

Britta Lange

CAPTURED VOICES

SOUND RECORDINGS OF PRISONERS OF WAR
FROM THE SOUND ARCHIVE

1915-1918



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from the Sound Archive 1915–1918

Translated by Dr. Rubaica Jaliwala

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Content

| | |
|--|-----|
| Note of the translator, by Rubaica Jaliwala | 7 |
| Making listening audible, by Sebastian Schwesinger | 9 |
| Listening to the sound files | 11 |
| 00 Translations | 13 |
| 01 Jasbahadur Rai – O listen, listen | 41 |
| 02 In the archive | 53 |
| 03 Phonography | 83 |
| 04 Ibrahim Halimoff – Earth, sun, moon | 93 |
| 05 John Eggers – A story of the prodigal son | 121 |
| 06 Jean Beauseigneur – In the trenches | 143 |
| 07 I would have to listen to it a few more times | 161 |
| 08 Pjotr Kuriyz – On 4th August | 173 |
| 09 Ramadan Salibota – Red water | 183 |
| 10 When I translated this | 195 |
| 11 Jámafáda – The war is horrifying | 203 |

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 12 | Call to prayer by Nur Muhammed Hisameddin | 217 |
| 13 | Sādāk Berrējīd – My blood flowed in streams..... | 235 |
| 14 | Seoraj Singh – What has never been seen and never been heard | 253 |
| 15 | Story of the seagull | 275 |
| 16 | A story that makes you happy..... | 301 |
| 17 | Chote Singh – I am a prisoner of war | 315 |
| 18 | Bhawan Singh – Ghosts | 335 |
| 19 | Jasbahadur Rai – Green peepal, grass, leaves and the cuckoo... | 355 |
| | Captured voices: An epilogue, by Thomas Macho | 371 |
| | List of German institutions | 376 |
| | List of sources | 378 |
| | Bibliography..... | 382 |
| | Index of historical persons | 395 |
| | Thanks | 400 |

Note of the translator

RUBAICA JALIWALA

In the 2010 film *Âs nutayuneân / We still live here*, renowned linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky observed that “A language is not just words. It’s a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is.” In other words, translating a language signifies translating a culture. In the case of *Captured Voices*, the diverse origins of the imprisoned colonial soldiers has implied a translation not so much between languages as between cultures that Britta Lange undertook in writing the book and I in translating it into English.

My collaboration on the vast project of this book and on projects related to the sound recordings of prisoners of war in the First World War began 15 years ago, in 2006, when I translated a number of sound recordings and the subtitles of Philip Scheffner’s award-winning film *The Halfmoon Files. A Ghost Story...* (2007), in which I also featured briefly as a researcher. On a visit to Mumbai in 2006, I looked for and contacted several people from North India residing in Mumbai – among them parents of a friend, a security guard at the Goethe Institute Mumbai and a Nepali assistant at a well-know art gallery – to help me translate some of the recordings into Hindi, which I subsequently translated into English. Through my work on the film, I came to learn that the languages of some recordings were a blend of a couple of dialects of the time and no longer exist in that form today. It also provided me with insight into the development and loss of dialects and languages and revealed first-hand the perils of translation, of one’s own – and sometimes of more than one – interpretation in the translation, the loss of meaning as also the gain of new understandings.

In 2007/2008, I translated recordings and texts for the joint exhibition by Philip Scheffner and Britta Lange – *The Making of... Ghosts* (held in Berlin 2007/2008, Mumbai and Delhi 2011, Prag 2014, Berlin 2015). I was project manager of *The Making of...* in Mumbai and Delhi in 2011, comprising the exhibition, screenings of *The Halfmoon Files* and the lecture by Britta Lange, “Objective Data – Subjective Texts. Anthropological and Linguistic Research

on Indian war prisoners from 1915–1918,” which I also translated from German to English.

In 2017/18, I have likewise been involved in translating from Hindi some of the sound recordings that Britta Lange has presented in this book, for example, Seoraj Singh’s recording (chapter 14) of his Akhbar Birbal story.

It has been a pleasure and a tremendous learning experience to have worked on this project, and I hope that my English translation has succeeded in presenting Britta Lange’s book historically, linguistically and conceptually, as well as doing justice to the captured voices of the war prisoners of the time.

Making listening audible

SEBASTIAN SCHWESINGER

The idea is enticing: A document that speaks – from a bygone era. Without detours, a past event speaks to us. All we have to do is put on headphones or turn on the stereo and a journey through time begins, one in which we burrow into the ears of those present and listen to the words of that time in their unique form. This hope of opening time capsules that bring another world to the ear always resonates when playing sound documents in archives. They are important testimonies of their time and yet they cannot strip away their context, and we ours, or let it become entirely transparent. The engagement with historical sound documents remains an engagement across time: between a historical material made to sound and a listening in the Here and Now. We are perhaps too used to relegating listening to what we hear, to understanding it more as a passive hearing than as an act of creating meaning. But what we make ourselves listen to is shaped by present and individual sound experiences, media and contexts that were different in other times and places under different conditions. This insight conceals another, namely that we have become accustomed to listening to sounds as objects – as if they led directly to their source, about which they provide us with information. A common rule of thumb among acousticians is that about 90% of the auditory impression is characterised by spatial effect and not by direct sound. On the one hand, it can be concluded that the room as a place of listening plays an important role in making the experience of sound meaningful. And on the other hand, that listening always refers to the context and not only to an isolated object.

Even in technical environments, listening refers to its respective place, its position. From there, according to psycho-acoustics, we perform “auditory scene analyses”. So we do not listen exclusively to individual things, but in the medium of sound we experience a scenic, relational constellation. In this respect, one could also speak of sounds in the sense of trajectories, which – viewed phenomenologically – deal with their locality as specific expressions or which – viewed purely mechanically – are in constant formation as material stimulation and propagation up to the highly individual reception at

the ear. To convey such a complex environmental experience linguistically is difficult and may indicate why a purely indexical assignment of sounds to objects has been prevalent in many cases. Sounds thus refer not only to the place of their origin, but beyond that to the environment of their unfolding, the concrete listening place and position, i. e. not only to its cultural but also its situational involvement.

