in front of a shattered wall, with Indians positioned on the edge of the wall to cover the Gurkhas stalking through.”⁵³ (Illustration: Gurkhas and Sikhs in war exhibition) The preparation for military action in this scene, the stealing up to the German trenches, was staged with representatives of precisely the ethnic groups that had given rise to so much speculation in the German Empire. The Gurkhas were Nepalese troops that had served in the British Army since 1816. Karl Weule

⁵¹ Karl Weule: „Die farbigen Hilfsvölker unserer Gegner. Eine ethnographische Übersicht“, 2 Teile, in: *Kosmos*, Bd. 12, 1915, Nr. 6, S. 205-209; Nr. 7, S. 249-253, here Teil 2, p. 253.

⁵² Letter from the executive committee of the Württemberg War Exhibition 1916 (dept. 23, Württemberg Regional Association of the Red Cross Stuttgart) to Captain Pfaff at the Württemberg War Ministry, dated 22.3.1916; Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, M 1/9 Bü 110, Kap. III, Tit. 1, Lit. Nr. 6d3, Bd. I, Kriegsausstellung November 1915-Juni 1916, Bl. 82-84.

⁵³ Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, M 1/9 Bü 110, Kap. III, Tit. 1, Lit. Nr. 6d3, Bd. I, Kriegsausstellung November 1915-Juni 1916, Bl. 84.

explained in 1915: “The Gurkhas live in the west of Nepal. Gurkha, or according to the western written form, Gorkha, is in fact merely a collective name for genetically very different ethnic terms. [...] The Gurkha is of only medium stature, but extremely strong and quite hardy. [...] Contrary to that of most other infantry, the Gurkha uniform is purely European in as much as it resembles that of the English Army. [...] We have developed a veritable cycle of legends around the dreaded Kukri, that curved wide knife [...] the Gurkha slings unerringly while stalking or charging, even from a large distance. It is indeed a dangerous weapon.”⁵⁴

In accordance with these stereotypes, the Umlauff company placed kukri knives in the mouths of their Gurkha figures. Operating with popular myths, which had been circulating since the beginning of the war according to Weule, Gurkhas were portrayed as exceptionally good fighters, and at the same time as often deviously stealing up on their opponents and cutting their throats with the said kukri knives. The Umlauff company attempted to draw a profit from portraying this cliché. The “German War Exhibition” in Hanover went as far as to show “four Gurkhas with kukri (knives) in their mouths, left three Sikhs.”⁵⁵ Sikhs were probably chosen to represent Indians because their religious beliefs diverged from the more well-known religions of Islam and Hinduism. Nevertheless, a common cultural denominator was hard to find. For this reason, Theodor Wanner and Heinrich Umlauff presented a scene of military action, reducing ethnic specifics to physiognomies and accessories. The fact that the English colonial troops were shown cutting through a wire barrier admittedly characterized them as a dangerous military opponent. Stalking through the barbed wire surrounding the German trenches, however, the opponents became an easy target and risked being shot. Choosing a dangerous moment as a setting for the portrayal of a particular group was as much a part of German war propaganda as its suggestion that “Russians” revelling in the front-line shelters with masses of alcohol could hardly be taken seriously as a military opponent – they were staged with balalaikas and vodka performing their national dance.

The inordinate scale of onlooker curiosity during the First World War was carried to the extreme when prisoners of war from Wünsdorf were used as extras in the making of colonial feature films. The German Colonial Film Society (Deuko), founded in 1917, had set itself the task of producing “colonial film dramas with an exciting content and a healthy tendency”, convinced “that colonies were of the utmost importance to the fatherland”.⁵⁶ By 1919, Deuko had produced seven films for domestic propaganda: a cartoon for war loan promotion purposes and six feature films.

⁵⁴ Karl Weule: »Die farbigen Hilfsvölker unserer Gegner. Eine ethnographische Übersicht«, Teil 1, in: *Kosmos*, Bd. 12, 1915, Heft 6, p. 205-209, here p. 208.

