

A voice recording, a portrait photo and three drawings: tracing the life of a colonial soldier

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Abstract

Out of a total of approximately 1.4 million South Asians fighting in the First World War, more than 90,000 combatants fought on the Western Front in France and Belgium. Nearly 50,000 South Asian labourers were also sent to France and Flanders to support the British troops. During the First World War, South Asian combatants and non-combatants were taken prisoner in France, Belgium, Mesopotamia, East Africa, and other theatres of war. Around a thousand South Asian military POWs and approximately the same number of civilian South Asians living in Europe were detained in German camps. Within this article, these years of captivity in the life of the colonial soldier Gangaram Gurung are reconstructed – by exploring visual, auditory and textual evidence about him.

Gangaram Gurung: a life in a global conflict

Gangaram Gurung, the Gurkha »line-boy« from Punjab, was one of more than one million South Asian participants in the First World War whose life stories so far largely remain untold, not only because they did not write their own memoirs, but also because very little information on the individual colonial soldier was collected in the archives.¹ He

fought in the First Battalion of the Third Gurkha Rifles Regiment of the British Indian Army on the Western Front. He reached the front in November 1914. Together with a larger group of South Asian combatants, Gangaram Gurung was captured on 22 December 1914 at La Bassée (near Givenchy) in France² and brought to Germany. He remained in captivity – first in Halfmoon Camp at Wünsdorf outside Berlin, later in Morile-Marculesti in Romania – for nearly four years, until October 1918. According to the Indian Soldier's Fund, Havildar (Sergeant) Gangaram Gurung was transferred to the Netherlands in October 1918, from where he was allegedly repatriated to India.³

Within the framework of this article, I will try to reconstruct these years of captivity in the life of Gangaram Gurung through a combination of visual, auditory and textual evidence about him which allows, together with new research findings on South Asian soldiers in the First World War, to draw conclusions on those phases of his life which are not documented. General research interest in the social, religious and ethnic structures and combat operations of colonial troops has rapidly grown in the context of exploring the global character of the First World War. Comprehensive studies have been published on Indian troops, not only from the per-

¹ Most of the research for this article was carried out within the project *Cultural Exchange in a Time of Global Conflict: Neutrals and Colonials and Belligerents during the First World War*, funded by HERA from 2013 to 2016. But it also ties in with earlier studies on perceptions and experiences of the First World War in Asia and Africa carried out at ZMO. I am thankful to Larissa Schmid, Franziska Roy and Ravi Ahuja for drawing my attention to sources and publications related to Gangaram Gurung. I also would like to thank the artist Sonya Schönberger for the collabora-

tive work on Gangaram Gurung and Santanu Das and Britta Lange for their comments on the paper.

² ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) Archive, Geneva, R 51865, British Prisoners of War, interned military, 12 Oct. 1918.

³ BL, (British Library), London, IOR MSS EUR F120/272, October 15th, 1918, Indian Soldier's Fund, prisoners repatriated from Germany and Romania; ICRC Archive, R 51747, List of non-commissioned officers arrived in Holland from Germany for internment October 13th, 1918.

spective of military and social history,⁴ but also in the disciplines of cultural and literary studies.⁵ Especially with regard to the latter group of studies, strong arguments have been made for expanding the scope of sources and for including not only textual documents, but also photos, audio documents and objects into the analysis.⁶ New ways to present the results of research have been used, like documentaries, exhibitions and art.⁷ In some cases, as in Philip Scheffner's documentary *Halfmoon Files - a Ghost Story* (2007), a single individual, the sepoy Mal Singh, is in focus. However, as the documentary shows, large gaps remain, and the whole story of his life cannot be told.

Debates on how to conceptualise studies in micro history in order to shed new light on processes of global developments, have become important during the last decade. Unlike simply doing what is commonly regarded as micro-history - which would mean focusing research on smaller societal units or other social groups including families, small entrepreneurs etc., the German historian and anthropologist Hans Medick, for instance, explores the concept of global micro-history, a term coined by Tonio Andrade.⁸ Medick asks what happens if the historian combines these strands - if he or she uses

or understands micro-history as global history - in order to find the broader transformations in the micro-context and make it visible and thereby to connect life worlds with larger contexts.⁹ This, in a way, describes the tension I am dealing with in this paper: bringing a historical individual, in my case a soldier of the First World War, out of his anonymity by trying to uncover his trajectory through the war and by relating his life to the global conflict. Conceptually, I intend to approach a global conflict through the lens of an individual fate, in order to understand how the war was mirrored in and affected the lives of colonial soldiers; in other words, I want to trace what the anthropologists Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave have called »history in person«. The authors argue, that »history in historical structures and history in person« are connected through asymmetrical processes of intermediation which find its expression in praxis and conflict: »... subjects are in part fashioned and yet also fashion themselves in historically and culturally specific ways«¹⁰ in a continuous process where long term developments, short term local practices and individual identities influence one another.¹¹