With this in mind, Britta Lange and I situated the voices of the prisoners of war and emphasised the mediality and locality of the sound and listening so as not to present the historical voices exclusively under the claim of their authenticity. The tracks compiled here place the historical recordings at the centre of a chain of transmissions. They move from the microscopic presentation of sound documents to pure mediation by the translators. From a methodological point of view, the tracks initially correspond to field recordings, as we have decided against releasing the archive documents and consciously opted for the audibility of the listening situation. This is by no means intended to establish a privileged listening position, but conversely to emphasise the diversity of these listening situations and their relevance for careful appropriation in cultural history and theory.

As a central location of this compilation, the archive holds a specific form of embedding the recordings also in their sounding form. Unlike the available digital copies, the recordings on the shellac records are separated from the pitch pipe, which the typical rhythm of the lead-out groove also conveys aurally. Likewise, listening to the records draws attention to the digital fade-ins and fade-outs, which were probably intended to ease an overly clumsy introduction to the unfamiliar noise components of a historical recording. In short: the archive material appears more bulky, not only does it have to be retrievable and undamaged, it also has to be calibrated and linked. These archival practices scenically condense and enrich listening. They establish the archive as a place of specific listening.

Again and again, excursions accompany the historical and contemporary protagonists into listening spaces outside the archive. There they have to compete with quite intrusive environments (e.g. track 16) or prove themselves on stages of the public sphere (e.g. track 7 & 12). Yet listening in these spaces is multi-layered. It can also crawl under the headphones of individual protagonists such that only the simultaneous translation of the historical recording enables sounding out a modern office space (track 15). Similarly, the mobile recording and playback devices bring their respective limitations and peculiarities to the organisation of sonic experiences in the listening spaces they help create. It is not Hi-Fi rooms that this documentary form presents.

These approaches exact a lot from ears accustomed to studio sound. Using simple technical means, the tracks accompany selected work scenes involving the archive holdings in seminars, exhibitions, offices, public spaces. They thus collect different listening contexts in which meaning and significance are elicited and assigned to the mobilised sound documents.

In line with Britta Lange, these 19 tracks also “render audible” a cultural history and theory perspective on the sound documents and their functional, emotional, medial, situational, etc. embedding. It may therefore seem counter-intuitive that the released digital copies of Jasbahadur Rai’ s recordings (tracks 1 & 19) provide a framework for the scenes we have compiled. However, beyond the listening spaces we present, we also want to highlight the technical or local contexts in which they are updated and recontextualised during each playback.

Listening to the sound files

- All sound files are designed for listening on headphones! We recommend using circumaural headphones, but basic ear buds or supra-aural headphones are also fine.
- To listen to the sound files of this ebook, click on the title or the headphone icon on the first page of each chapter. You can also scan the QR code in the upper right corner using a smartphone or any handheld device with a built-in camera. In some cases, you may need to authorize the link to be opened in your reader software.
- If you have problems scanning the QR code, try to zoom into the ebook page to enlarge the resolution of the QR code and/or increase the brightness of the screen you are reading on.
- The links behind the title, the headphone icon or the QR code will open a website in your browser, where you can listen to each sound file corresponding to the written transcripts in the ebook by simply clicking on the play button.
- It is not permitted to copy, download, rip, reproduce or distribute to third parties the sound file published on this website (neither in parts nor in its entirety).
- All sound files: [click here](#)

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Translations

To write a book on sound recordings implies above all: to translate. To translate from sound to text, from text to sound, from one typology to another, from the past to the present. Writing about sound recordings of male prisoners of war of the most different origins in German camps during World War I also represents the attempt to translate from other languages into English, into German and, if possible, from one culture to another. This diverse process of translation creates frictions. Nothing can ever be translated without loss, but neither without gaining something new. My translations will also always be interpretations. Just as the sound recordings that I prepend to this book are interpretations. They were formed in 2016 and 2017, in my thoughts and under the conditions I set, and reflect my listening to the historical recordings and my conversations with other listeners.

This makes the historical sound recordings I use audible in their oldest preserved form – as shellac records from the 1920s and 1930s – and no longer as they once sounded. In today's Sound Archive of the Humboldt University of Berlin, the sound recordings of the prisoners from the time of World War I on 1,650 shellac records represent the largest collection in the holdings. The Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission¹, on behalf of the Prussian Ministry of Science, Art and National Education / Prussian Ministry of Culture, recorded the voices of male war and civilian prisoners on a gramophone in German camps between 1915 and 1918.² This undertaking joined other research projects carried out in prison camps during the war in the German Reich

1 For ease of reading, the names of the German institutions are given in English translation in the running text. The German names can be found in a list at the end of the book (p. 376).

2 For the history of the Phonographic Commission's gramophone records in today's Sound Archive, see Mehnert, Dieter: "Historische Schallaufnahmen – Das Lautarchiv an der Humboldt-Universität Berlin", in: *Studentexte zur Sprachkommunikation. Elektronische Sprachsignalverarbeitung*, Vol. 13, Berlin 1996, 28–45; Bayer, Kirsten / Mahrenholz, Jürgen: "'Stimmen der Völker' – Das Berliner Lautarchiv", in: Bredekamp, Horst / Brüning, Jochen / Weber, Cornelia (eds.): *Theater der Natur und Kunst. Theatrum naturae et artis. Wunderkammern des Wissens*. Vol. 3: Catalogue, Berlin 2000, 117–128; Mahrenholz, Jürgen: "Zum Lautarchiv und seiner wissenschaftlichen Erschließung durch die Datenbank IMAGO", in: Bröcker, Marianne (ed.): *Berichte aus dem ICTM.Nationalkomitee Deutschland XIII*, Bamberg 2003, 131–152; Lange, Britta: "Ein Archiv von Stimmen. Kriegsgefangene unter ethnografischer Beobachtung", in: Wegmann, Nikolaus / Maye, Harun / Reiber, Cornelius (eds.): *Original / Ton, Zur Mediengeschichte des O-Tons*, Konstanz 2007, 317–341; Scheer, Monique: "Captive Voices: Phonographic Recordings in the German and Austrian Prisoner-of-War Camps of the World War I", in: Jöhler, Reinard / Marchetti, Christian / Scheer, Monique (eds.): *Doing Anthropology in Wartime and War Zones. World War I and the Cultural Sciences in Europe*, Bielefeld 2006, 279–309.