⁵⁵ Deutsche Kriegsausstellung Hannover 1916/17, Führer, Berlin 1916, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Martin Steinke: “Koloniale Propaganda-Films”, in: *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung. Organ der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft*, Jg. 34/35, 1917/18, p. 137 (= Nr. 9/1917, 20.9.1917).

Employing feature films for colonial propaganda was a radical departure from earlier film efforts in this field: between 1900 and 1914, the German Colonial Film Society had concentrated on short documentary films illustrating the success of German colonial policy in Africa and Asia.⁵⁷ Deuko productions were the first to show the colonies as a perfect substitute for home. In the first feature film, *Der Verräter* (The Traitor), which was first released in August 1917, a young Englishman marries the daughter of his German superior (overseas company) and journeys to Africa with her, where he spies for the English and is compelled to die in a wild chase. The second Deuko film, *Farmer Borchardt*, portrays the Herero uprising of 1904 against German colonial rule in German Southwest Africa (today's Namibia), combining it with tragic episodes of love, betrayal and loyalty to the fatherland. *Der Gefangene von Dahomey* (The prisoner from Dahomey) (1918), a film with a hostile attitude towards the French, is about a German planter living in Africa who is captured by the French at the outbreak of war, and although brutally tortured by a French captain is finally rescued by the latter's wife. The prison camp scenes were shot in the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf in 1918; French prisoners of war were obliged to play black prison guards. Neither the film itself nor the press gave cinema audiences any inkling of this – hence the German public remained ignorant of the perversity of the situation: French prisoners in German camps were used to portray the French torturers of captive Germans in Africa.

Since the German Empire was not in possession of colonies in Asia, with the exception of the Chinese Province of Kiautschou, Asian or Indian topics did not arise in Deuko feature films. India did, however, serve as a basis for numerous plots in films that were made during and shortly after the First World War: *Der indische Tod* (Indian Death) (1915, Eichberg & Fiebisch, Berlin), *Der Schleier der Favoritin* (The Favourite's Veil) (1915, Luna Film GmbH, Berlin⁵⁸), *Die Liebe der Bajadere* (The Love of the Bayadere) (1918, Argus Film GmbH, Berlin), *Indische Nächte* (Indian Nights) (1919, Deitz & Co., Berlin), *Das Geheimnis von Bombay* (The Secret of Bombay) (1920, Decla, Berlin) and *Die Perle des Orients* (The Pearl of the Orient) (1921, UFA, Berlin). Nonetheless, German history still had constellations in store that made the special camp in Wünsdorf and the staging of Indians coincide. A camp report from February 1915 disclosed the following: "On the 12th, a large division – 50 men – drove to Berlin to be filmed in Luna Park. According to the Belgian sergeant in the camp, the men were well-behaved and in good spirits, both

⁵⁷ For activities of the German Colonial Film Society, cf. Wolfgang Fuhrmann: Propaganda, Sciences, and Entertainment. German Colonial Cinematography: A case study in the history of early nonfiction cinema, Diss. Phil. Universität Utrecht, 2003.

⁵⁸ This film was also released also under the title of *Curare oder der indische Dolch* (Curare or the Indian Dagger).

on the trip and in Berlin, and returned to the camp refreshed from the change.”⁵⁹ As yet there is no evidence of any association with the film *Schleier der Favoritin*. When the war was over, the recruiting of extras from prison camps continued. Having achieved phenomenal success with the mammoth production *Die Herrin der Welt* (The Ruler of the World) (1919), director Joe May began shooting *Das Indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb) in 1920.”⁶⁰ At a cost of 24 million Reichsmark, it became the most expensive film of the post-war years. Similar to most of the exoticizing feature films of the time, the European protagonists travel to distant parts, weather adventures and return reformed characters. In *The Indian Tomb* architect Rowland goes to India, where the Maharaja of “Eschnapur” commissions him to build a tomb for his unfaithful bride. Rowland’s fiancée, Irene, follows him to India, where both have to face a series of adventures. In the end, the architect builds the tomb for the Indian bride, now dead, and returns to Europe with Irene.