This article focuses on Gurkha-Havildar (Sergeant) Gangaram Gurung, who was captured as a prisoner of war on the Western Front in December 1914. It concentrates on the period from October 1914, the moment of his departure from India, to October 1918, the time when he was released from prison camp. I will first provide an analysis of the treatment of South Asian prisoners of war in Germany, concentrating on living conditions, propaganda and the role of academic research in Halfmoon Camp as well as in the camp in Morile-Marculesti in Romania where most of the prisoners were transferred in spring 1917. In the second part of this article, I will tell the story of Gangaram Gurung as it appears to me from the available archival documents. I will explore his journey from the front into captivity, his social position within the camps and the repertoires he used to cope with this situation in order to survive. In the final part, I will discuss his life trajectory from two perspectives: first, as a South Asian participant in the First World War whose story could open a window to better understand the role of co-

4 For accounts of aspects of military history, see for instance: Kaushik Roy, *The Indian Army in Two World Wars*, Leiden: Brill, 2011; Kaushik Roy, »Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880-1918«, *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (4), 2013, pp. 1310-1347; George Morton Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014. For studies dealing with social aspects of the life of South Asian soldiers, see: Radhika Singha, »Front Lines and Status Lines: Sepoy and »Menial« in the Great War 1916-1920«, in: Heike Liebau et al. (eds.), *The World in World Wars. Experiences, perceptions and perspectives from Africa and Asia*, Leiden et al., Brill, 2010, pp. 55-106; Radhika Singha, »The Short Career of the Indian Labour Corps in France, 1917-1919«, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 87 (2), 2015, pp. 27-62; Claude Markovits, »Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front«, in: Liebau et al. (eds.), *The World in World Wars*, pp. 29-53.

5 Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, Cambridge 2011.

6 See especially Santanu Das, »Reframing Life/War »Writing«: Objects, Letters and Songs of Indian Soldiers 1914-1918«, *Textual Practice* 29 (7), pp. 1256-1287; Britta Lange, »Sensible Sammlungen«, in: Margit Berner, Anette Hoffmann and Britta Lange (eds.), *Sensible Sammlungen: aus dem anthropologischen Depot*, Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2011, pp. 5-40.

7 With special emphasis on South Asian experience in captivity, see: Philip Scheffner, *Halfmoon Files - a Ghost Story* (documentary, 2007) <http://halfmoonfiles.de/en> (14 May 2018); Julia Thieke, Elke Fallat, *Digging Deep - Crossing Far* (exhibition 2016) <http://digging-deep-crossing-far.de/de/> (17 Dec. 2016).

8 Hans Medick, »Turning Global? Microhistory in extension«, *Historische Anthropologie* 24 (2) 2016, pp. 241-252; Tonio Andrade, »A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys and a Warlord: Towards a Global Micro History«, *Journal of World History* 21 (2010) 4, pp. 573-591.

9 Hans Medick used this approach with regard to the period of the Thirty Years War. His aim is to explore the tension but also the (im)balance between »Alltag und Katastrophe« (Everyday life and catastrophe). Hans Medick, Benigna von Krusenstjern (eds.), *Zwischen Alltag und Katastrophe. Der Dreißigjährige Krieg aus der Nähe*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999.

10 Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave, »History in Person: An Introduction«, in: Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave (eds.), *Enduring Struggles: Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*, Santa Fe/Oxford: School of American Research Press; James Currey, 2001, pp. 3-33, here p. 5.

11 Holland et al., »History in Person«, pp. 18, 25.

lonial actors in this global conflict; and second, as an example of how to analyse, interpret and connect various kind of historical sources, such as audio, visual and textual material, to make the life of an »unknown soldier«¹² within a global conflict visible.