and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.³ The English teacher Wilhelm Doegen (1877–1967), responsible for the practical organisation of the Phonographic Commission's work, noted in an unpublished report dated 29th July 1919: "The following were recorded: Words (sounds in sample words), colloquial language, stories, songs, dialogues, language of presentation and music (songs sung with accompanying instruments, choirs, instrumental music and orchestra)-sounds [...]"⁴. The Commission's linguists recorded speech samples and songs, while the musicologists recorded vocal and instrumental samples. The latter did not use a gramophone but an Edison phonograph, with which they recorded over 1,000 wax cylinders, that are now stored in the Phonogram Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin.⁵ Some prisoners of war have spoken or sung into the funnel of both a gramophone and a phonograph. Their voices are therefore stored in both archives. If the individual studies in this book only deal with recordings from the Sound Archive of the Humboldt University, this is due to the separate institutional histories of the two parts of the collection. The gramophone sound records of the Phonographic Commission found in the Sound Archive were digitised at the Hermann von Helmholtz Centre for Cultural Techniques of the Humboldt University of Berlin between 1999 and 2006 and have since been made accessible through the university's scientific collections database.⁶ The Edison-cylinder with prisoner of war sound recordings of the Phonographic Commission preserved in the Berlin Phonogram Archive (Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv) could be fully digitised

3 Closest to the work of the German Phonographic Commission is the collection of sound recordings of prisoners of war, which was created between 1915 and 1918 for the Phonogram Archive of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. See Audio-Edition: Lechleitner, Gerda / Liebl, Christian / Remmer, Ulla (eds.): *Sound Documents from the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The Complete Historical Collections 1899–1950. Series 17, 1–5. Recordings from Prisoner-of-war Camps, World War I*, Vienna 2018. Cf. i. a. Lange, Britta: *Die Wiener Forschungen an Kriegsgefangenen 1915–1918. Anthropologische und ethnografische Verfahren im Lager*, Vienna 2013.

4 Doegen, Wilhelm: *Bericht über mein Wirken und Schaffen in der Preussischen Phonographischen Kommission*, Berlin, 29th July 1919, p. IV, c and d; German Historical Museum, personal documents Wilhelm Doegen, Do2 98/2157.

5 For the history of the Phonographic Commission and the Phonogram Archive of the Ethnological Museum Cf. Ziegler, Susanne: "Die akustischen Sammlungen. Historische Tondokumente im Phonogramm-Archiv und im Lautarchiv", in: Bredekamp / Brüning / Weber (eds.): *Theater der Natur und Kunst*. Essays, 197–206; Ziegler, Susanne: *Die Wachszylinder des Berliner Phonogramm-Archivs*, Berlin 2006. For the history of the Phonogram-Archiv in general: Simon, Artur: "History of the Berlin Phonogramm Archive (1900–2000)", in: id. (ed.): *Das Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv 1900–2000. Sammlungen der traditionellen Musik der Welt*, Berlin 2000.

6 www.sammlungen.hu-berlin.de (accessed on 9.9.2021). The digitisation of all shellac records of the Sound Archive was funded by the VW Foundation. The magnetic audio tapes from the 1960s were neither digitised nor researched in this context – a research gap in the history of institutions for phonetics and possibly also in the history of science.

between 2012 and 2015 with funding from the DFG.⁷ In 2022, the collection holdings of the Phonographic Commission will be brought once again into physical proximity, as both the Phonogram Archive and the Sound Archive will move into the newly built Humboldt-Forum in the reconstructed City Palace as independent institutions. But when I began my research in 2006, only the Sound Archive's prisoner of war holdings were usable.

Even if the now digitised historical recording can be easily mobilised and can thus gain visibility and attention with greater ease, the prisoners' voices still represent captive voices. Firstly, they are technically captured: as media recorded and reproduced sounds, which are not identical to the historic raising of the voice, which is irrevocably past and is therefore irretrievable for analysis. Secondly, they are institutionally captured: as preserved documents in the Sound Archive, which can only be listened to during a personal visit as a gramophone record or as digital files on headphones or on one's computer upon signing a user agreement. Whether they should be made available online without access restrictions requires legal and cultural-ethical considerations. The voice documents of the prisoners of war form a sensitive collection because they were collected under precarious, epistemically violent circumstances.⁸ Speaking on the records were prisoners of war who were not in a position to decide or to negotiate about the act of recording, the scientific procedure and the social interaction with them. Today, in times of unrestricted downloads and an unlimited availability of sound software, it seems necessary to consider how to keep the context of the sound recordings present when using them. An ethics of the Sound Archive and possible practices in dealing with the prisoner of war collection have yet to be determined.

Thirdly, the recorded voices of the prisoners of war – unlike other holdings of the Sound Archive such as the “voices of famous personalities” collected from 1917 onwards or the samples of German dialects and foreign languages produced from 1922 – are captured in terms of content in a dual sense. For although the prisoners of war spoke into the gramophone, they could not speak

7 Cf. the section of the Phonogram Archive in the databank of the National Museums of Berlin (Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin): [http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/Result-LightboxView/preselectFilterSection.\\$FilterGroupControl.\\$MpDirectLink&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfilterDefinition&sp=0&sp=0&sp=1&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=S10026&sp=S11](http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/Result-LightboxView/preselectFilterSection.$FilterGroupControl.$MpDirectLink&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfilterDefinition&sp=0&sp=0&sp=1&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=S10026&sp=S11) (accessed on 9.9.2021).