In order to create authentic Indian scenery, May had his architects construct vast backdrops with Indian temples complete with two Gopuras, all on the grounds in Woltersdorf. The Sarrasani Circus was contracted for the all-important elephants and tigers. Johannes Umlauff, who was a brother of Heinrich Umlauff commissioned to design “enemies” for war exhibitions, supplied hundreds of items on loan from the ethnography department of the Museum of Natural History, Ethnology and Trade in Bremen for the interiors.⁶¹ In addition he was responsible for extras, i.e., for “procuring foreign peoples”. He took some of them “from the Russian prisoner of war camp in the environments of Berlin. I picked out the best Mongolian types from here”.⁶² It is very likely that this refers to the camp in Wünsdorf near Berlin, where Russian prisoners of war lived until 1924 due to a delay in departure.⁶³ Film architect Erich Kettlehut recounts in his memoir that about “300 Russian prisoners of war, [...] 200 officers and about 100 common soldiers” were hired for *Das indische Grabmal* and lived during filming on the Woltersdorf film grounds in a village of barracks which

⁵⁹ Camp report from 6.2.1915, signed Wetzel; Auswärtiges Amt Berlin, Politisches Archiv, PA-AA WK 11s, R21262, Bd. 16 I, Bl. 29.

⁶⁰ *Das Indische Grabmal*, part 1: *Die Sendung des Yoghi*, part 2: *Der Tiger von Eschnapur – Ein Mysterium in fünf Akten*, produced by May-Film GmbH, screenplay: Thea von Harbou and Fritz Lang based on a novel of the same name by Thea von Harbou (Ullstein Verlag, 1918); director: Joe May; scenery: Martin Jacoby-Boy, Otto Hunte, Erich Kettlehut, Karl Vollbrecht; ethnographic design: Johannes Umlauff. First releases: 1.10.1921 and 22.10.1921 (Ufa-Palast am Zoo, Berlin).

⁶¹ As shown in the surviving insurance policies from 1921, the value of the ethnographic artefacts on loan was set at roughly 100,000 Reichsmark. Cf. the list of Indian objects from June 1920 and the insurance policy of Universale, Berlin from 12.4.1921. Übersee-Museum Bremen, Kap. 1.1 Aktenverzeichnis A, Nr. 89, Umlauff, Johannes.

⁶² Cf. Johannes Umlauff: *Ohne Titel (Lebenserinnerungen)*, o.O., o.J. (Archiv der Firma Carl Hagenbeck), p. 118.

⁶³ Margot Kahleyss: *Muslimen in Brandenburg. Kriegsgefangene im 1. Weltkrieg. Ansichten und Absichten* [1998], (ed.) Museum Europäischer Kulturen, Berlin 2000, pp. 41/46.

resembled an ethnographic village. The soldiers “lived strictly separate from the officers, the whole area was surrounded by barbed wire, around which two guards marched day and night. Whereas the ordinary soldiers were occupied as unskilled workers on the premises, which these invariably good-natured men did with great enthusiasm, the gentlemen officers, mostly cossacks, were bored, since they were only called upon to ride the magnificent circus horses in a few scenes.”⁶⁴

Indians were portrayed in the film by Russian extras, who were literally recruited in the prisoner of war camps for this purpose. The camps were now no longer used to register differences between ethnic groups mathematically in the interest of science but, on the contrary, served to level out ethnic differences to the advantage of the entertainment industry. The fact that “Mongolian” extras played the part of Indian soldiers did not occur to the European audience – and it is precisely this quasi ethnographic arbitrariness intended for a mass audience that producers practised to their own financial and logistic benefit.