South Asian prisoners of war in Halfmoon Camp at Wünsdorf

In this part I try to spell out the complex nature of the POW camp as a contested military, political and social space in order to provide a contextual frame for Gangaram Gurung's life during the war. I will discuss the politics of the Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient (Information Service for the East, NfO) as a propaganda institution and its aspirations to foment anti-colonial strife among the prisoners. I will also look at the Phonographic Commission and their attempts to record voices of prisoners of different origin in German camps. We do not know how these four war years, which is most probably the best documented period of Gangaram Gurung's entire life, shaped or even determined his further life. Supposing he returned to his family in India – what place might the war years have had in his life? Having been a prisoner did not mean returning home as a hero. Maybe he saw those years as a »lost« period which he tried to overcome by soon returning to »normality«. While cautiously following his path along the available sources, we have to be aware of the gaps and interstices which we find no evidence for.

Out of a total of approximately 1.4 million South Asians fighting in the First World War, more than 90,000 combatants fought on the Western Front in France and Belgium. Nearly 50,000 South Asian labourers were also sent to France and Flanders to support the British troops. Since the beginning of the First Battle of Ypres on 19 October 1914, a great number of South Asian soldiers had to replace the immense losses in the British Army and were forced to fight in the first lines. The first Indian troops landed in Marseilles in October 1914 and fought in various battles at Ypres, Festubert, Givenchy and/or Neuve Chapelle. In November 1915, most of the combatants were transferred to Mesopotamia; only some of the Indian cavalry and artillery troops remained in Flanders until 1918.¹³

12 Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Heike Liebau, »The First World War in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia: Commemoration, New Research and Debates around the Centennial«, in: Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Heike Liebau, Anorthe Wetzell (eds.), *The Long End of the First World War: Ruptures, Continuities and Memories*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus 2018.

13 Morton Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*; George Morton Jack, »The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration«, *War in History*, 13, 3 (2006), p. 329; Andrew Tait Jarboe, »Soldiers of Empire. Indian Sepoys in and beyond the Imperial Metropole dur-

Around 1,000 South Asian men, taken prisoner of war between autumn 1914 and spring 1915 at Flanders fields, and approximately the same number of civilian South Asians who had lived in Europe when the war broke out, were detained throughout the war in German camps.¹⁴ Most of the military prisoners were interned in what was called the »Inderlager« (Indian camp), a section of the »Halbmondlager« (Halfmoon Camp) in Wünsdorf. Gangaram Gurung was among them.

Halfmoon Camp was one of the numerous »special« camps erected for specific groups of POWs or for a specific purpose. Within a few weeks after the beginning of the First World War, Germany had to deal with a growing number of prisoners who needed to be housed, clothed and fed. As authors like Heather Jones, Olga Nagornaja and others have shown, the treatment of prisoners became part of warfare. It could be an important argument in political negotiations between the belligerent sides, when the situation in the camps was used to raise demands or to put pressure on the enemy.¹⁵ In Germany, several types of camps were erected: camps for the rank and file, for officers, camps for punishment (Straflager) and special camps for

ing the First World War, 1914-1919«, 2013, *History Dissertations*, Paper 11, p. 9, <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20003087>; Dominique Faivre, *Les Indiens 1914-1915. Le sacrifice d'un peuple dans la boue d'Artois*, Saint Venant: ARHAM Association de Recherches Historiques et Archéologiques Militaires, 2014; Tom Donovan and Simon Doherty, *The Indian Corps on the Western Front. A Handbook and Battlefield Guide*, Brighton, UK: Tom Donovan Editions with the Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, New Delhi, 2014.

14 This number is the preliminary result of special research on South Asian POWs in Germany. See: Franziska Roy and Heike Liebau, »Introduction«, in: Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, Ravi Ahuja (eds.), »When the war began we heard of several kings«. *South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, New Delhi 2011, pp. 1-16. During the First World War, South Asian combatants and non-combatants were also taken prisoner in Mesopotamia, East Africa and other theatres of war. It is estimated that around 10,000 men were captured by the Ottoman army in the Mesopotamian campaign. There is little information about Indian combatants captured in East Africa after the Battle of Tanga in November 1914, where Indians participated in fighting German troops. See: Heike Liebau, »Prisoners of War (India)«, 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, 8 Oct. 2014. http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/prisoners_of_war_india.