8 Detailed information on the concept of sensitive collections Cf. Berner, Margit / Hoffmann, Anette / Lange, Britta: *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot*, Hamburg 2001; “Sensitive Collections”, translation in English by Emer Lettow / “Collections sensibles”, translation in French by Christiane Kopylov and Lotte Arndt, in: Abonnenc, Mathieu K. / Arndt, Lotte / Lozano, Catalina (eds.): *Crawling Doubles. Colonial collecting and affect / Collecte coloniale et affect. Ramper, dédoubler*, Paris 2016, 288–317.

freely in front of “enemy” scientists under the political-military conditions of the camp and the technical conditions of sound recordings. They had to observe multiple rules of conduct and language that are difficult to reconstruct today. The recorded voices of the prisoners of war are therefore not only captive in their conditions of origin in the sense that they are inevitably marked by them. In fact, the majority of them are still captured in terms of content today, as the recordings were not and are not listened to, not translated, not understood, not contextualised, not returned to the people or institutions in the regions of their origin. In the interwar period, only individual recordings or series comprising a few examples with accompanying booklets for language learning purposes were published⁹ and smaller holdings were examined linguistically and musicologically within the framework of the institution itself.¹⁰ It was not until the 1990s that the collection, which had for long received little attention, was virtually rediscovered, digitised and catalogued. Since then, academics and cultural practitioners have not only continued to research the general history of the prisoner of war collection, but have also taken a closer look at the individual photographs and sub-collections.¹¹

The engagement with the personalities and biographies of the speakers, their origins and the situation in the camps, as well as the question of what they actually said was set into motion not by an academic but by an artistic project. In his experimental documentary, *The Halfmoon Files. A Ghost Story...* (2007), the filmmaker Philip Scheffner follows the Indian colonial soldier Mall Singh, who went to the European battlefields for the British army and, as a prisoner of war of the Germans, spoke of his wish to return to India on a short gramophone recording from the so-called Halfmoon Camp in Wünsdorf near Zossen in December 1916.¹² Scheffner’s filmic search for the historical

⁹ Series *Lautbibliothek. Phonetische Platten und Umschriften*, published by the Sound Department of the Prussian State Library, 1927–1944.

¹⁰ Cf. Nadel, Siegfried Ferdinand: *Georgische Gesänge*, Berlin 1933; Ziehm, Elsa: *Rumänische Volksmusik dargestellt an den Schallaufnahmen des Instituts für Lautforschung an der Universität Berlin*, with the collaboration of Fritz Bose, Berlin 1939.

¹¹ In chronological order Cf. i. a.: Ziegler, Susanne: “Dokumentation balkanischer Musiktraditionen in Deutschland. Aus den historischen Schallaufnahmen der Preußischen Phonographischen Kommission 1915 – 1919”, in Reuer, Bruno (ed.): *Musik im Umbruch – Kulturelle Identität und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Südosteuropa*, Munich, 1999, 379–393; Ziegler, Susanne: “Historische Tonaufnahmen keltischer Musik in Berliner Schallarchiven”, in: Heinz, Sabine (ed.): *Die Deutsche Keltologie und ihre Berliner Gelehrten bis 1945 – Beiträge zur internationalen Fachtagung “Keltologie an der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität vor und während des Nationalsozialismus”*, Berlin 1999, 71–90; Kratz, Daniela: *Griechen in Görlitz 1916–1919 – Studien zu akustischen Aufnahmen des Lautarchivs der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, unpublished master thesis, Humboldt University of Berlin, 2005.

¹² Scheffner, Philip: *The Halfmoon Files. A Ghost Story...*, Germany 2007, Video, 83 min. See also: <http://halfmoonfiles.de/de/4/film/home> (accessed on 9.9.2021).

personality becomes entangled with ghost stories of then and now, until it finally slips away from the director in the postcolonial present. The film, which won several awards and was subtitled in various languages, also triggered an echo in the academic world.¹³ His questions were transferred to scientific papers, which on the one hand further researched the historical context of the involved groups of speakers of certain languages or from certain regions of origin. On the other hand, the scientists also began to examine individual recordings from historical and cultural studies perspectives for the content of what was said or sung, for its genre and for everything that was recorded and can be heard besides speech and song.¹⁴ This also includes my own work¹⁵, which could not have turned out this way had it not been for the joint research with Philip Scheffner since 2006 and our ongoing conversations to this day.

The historical translations into German or English are missing for many of the prisoner of war sound recordings in the Sound Archive. Only a few of them were translated over the last years or are presently part of research projects.¹⁶ It has become apparent that the existing historical translations are

- 13 Cf. i. a. Balke, Friedrich: "‘Rete mirabile’ Die Zirkulation der Stimmen in Philip Scheffners Halfmoon Files", in: *Sprache und Literatur*, Vol. 40/2, 2009, 58–78; Gordon, Avery: "I'm already in a sort of tomb'. A reply to Philip Scheffner's *The Halfmoon Files*", in: *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110/1, 2011, 121–154; Das, Santanu: "The Singing Subaltern", in: *parallax*, Vol. 17, 2011, no. 3, 4–18.
- 14 Cf. i. a. Ross, Jaan (ed.): *Encapsulated Voices. Estonian Sound Recordings from the German Prisoner-of-War Camps, 1916–1918*, Cologne / Weimar / Vienna 2012; Hoffmann, Anette: "Echoes of the Great War: The Recordings of African Prisoners in the First World War", in: *Open Arts Journal*, Issue 3, Summer 2014, 9–23; Hoffmann, Anette / Mynaka, Phindezwa: "Hearing voices in the archive", in: *Social Dynamics. A journal of African studies*, Vol. 41, no. 1, March 2015 140–165; Hilden, Irene: *Die (Un)Möglichkeit subalternen Artikulation. Zu den Tonaufnahmen aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern des Ersten Weltkriegs*, unpublished cultural history and theory master thesis, Humboldt University Berlin, 2015; Liebau, Heike: "A voice recording, a portrait photo and three drawings: tracing the life of a colonial soldier", *ZMO Working Papers* 20, 2018; https://www.zmo.de/publikationen/WorkingPapers/liebau_2018.pdf (accessed on 8.9.2021). Particularly diverse were also the contributions to the conference "Listening to the Archive. Histories of Sound Date in the Humanities and Sciences", held in January 2016 by the Humboldt University Berlin, the University of Amsterdam and the Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science.
- 15 Cf. i. a. Britta Lange: "South Asian Soldiers and German Academics: Anthropological, Linguistic and Musicological Field Studies in Prison Camps", in: Ahuja, Ravi / Liebau, Heike / Roy, Franziska (eds.): "When the war began, we heard of several kings." *South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, New Delhi 2011, 149–184; Lange, Britta: "Denken Sie selber über diese Sache nach..." Tonaufnahmen in deutschen Gefangenenlagern des Ersten Weltkriegs", in: Berner / Hoffmann / Lange: *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot*, Hamburg 2011, 89–128; Lange, Britta: "Geschichten von der Möwe, 1916–1918. Praktiken von *talking* und *speaking* vor dem Grammophon", in: Lüdtke, Alf / Nanz, Tobias (eds.): *Bilder, Laute, Texte. Register des Archivs*, Göttingen 2015, 25–46; Lange, Britta: "Poste restante, and Messages in Bottles. Sound Recordings of Indian Prisoners in World War I", in: *Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies*, Vol. 41, no.1, 2015, 84–100.
- 16 For example, the HERA-project "Cultural Exchange in a Time of Global Conflict. Colonials, Neutrals and Belligerents during the First World War" 2013–2016 at the Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin (today: Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient) and numerous other research and