Clichés: Frobenius and Mundy

The extent to which these partly discretionary ethnographic stereotypes prevailed, particularly as a result of the camps, is revealed in a number of wartime stories: stories that endorse these stereotypes and stories that confront them. Prior to his activities in Romania, Leo Frobenius had spent 1915/1916 in Wünsdorf camp for study purposes, where he primarily recorded Kabylie legends.⁶⁵ With support from military positions, he published an illustrated booklet in 1916 entitled *Der Völkerzirkus unserer Feinde* (Our enemies’ circus of nations), which contained photographs of internees from Wünsdorf and other German camps. In his preface Frobenius implied that the British and French colonial powers had trained their dependent nations like wild animals in a circus.⁶⁶ The indignant reaction of the respective national representatives of those concerned are documented in the political archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The India Independence Committee resident in Berlin, for example, wrote: “What impression must India have when the British Government there can disseminate that Indians are being described by the Germans as ‘wild animals’ and thrown together with Bantu and Senegal negroes, Turks and whatever else they are called!”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Cf. Erich Kettelhut: *Erinnerungen*, Typoskript, ca. 1960 (Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin), p. 354f.

⁶⁵ Cf. 13 notebooks of Leo Frobenius on the Halfmoon camp in Wünsdorf from August until October 1916; Frobenius-Institut der Universität Frankfurt/Main, Archiv, LF 322-LF 334.

⁶⁶ Leo Frobenius: *Der Völkerzirkus unserer Feinde*, Berlin 1916.

⁶⁷ Letter of the India Independence Committee to the Intelligence Bureau for the East at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated 3.4.1917; Auswärtiges Amt Berlin, Politisches Archiv, PA-AA WK 11s, R 21261.

Quite a different form of resistance to such clichés about Indians was the serial novel by Talbot Mundy, which appeared in 1917 in the American adventure magazine *Adventure*. The author was inspired by a notice in the *New York Times* in July 1915: a troop of Indian soldiers from the British Army had been captured in Flanders by the Germans. (Abb.: aus Mundy) Convinced they were Muslims, the Germans sent the Indians to Turkey in the hope that they would join the jihad against England by the Ottoman Empire, an ally of the German Empire. The Indian Sikhs, however, remained loyal to the British, fled Constantinople and fought their way to Afghanistan, reaching Kabul after four months. In 1917, Mundy fictionalized the story, taking the perspective of Sikh Hira Singh, a character who reports from an intermediate station – the German prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf: “Nothing was left undone to make us feel well received, except that a barbed-wire fence was all about the camp and armed guards marched up and down outside. [...] All day long Germans, mostly women and children but some men, came to stare at us through the barbed-wire fence as if we were caged animals.”⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier, excursions to Wünsdorf by curious onlookers did in fact take place – staring at the camp was tantamount to visiting the Zoologische Garten (the Berlin zoo), where around 1900, “exotic” human beings were likewise on show. Mundy allows his character, Hira Singh, to dwell in particular on the clichés circulating about “savages” and “cannibals”: “I have fought in a trench beside Englishmen who spoke of me as a savage; and I have seen wounded Germans writhe and scream because their officers had told them we Sikhs would eat them alive. [...] God knows what tales they had been told about us Sikhs. I read their faces as I rode. Fear is an ugly weapon, sahib, whose hilt is more dangerous than its blade. If our officers had told us such tales about Germans as their officers had told them about us, I think perhaps we might have feared to charge.”⁶⁹ It should, however, not be forgotten here that Mundy himself conducted a form of war propaganda – for the “good soldiers” with “izzat”, whom he describes in a somewhat simplistic manner.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Talbot Mundy: *Hira Singh. When India came to fight in Flanders* (1917), electronic version of the Gutenberg project, p. 30. Mundy was inspired by the notice “Indian Troops Eluded their Turkish Jailers – Escaped from Constantinople and Traveled Overland to Afghanistan“, which appeared in the *New York Times* on 11 July 1915.

⁶⁹ Mundy, p. 16 and p. 19.

⁷⁰ For a completely different method of dealing with stories by Indian soldiers, cf. Mulk Raj Anand: *Across the Black Water* [1940], New Delhi 1978; Ders.: *The Sword and the Sickle*, London 1942.