15 Oxana S. Nagornaja, *Drugoj voennyj opyt. Rossijskie voennoplennye Pervoj mirovoj vojny v Germanii (1914-1922)*, Moskva: Izdat. Novyj chronograf, 2010. Heather Jones, »Imperial captivities: colonial prisoners of war in Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918«, in: Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, pp. 175-193; Heather Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War. Britain, France and Germany 1914-1920*, Cambridge 2011. On the role of captivity in general, see Jochen Oltmer (ed.), *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkrieges*. Paderborn et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh 2006.

propaganda purposes. Halfmoon Camp in Zossen/Wünsdorf near Berlin, where most of the South Asian prisoners were interned from the beginning of 1915, belonged to the last category. It was originally planned as a special camp for Muslim prisoners and, as such, as part of a larger German plan to stir the populations of territories ruled by Britain, France and Russia into revolution. The main idea was to support anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments and to instigate revolts in order to weaken the military and political power of the enemies.¹⁶ The region around Zossen and Wünsdorf south of Berlin had been a large military complex for the army of the German Kaiser since the very beginning of the 20th century. During the First World War, German troops were trained there and sent to the Western front from Wünsdorf railway station, while prisoners were brought back from the front lines to Wünsdorf. Significant attention within the newly founded Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient (NfO),¹⁷ a special propaganda and intelligence bureau for the »Orient« within the German Foreign Office, focused on India as the largest colony of the British Empire. Therefore, within Halfmoon Camp, a special Indian camp (Inderlager) was created. According to a plan developed by the German diplomat, orientalist and first head of the NfO, Max von Oppenheim,¹⁸ South Asian prisoners were to live there in accordance with their religious rules and in consideration of their climatic needs. Germans and »trustworthy« Indians should observe them and select a group who would go with Indian nationalists via Constantinople to Afghanistan to carry out revolutionary activities there, together with the large group of Indians in Afghanistan. These carefully chosen POWs would, Oppenheim

16 See for instance: Jennifer Jenkins, »Fritz Fischer's »Programme for Revolution«: Implications for a Global History of Germany in the First World War«, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 2 (2013), pp. 397-417; Jennifer Jenkins, »Germany's Eurasian Strategy in 1918«, in: Anorthe Kremers, Helmut Bley (eds.), *The World During the First World War. Perceptions, Experiences and Consequences*, Essen: Klartext 2014, pp. 291-302; Marc Hanisch, »Max Freiherr von Oppenheim und die Revolutionierung der islamischen Welt als anti-imperiale Befreiung von oben«, in: Wilfried Loth and Marc Hanisch (eds.), *Erster Weltkrieg und Dschihad. Die Deutschen und die Revolutionierung des Orients*, München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014, pp. 13-38; Jennifer Jenkins, Heike Liebau and Larissa Schmid, »Anti-Colonial Networks, Independence Committees and Germany's Global War«, *Journal for Global History* (forthcoming).

17 Maren Bragulla, *Die Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient: Fallstudie einer Propagandainstitution im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Saarbrücken: VDM, 2007. For the activities of the NfO with regard to South Asian prisoners of war see: Heike Liebau, »The German Foreign Office, Indian emigrants and propaganda efforts among the »Sepoys«, in: Roy et al., »When the war began we heard of several kings«, pp. 96-129.

18 Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA AA), Berlin, R 20938, appendix to Vol. 2, »Denkschrift betreffend die Revolutionierung der islamischen Gebiete unserer Feinde«, by Max Freiherr von Oppenheim, October 1914.

expected, report about the good treatment they received in the German camp. Another group of POWs should be prepared to return to the front together with revolutionaries, in order to convince fellow countrymen to desert.¹⁹

It is difficult to reconstruct the exact number of South Asians captured or deserted on the Western Front who then were sent to camps in Germany. Most of the captured prisoners and deserted South Asian combatants were first brought to the French town of Lille before they were transported to Germany. In Lille, they were interrogated by Germans, for instance Paul Walter, a former German missionary in India who spoke Hindustani.²⁰ It was in Lille too, where first decisions were taken about who should be transported into which camp, who could be of interest for the German Foreign Office, who was responsive to German propaganda and who showed anti-British sentiments that could be developed further through specific, target-oriented propaganda.²¹ During the first weeks of the war, South Asians were taken to various POW camps, for instance to Wittenberge,²² only from the beginning of 1915 were they concentrated in Halfmoon Camp, where the aforementioned Indian camp was erected to separate the South Asian prisoners from the others, mostly North African colonial soldiers who had fought in the French army.