partly incomplete or cannot be understood today without additional explanations. A second generation translation can reveal other levels of meaning. Thus, one of the most urgent questions to the collection still remains: What did the prisoners even say?

This book addresses a few of the numerous captured voices from the Sound Archive. The speakers belong to the large number of men, who were taken prisoners of war during World War I in Europe. According to estimates today, the total number ranged between 6.6 and 8.4 million, whereby in October 1918 almost 2.4 million soldiers and about 40,000 officers were in German captivity.¹⁷ The diversity of national and ethnic groups in the German camps resulted from the political blocs in the World War. The German Reich fought together with the Danubian Monarchy Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. Opponents of the so-called Central Powers were the Triple Entente from Great Britain, France and the Russian Tsardom, each of which sent dependent “peoples” into battle: among others, African troops for the French army, Indian troops for the British army and soldiers from Georgia and Caucasus for the army of the Tsar. The opponents of the Central Powers also included the militarily taken over Belgium. In the course of the war, other states entered in the war on the side of the Entente: including Italy in 1915, Romania in 1916 and the USA in 1917. Around 1.4 million Russians, 500,000 French including their colonial soldiers, 185,000 British including their colonial soldiers, 130,000 Italians, 46,000 Belgians and 43,000 Romanians, in addition to Serbian, US-American, Portuguese, Greek, Montenegrin, Japanese and Brazilian soldiers were taken prisoner by the Germans until the end of the war in 1918.¹⁸ Over 100,000 civilians were also interned in the German Reich: so-called “enemy state foreigners”, who were on German soil or in German waters at the outbreak of the war. This phenomenon had not occurred before in history.¹⁹

The numbers of the different groups of prisoners of war include the troops referred to as colonial soldiers. Although mercenaries from the

translation projects, as well as artistic works. Cf. for this: <http://www.lautarchiv.hu-berlin.de/aktivitaeten/> (accessed on 9.9.2021).

17 Hinz, Uta: *Gefangen im Großen Krieg. Kriegsgefangenschaft in Deutschland 1914–1921*, Essen 2006, 9f.

18 Ibid. 10. For the Habsburg Monarchy, the figure of prisoners of war fluctuates between 900,000 and 1.75 million (Cf. Moritz, Verena/Leidinger, Hannes: *Zwischen Nutzen und Bedrohung. Die russischen Kriegsgefangenen in Österreich (1914–1921)*, Bonn 2005, 21).

19 Jahr, Christoph: “Zivilisten als Kriegsgefangene. Die Internierung von ‘Feindstaaten-Ausländern’ in Deutschland während des Ersten Weltkriegs am Beispiel des ‘Engländerlagers’ in Ruhleben”, in: Overmans, Rüdiger (ed.): *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Cologne i. a. 1999, 297–321.

French colonies in Africa had already been deployed in Europe during the French-Prussian War of 1870/71, the scale was exceeded many times over from 1914 onwards. According to estimates today, the Triple Entente deployed about 650,000 colonial soldiers on battlefields in Europe. France sent huge contingents of men from its colonies in Africa, among them 172,800 soldiers from Algeria, 134,300 from West Africa, 34,000 from Madagascar and more than 2,000 from the Somalian coast.²⁰ England drafted over a million soldiers from India – among them men from India, today's Pakistan and Nepal – to fight outside of India in the British army, but it sent no men from its African colonies to the European fronts.²¹ The German Reich deployed soldiers from its “protected areas” in Africa exclusively for battles on the African continent. In total, over four million colonised people were drawn into the World War. Sound recordings were made of a tiny fraction of this mass of interned people.

The holdings of phonograph records created by the Phonographic Commission show that its members had a special interest in material from those interned as colonial soldiers in the German Reich. As early as end of 1914, on the recommendation of the German News Agency for the Orient, two prison camps were set up in Wünsdorf near Zossen, about 40 kilometres south of Berlin, in which primarily non-Christian prisoners of war were to be interned and politically influenced. Through targeted propaganda, Muslim prisoners were to be persuaded to join the jihad – the holy war of the Ottoman Empire as an ally of the German Reich, particularly against England.²² In the Weinberg Camp mainly Muslim Tatars from the Tsarist Empire were held captive, and in the Halfmoon Camp Indian and African colonial soldiers from the British and French armies. Of a total of 1,650 gramophone wax records, 482, almost a third, were recorded in the Wünsdorf camps,²³ mainly with voices of people from Asia and Africa.

The gramophone collection of voice recordings from the First World War was influenced by military and political conditions, which were reflected in the voices of the colonial soldiers. In the recordings, the prisoners left behind narrations of personal stories: stories of people whose accounts were never

20 Cf. Koller, Christian: “German perceptions of enemy colonial troops, 1914–1918”, in: Ahuja / Liebau / Roy (eds.): *When the war began*, 130–148.

21 However, for example, England recruited over 30,000 civilian workers in South Africa, just as other countries brought workers to Europe. It is questionable whether a clear distinction could always be made between the functions of the soldier and the worker.

22 Cf. Höpp, Gerhard: *Muslimen in der Mark – Als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen, 1914–1924*, Berlin 1997.