The story of the *Möwe*

*When the war is over,
Many stories will be printed.*

Many stories have been printed in particular in German history books since the war. These examples of official European historiography recount, for instance, that England and the German Empire waged a fierce naval battle between 1915 and 1918. They outline the military successes of the German cruiser *Möwe*, which apart from other “enemy” ships captured the British steamship *Appam* on 15/16 January, and likewise on 16 January in the dead of night ran into a British Clan Line ship. Giving a false identity, the *Möwe* fired on the *Clan MacTavish* and forced the crew of Europeans and Indians to be transferred initially to the captive *Appam*, and subsequently to the *Möwe*. One of the Indian sailors came by a circuitous route to the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf, where on 7 February 1918 he relayed the “Story of the *Möwe*” in Bengali into the phonograph funnel:

Hear all you sailors. We are in danger. In the year 1916, January 16 in the Sunday evening at 7 pm a German cruiser by the name of Melva [= Möwe] came alongside and hailed through his megaphone and asked “what is the name of your ship“. Captain Oliver answered “my ship is called Clan MacTavish. I am on my way from Australia to London“. The sea is called the Spanish coast. At that moment, Melva the cruiser threw a grenade and announced that they were a German cruiser. Clan MacTavish, Captain Oliver on hearing they were a German cruiser ordered two rounds of canon shots on the cruiser. The cruiser on being shot at, fired back 5 cannon balls. People ran helter skelter. The captain of the cruiser asked the captain of Clan MacTavish, who are your crew members. The captain answered they are Muslims from Calcutta. The captain of the cruiser gave Clan MacTavish 15 minutes time on hearing we were Muslims and sent life boats to transfer the crew, both the English and Muslims. All the people from Clan MacTavish boarded Melva. 17 people had died when Melva fired the 5 cannon balls. The captain of Melva said to us “you are Muslims” and beat us and took a head count. He then said: You do some work. After one week on seeing our attitude he started giving us double pay ... that’s all.⁷¹

Listen, brother. We got to eat fat, wholemeal wheat flour, potatoes, butter, rice, and sardine fish for 50 days. The captain of Melva used to visit our quarters twice-thrice a day and he would tell us not to be afraid. We stayed on Melva for 1 month 24 days. After that we were taken to

⁷¹ Mohammed Hossin (Hussain) from Calcutta, “The Story of the *Möwe*” in Bengali, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 7.2.1918 at 2.30 (PK 1150).

“Oleum Savran” [?].⁷² The camp captain of “Oleum Savran” was told that “these are Muslims. Please take good care of them and feed them well”. Saying this, the captain of Melva left. Accordingly, the camp captain of Oleum Savran fed us well. We got rice, meat, fish, potatoes, chicken, eggs. [...] We stayed in Oleum Savran for three months. One day the chief of Oleum Savran came to visit us and asked us “where are you from“. We said we are Muslims from India. He asked how we were doing at the camp. We said we are well and well looked after but there is just one thing we want from you. We want to go back to India. He misunderstood this and sent us to the Indian prison camp. We thought in our mind now we have to stay in this ‘garod‘ till the war is over. We stayed at the prison camp for eight months in the bedlam.⁷³

Eight who were sick and could not go to work were sent to Havelberg camp. We stayed there for three months. The eight of us and 400 people from Hanjar⁷⁴ ship came to Lisia [?] prison camp. Those who are old and infirm went to London.

The rest went to work in Germany. Those who were sick stayed at the camp.

The rest – the sepoy – went to Romania.

Hey Khuda (Oh Lord), what fighting. Suppose we never meet again. Poet, what should I write. If I meet my end here? Brother Sailors. If I have made any mistakes, please forgive me.

My name is Mohamed Hussain. I am Officer Boy of Clan MacTavish.

1918. February 4.⁷⁵

Already fifty years old at the time of the recording, Mohammed Hussain, “Bengali elementary school in Calcutta, went to sea at ten years of age”, was an exception among the Indian prisoners of war. He was also one of the few Indians to remain in Wünsdorf camp until the end of the war. His story, which he described in such detail and which bears testimony hitherto unknown in Europe to an event in the First World War, has not been printed prior to the publication of this book.

Credits

When the war is over,

⁷² The lascars from the *Möwe* were interned in camps in Güstrow and Parchim.

⁷³ Mohammed Hossin from Calcutta, “The Story of the *Möwe*, Part II”, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 7.2.1918 at 3.10 (PK 1151).