23 Cf. Mahrenholz, Jürgen: “Recordings of South-Asian Languages and Music in the *Lautarchiv* of the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin”, in: Ahuja / Liebau / Roy (eds.): *When the war began*, 187–206, here 198. These records contained a total of 765 individual pieces.

asked for at the time, much less published, for the official historiography of the World War. Mainly colonial soldiers from the British and French armies, but also soldiers from the Caucasus regions or the Baltic States who had to go to war for the Tsar's army, can be considered as having had no or only a few privileges, whereby a complex system of differences and gradations must be taken into account. Some of them were farmers and owned land, others had always been dependent on the hierarchically structured labour relations. Many of them were placed in at least a double subaltern position during the war: Not only did they often come from lower social classes and were identifiable as well as liable to be stigmatised in Europe as non-European by the colour of their skin. Furthermore, they were treated as war or civilian prisoners in the German camps. However, the sound recordings of the Phonographic Commission were not made in order to interrogate the prisoners as colonial subjects with individual stories, but to produce supra-individual and exemplary examples of language.

The question of what constitutes a tone or voice archive or a *sound archive* has so far received little attention within the *archival turn*. It arises with the term. Following Michel Foucault, the linguistically composed archive can on the one hand be described as an institution (*les archives* in plural) that houses and co-produces documents as an organising power; on the other hand as a historically and culturally specific a priori which conditions discourse (*l'archive* in singular): the "law of what can be said".²⁴ Whereas the first archival form represents a material deposit, the second is an immaterial structure, which in turn, however, produces concrete ways of speaking. Thus, it can be assumed that the archive as a law (after the Greek term for the *archons* who wrote and preserved the laws) determines what is spoken and sung. This articulation sounds or appears, fades or disappears, is repeated and memorised or not. It is manifested in the form of sound recordings or not – or is inscribed in an immaterial archive, the *oral memory*, or in a repertoire that can be updated under certain conditions²⁵. In the broad sense, the colonial archive is to be understood as an immaterial archive in which power structures and exclusions are produced and manifested under conditions of colonality. Institutional archives as material repositories of recorded sounds are thus only a special case of that which is spoken, sung, articulated, perhaps thought, which the archive produces as law. Especially

24 Foucault, Michel: *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), translated from French into English by A. M. Sheridan Smith, London / New York 1989, 145.

25 Cf. Hamilton, Carolyn i. a. (eds.): *Refiguring the Archive*, Cape Town 2002.

the colonial archives of knowledge and speech produce an echo in material archives only to a small and distorted degree.

The Sound Archive of the Humboldt University as an institution is not comparable to the archives of the colonial administration as they are preserved today in the Federal Archives and partly also in the local archives of the former colonies. Since it did not administer colonial subjects, it was not a colonial administration archive either. Rather it represents an academic media archive which, in parts of its holdings, should also provide knowledge about the languages and music traditions in colonies. Moreover, towards the end of the war, Wilhelm Doegen stated in an exposé that the collection should serve “also colonial interests and aims”, such as the training of civil servants and private individuals who would go abroad.²⁶ I propose therefore to speak of the prisoner of war recordings as a colonial collection within the Sound Archive – and thereby of a colonial archive by extension.

If the sound recordings of the prisoners of war represent a colonial collection and are simultaneously determined by an immaterial oral archive of the colonised, the question arises as to how this holding is to be read and be listened to today – in the postcolonial present –, whether it can provide information on the perception of those speakers or contains traces of subversion. A prerequisite to find such traces, however, would be the assumption that the “true” position, the voice of the prisoners as subjects would be perceptible on the records. Using the acoustic and metaphorical figure of the echo, the cultural studies scholar Anette Hoffmann argued in favour of understanding the voice recordings of prisoners of war not as their authentic voices reporting on the war and on the self, but as reflections of their positions in whatever way: as an echo in the sense of a trace, which is determined by restriction, distortion, disturbance and stringency.²⁷ However, before the recorded words of a speaker can be questioned in this regard, the collection containing them and the comprising archive must be examined more closely. According to the suggestion of the historian Ann Laura Stoler, the Colonial Archive should not be brushed against the grain in search of gestures of resistance without first reading it along the grain. What needs to be examined is how the archive is constructed as a product of power, but also as a producing power on its own,

26 *Denkschrift über die Errichtung eines “Deutschen Lautamtes” in Berlin von Wilh. Doegen*, Berlin, November 1918. As a manuscript reverentially dedicated to His Excellency Prof. D. von Harnack by the author, 11.

27 Hoffmann: “Echoes”, 12.

what it should comprise and how it is structured.²⁸ This order of knowledge presents itself as a powerful basis of historiography and an effect of political power. Archives are not understood as mere suppliers of sources, but as sources themselves: “archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production, as monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography”.²⁹ Conducting an ethnography of the archive, revealing its modes of operation and classification systems also lends itself to the Sound Archive as a phonetic and preserving archive in its basic orientation, which in turn contains a colonial collection of prisoner of war voices. Only with the analysis of the structure of the archive and the collection can it be understood which information was stored and which was not, which persons under which premises were involved in the construction of archival records and who or what is not represented.

As a cultural studies scholar, I interconnect different perspectives in this book. Under the umbrella of the history of knowledge in the broad sense, I present who made the sound recordings, under what conditions, with which apparatuses, methods and with which goals for which institutions (I). In the sense of a history of the speakers, I ask who spoke on the sound recordings, about what, why and for whom (II). From the perspective of a history of listening, finally I address which persons in which situations listen with which intentions under which prerequisites (III). All three research approaches presuppose that the sound recordings of prisoners of war are not used as a sideshow to the history of the First World War, as an illustration or vivification of something else. I understand them as historical sources, which stand alone, are meaningful and open up a multitude of relevant questions, make visible methodological problems and demand theoretical expansion. They can also be starting points for more far-reaching historical studies.

I.) The speakers of the gramophone records selected for this book came from Great Britain, France, the Tsardom, from Romania, Tunisia, Burkina Faso and India. Their sound recordings, like those of the other speakers, were made in civilian and prisoner of war camps and they also report on them. The prisoners, as can be seen in their texts and performances in front of the gramophone, reflect in personal, historical and poetic condensation on the places they found themselves in and where multiple interests overlapped. In the First World War, the prison camps of the Central Powers were the subject

28 Cf. Stoler, Ann Laura: “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance”, in: *Archival Science*, Vol. 2, 2002, 87–109; Stoler, Ann Laura: *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton / Oxford 2009.

29 Stoler: “Colonial Archives”, 90.

and site of representation of military, politics, propaganda, popular curiosity and the entertainment industry, as well as for scientific methods, media and archives.³⁰ Just like the approach of the Phonographic Commission, the functions of the camps for a series of scientific studies, methods and findings can be examined historically in terms of the history of knowledge and the history of science. The sound recordings of prisoners of war then appear as scientific artefacts produced for German research with the help of technology and on the basis of the knowledge of the time. The practices of creating materials for different historical questions are describable as cultural techniques and can be explored through the analytical approaches of the history of knowledge and the history of science, as well as the history of technology and institutions of their production, archiving, processing and evaluation.

I understand the sound recordings – analogue to the concept of imaging techniques, to strategies of visualisation or making visible in scientific images³¹ – as audible scientific renderings.³² They are not spontaneous, random, unbroken “authentic” utterances, but artefacts: documents that create a scientific listening object. In this respect, I assume that the operating media, which recorded the presumably self-acting and “objective” facts without the influence of subjects, were fundamentally involved in the construction of the results, i. e. that results and categories were inconceivable or non-existent without the media used. The scientists of the Phonographic Commission adhered to the “mechanical objectivity”³³ that could be ascribed to the phonograph and gramophone as well as the photographic camera. The apparatus seemed to record the audible without any distortion of human interpretation.³⁴ However, the involved researchers produced the sound recordings, tried to make knowledge audible and co-produced it by providing something to listen to. The sound recordings are therefore not only something audible, but also

30 Cf. in addition to the growing number of studies on individual camps in general, i. a. Hinz: *Gefangen*, and Oltmer, Jochen (ed.): *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Paderborn 2006.

31 Cf. Rheinberger, Hans-Jörg: “Objekt und Repräsentation”, in: Heinz, Bettina / Huber, Jörg (eds.): *Mit dem Auge denken. Strategien der Sichtbarmachung in wissenschaftlichen und virtuellen Welten*, Zurich 2001, 55–61.

32 Lange, Britta: “Sensible Sammlungen”, in: Berner / Hoffmann / Lange: *Sensible Sammlungen*, 15–40, here 31ff.

33 Cf. Daston, Lorraine / Galison, Peter: *Objektivität*, Frankfurt am Main 2007. Daston and Galison have examined the discourse on mechanical “objectivity” in relation to images in 19th century anthropological atlases, but did not deal with sound recordings. Further on, however, it will become clear that the scientists of the Phonographic Commission constructed a system of recording that derived scientific value from the establishment of “objectivity” and verifiability.

34 Friedrich Kittler thus assumes that the phonograph is to be assigned to the sphere of the real, insofar as it records “before any semantics”. Cf. Kittler, Friedrich A.: *Grammophon Film Typewriter*, Berlin 1986, 16.

something rendered audible. The concept of rendering audible refers to the constructional character of the sound recordings. This constructedness is often obscured by the fact that the artefacts nevertheless appear to sound “natural”.

The main sources available for questions relating to the history of knowledge and the history of science are the published and unpublished records of the German scientists involved at the time. Unpublished documents include protocols and contracts of the Phonographic Commission³⁵, correspondence among its members and various institutions³⁶, research documents of the Indologist Heinrich Lüders on the Indian prisoners of war³⁷, reports and reminders by Wilhelm Doegen³⁸, who described himself as “commissioner”³⁹ of the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission. As the Prussian Academy of Sciences also subsidised linguistic research on the prisoners of war, the corresponding reports can become supplementary reading.⁴⁰ The unpublished sources on propaganda activities at the Weinberg and Halfmoon camps in Wünsdorf near Zossen are available in the Political Archives of the Federal Foreign Office⁴¹ and have already been partially evaluated.⁴²

In terms of published sources, the books by Doegen can be referred to. *The attitude and fate of prisoners of war (Der Kriegsgefangenen Haltung und*

³⁵ Archives of the Humboldt University of Berlin, Institute for Phonetic Research, Vol. 1–28 (1919–1945); The Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage, Berlin: PK, I. HA Rep. 76: Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Va Sec. 2, Tit. X No. 250: Institute for Phonetic Research, Vol. 1 (1917–1928), Vol. 2 (1929–1930), Supplement (1931–1934).

³⁶ Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage, manuscript collection, estate Felix von Luschan: Correspondence with Wilhelm Doegen, Paul Hambruch, Carl Meinhof, Rudolf Pöchl, Carl Stumpf; Phonogram Archive of the Ethnological Museum Berlin: Folder Phonographic Commission, documents and correspondence of the Phonographic Commission, i. a. Responses of the members to a survey by Carl Stumpf at the beginning of 1919. Stumpf requested all members of the Phonographic Commission for information on whether they were receiving money for their work, exactly what work they had done and whether they had already published anything or were planning any publications.

³⁷ Archives of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, estate Heinrich Lüders.

³⁸ Doegen: *Bericht über mein Wirken*; Doegen, Wilhelm: *Manuskript des ersten Kapitels der Autobiographie von Professor Doegen (mit Fotos)*, sent with letter dated 28.11.1967 from the publishing house Die Welt to family Blass; German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum), personal documents Wilhelm Doegen, Do2 98/2154.

³⁹ Doegen, Wilhelm: “Einleitung”, in: id. (ed.): *Unter fremden Völkern. Eine neue Völkerkunde*, Berlin 1925, 9–17, here 10.

⁴⁰ Archives of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities: PAW (1812–1945), II–VIII, 348, supported scientific research undertakings of the Phil.-hist. Class (1916–17); PAW (1812–1945), II – V, 166: Minutes of the meetings of the Phil.-hist. Class (1915–1917), II.