⁷⁴ Probably a reference to the Hansa Line, a Bremen shipping company employing numerous Indian seamen. Those who happened to be on German soil at the outbreak of the war were likely to be interned.

⁷⁵ Mohammed Hossin from Calcutta, “The Story of the *Möwe* (conclusion)”, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 7.2.1918 at 3.20 (PK 1152).

Many stories will be printed.

Who will print? What? Why? For what purpose?

After the war, less was printed about the prisoners in Wünsdorf and the research carried out in the camps than originally planned. In the field of physical anthropology, Egon von Eickstedt's work *Rassenelemente der Sikhs* (Racial Elements of the Sikhs) appeared in Germany in 1920/1921, and the work of Josef Weninger on "westafrikanische Neger" (West African Negroes) in 1927 in Vienna. The wax cylinder music recordings were absorbed into the Berlin Phonogram Archive in the Museum of Ethnology, and have not been edited to this day. The wax disc voice recordings, on the other hand, constituted the basic body of material in the sound department of the Prussian State Library. The originals were rerecorded on matrixes, i.e., negatives, from which any number of positives in the form of shellac records could be produced. However, only a small number of sound recordings were published and distributed by the Prussian State Library in the 1920s and 1930s with the accompanying brochures. A book entitled *Unter fremden Völkern* (Among Foreign Peoples), published by Wilhelm Doegen in 1925, presented a collection of essays on the "culture" of individual ethnic groups, which mirrored to some extent the comprehensive claim of the camp research undertakings, but was of no further scientific consequence.⁷⁶

When the war is over,

Many stories will be printed.

Who will print? And who will tell?

Who will tell *after* the war? Does the war have to be over before stories about the war can be printed?

Who tells *during* the war? And why are these stories so much less celebrated than the grand projects that emerged *after* the war?

Which stories have survived – and which have not?

What are the fashionable stories about the First World War?

Listen, listen respected Sirs.

As far as my memory serves me right,

Let me tell you what the old men narrated.

Please forgive me

If I make mistakes or forget anything.

⁷⁶ For further details on the Wünsdorf voice recordings see Jürgen Mahrenholz's contribution to this volume.

A very old man told me this tale.

He saw it with his own eyes.

*This is a true story.*⁷⁷

Bhawan Singh spoke these words into a gramophone funnel on 8 December 1916. In retrospect, Heinrich Lüders wrote of this man: “One of the most intelligent prisoners was a Magar from a good family [...]. He not only spoke Khas and Hindustani, but was one of the very few able to articulate himself in English; he had even learnt some German. [...] *He* of all people had an unshakeable belief in ghosts and claimed to have seen them at home one night on the river bank; in the camp he saw the ghosts of his dead comrades as they strolled up and down the training ground in the moonlight and wrote a short essay for us in Khas about the various types of demons he was familiar with. [...]”⁷⁸

What is a ghost?

How does he live?

How many types of ghost exist?

How does he become a ghost?

That is what I will tell you.

When a person dies

he constantly roams about

and thus becomes a ghost.

It is the soul that roams about.

The roaming soul is like the air.

So a ghost is like air

*He can go everywhere.*⁷⁹

A ghost can go anywhere – a story, too. Whether it will be seen, heard or understood is quite a different matter.

⁷⁷ Bhawan Singh from Almora/Zillah Darjeeling, “Stories” in Khas, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 8.12.1916 at 4.30 (PK 591).

⁷⁸ Heinrich Lüders: “Die Gurkhas”, in: Wilhelm Doegen (Hg.): *Unter fremden Völkern. Eine neue Völkerkunde*, Berlin 1925, pp. 126-139, here p. 138f.

⁷⁹ Bhawan Singh from Almora/Darjeeling, “Stories“ in Khas, recorded at the prisoner of war camp in Wünsdorf on 8.12.1916 at 4.30 (PK 591).

*When the war is over,
Many stories will be printed.*

And indeed many stories can be made audible again. After the war many stories will be *needed* if this historical era is to be described and interpreted with a multi-perspective approach. Each of the stories is a true story.