⁴¹ Federal Foreign Office Berlin, Political Archives: IA-World War, WK No. 11, R 20938, Annex to Vol. 2: Oppenheim, Max Freiherr von: *Denkschrift betreffend die Revolutionierung der islamischen Gebiete unserer Feinde*, October 1914; WK 11s, R 21244 — 21262, Gefangenenerlager während des Ersten Weltkriegs: Propagandistische Aktivitäten (Unternehmungen und Aufwiegelungen gegen unsere Feinde); Dept. A, 126g, adh 1, R 1529, Vol. 20.

⁴² Cf. i. a. Höpp: *Muslimen*.

Schicksal) from 1921⁴³, commissioned by the Ministry of the Reichswehr, reports in retrospect mainly tendentiously about the good conditions in German camps and the ethically correct treatment of prisoners of war in the German Reich. In contrast, Doegen's book *Among Foreign Peoples* (*Unter fremden Völkern*), published in 1925, compiles, in addition to its preface and introduction, contributions on the individual ethnic and national groups in the camps. They were largely written by the staff of the Phonographic Commission at the time and in some cases report specifically on the work of sound recordings in the individual camps.⁴⁴ There are also references to the Commission's work in the published memoirs of the scientists involved.⁴⁵

What all these sources have in common is that they depict the German scientific perspective that in many cases was riddled with political rhetoric during the war. In numerous statements, the talk of Germany's "enemies" was adopted. Moreover, many of the scientific essays are determined by the racism of the time when it came to describing ethnic groups. On the one hand, stereotypes disseminated in the press and the theory of martial races – the idea that some human "races" were more suited to war than others⁴⁶ – contributed to this. On the other hand, the scientists' descriptions drew on comparative body descriptions and ascribed temperaments of "folk characters" practiced in anthropology, ethnology and racial studies around 1900. In his reports, Doegen in particular shows an effort, on the one hand, to describe the treatment of prisoners of war in the German Reich in accordance with the propaganda as lawful, humane and respectful, and on the other hand, to euphemistically present the scientific work of the Phonographic Commission as "uniting peoples"⁴⁷. German scholars had "used the World War for entirely peaceful work for free humanity" to accomplish a "unique cultural deed".⁴⁸ In his report of 1919 on the Commission's scientific work in the camps, he

43 Doegen, Wilhelm (ed.): *Der Kriegsgefangenen Haltung und Schicksal, Kriegsgefangene Völker Band 1*, edited in collaboration with Theodor Kappstein and published by official order of the Ministry of the Reichswehr, Berlin 1921. The numbers that Doegen gives for the groups of prisoners and their distribution among the camps are partly cited as evidence even today.

44 Doegen, Wilhelm (ed.): *Unter fremden Völkern. Eine neue Völkerkunde*, Berlin 1925. It contains essays by the following members of the Phonographic Commission: Hubert Grimme, Martin Heepe, Paul Hambruch, Otto Dempwolff, F.W.K. Müller, Helmuth von Glasenapp, Heinrich Lüders, Josef Horovitz, F.C. Andreas, Ernst Lewy, Gotthold Weil, Adolf Dirr, Adolf Lane, Hermann Jacobsohn, Hermann Urtel, Alois Brandl.

45 Cf. Brandl, Alois: *Zwischen Inn und Themse. Lebensbeobachtungen eines Anglisten. Alt-Tirol / England / Berlin*, Berlin 1936; Goldschmidt, Adolph: *Lebenserinnerungen 1863–1944*, ed. by Marie Roosen-Runge, Berlin 1989.

46 Cf. i. a. Omissi, David: *The sepoy and the Raj. The Indian Army, 1860–1940*, Houndsmill / London 1994.

47 Doegen: "Einleitung", 9.

48 Doegen, Wilhelm, "Vorwort", in: id. (ed.): *Unter fremden Völkern*, 5–6, here 6.

explains “explicitly” that he “never forced any prisoner to speak into the apparatus”.⁴⁹ It is not clear to whom this contention was addressed. However, it shows that it was conceivable at the time that the scientists would have forced the prisoners of war to participate.

The sources on the Commission’s work are to be read with reservation insofar as they can hardly be verified by counter-statements. Like the preserved, carefully staged photographs from the camps, they set the scene for the position of power of the scientists in relation to the speakers and of the Germans in relation to the prisoners of war. Not only do they not represent the position of these Others, they also appropriate and distort them through different strategies. Actions, statements and “characters” of the prisoners were sometimes described in an openly contemptuous way, but perhaps more often trivialised, described as ignorant or ridiculed. Many of the gestures and discursive strategies in the scientists’ texts reveal their “inability to deal with difference”.⁵⁰ At the same time, their claims that the prisoners had material benefits through their participation in the sound recordings – such as time off work, cigars, cigarettes, sweets and other foodstuff – but also “non-material” benefits in that they could talk for hours in their mother tongue and about their homeland.⁵¹ When Doegen writes in several repetitions that the prisoners were “thankful” to him and the Commission for this, it can be assumed that the formula of “gratitude”⁵² was used by the scientists to even out, tame and absorb many of the prisoners’ more ambivalent feelings. At the same time, it can be surmised that the relationship between the German scientists and the colonised imprisoned speakers was more complicated and multifaceted rather than being a one-dimensional and totally oppressive one. The situation created in the camps also exposed the scientists to misunderstandings and unexpected accusations, so that their gestures of superiority may not only document superiority, but precisely testify also to the desire for control and an ideal relationship of domination. A particularly critical and cautious approach to sources penned by German authorities and scholars is also called for because references to the scientific process have not yet been found in the words or texts of the prisoners.⁵³

49 Doegen: *Berichte über mein Wirken*, p. VIII, g, emphasis in the original.

50 Hall, Stuart: “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power”, in: Hall, Stuart / Gieben, Bram (eds.): *Formations of Modernity*, Cambridge 1992, 275–332, here 304.

51 Doegen: *Bericht über mein Wirken*, p. VIII, a.

52 Ibid., p. VIII a and b as well as III, e; VIII, f; VIII, g.

53 This does not mean that such comments cannot still be found in other sound recordings from the Sound Archive than those that I worked on. In the Vienna collection of prisoner of war recordings, for example, Sergej Objedkov, a Russian from Finland, ironically thematised the