On 7 January 1915, the following numbers of South Asian prisoners in Zossen/Wünsdorf are reported: 7 Gurkhas, 3 Rajputs, 1 Sikh, 1 (Muslim) Pathan from Rawalpindi. On 3 February 1915, when the special Halfmoon Camp for Muslims was ready, official German documents state that 10,600 POWs would be sent to Zossen/Wünsdorf, among them 102 Indian Muslims and 314 other Indians.²³ This number corresponds with the detailed description given by the representative of the American embassy in Berlin, J. B. Jackson, who in April 1915 visited the camp.

At Wünsdorf, by the side of the camp for French Mahommedans, a new camp has been constructed for British Indians. In it the various Indian races occupy separate barracks. In one, a corner of which is kept clean as a place for prayer, there

19 PAAA, R 21244, statement made by von Oppenheim, 20 November 1914. Von Oppenheim here also reports on the reactions among the Indian nationalists who expressed their wish to go with a group of POWs back to the front.

20 Paul Walter later worked in Halfmoon Camp.

21 After a group of soldiers belonging to the 58th Rifles and 9th Bhopals were taken prisoner at Festubert at the beginning of December 1914, Paul Walter reported on 7 December to Rudolf Nadolny, the head of the Political Section of the Reserve General Staff, that Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Sikhs (the Sikhs from the 58th Regiment) were among them. PAAA, R 21244, 7 December 1914, report by Walter.

22 PAAA, R 21244, 9 January 1915, report by von Oppenheim. It is said that 270 Indians were in Wittenberge.

23 PAAA, R 21244, report, 3 February 1915.

are 95 Mahomedans (Baluchis), in two other there are 160 Gurkhas; in a fourth there are 65 Sikhs including an officer who has a room himself; and in a fifth there are 71 Thakurs. [...] In all, there are at present 400 Indian soldiers and four officers in the camp.²⁴

On 1 June 1917, after large groups of South Asian POWs who had been in Wünsdorf since the beginning of 1915 had already been transported to Romania, another 631 Indians (many of them lascars/seamen) were registered in Halfmoon Camp.²⁵

Like all the other, mostly North African prisoners in Halfmoon Camp, South Asian prisoners, too, were exposed to intensive direct propaganda activities, such as thematic lectures or agitation through the special camp newspaper *El Dschihad*, published by the NfO in various languages. *Hindostan* was the Hindi or Urdu title of this propaganda periodical for South Asian prisoners.²⁶ Their chief objective was – besides pan-Islamic propaganda in the Urdu edition – to strengthen anti-colonial and nationalist sentiment among South Asian prisoners. South Asian political activists like Mansur Ahmad (?-?), Taraknath Das (1884-1958), Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (1880-1937), Chempakaraman Pillai (1891-1934), Bhupendranath Datta (1884-1961) and others, who during the war were organised in the Berlin Indian Independence Committee (IIC), were involved in the production of the newspaper. From the German side, Helmuth von Glasenapp (1891-1963), soon to be one of the leading German Indologists, and the former missionary Ferdinand Graetsch (?-?), were involved. Between April 1915 and August 1918, 84 issues of *Hindostan* appeared with print runs of about 700 copies each. The paper was produced exclusively for Halfmoon Camp and could be distributed elsewhere only with special permission.

However, as Gerhard Höpp argued, propaganda in Halfmoon Camp included not only direct forms of agitation and indoctrination.²⁷ Cultural and physi-

cal activities as well as opportunities to conduct religious rites were provided. The camp had a library with books in various languages. The opportunity to practise religion, as well as the organisation of religious festivities, was part of German propaganda policy in Halfmoon Camp. Not only Muslims celebrated their religious festivities, often with great public attention; the Hindus, too, organised for instance *Dassehra* in the camp. This is one of the most popular Hindu festivals in India to this day, celebrated in all regions of India in different ways, often over several days. In North India it is called *Ram Lila*, in West Bengal and East India it is called *Durga Puja*. Often the festival includes the performance of parts of the classical poem *Ramayana*. Although the treatment of prisoners in Halfmoon Camp was better than in other ordinary camps in Germany, the prisoners in Wünsdorf also had to face hunger and cold, tuberculosis, typhoid and respiratory diseases. The mortality rate among South Asian POWs in Germany was higher than in other groups, and it was the highest among the Gurkhas. Out of ca. 1,000 South Asian POWs in Wünsdorf, 226 died throughout the war.²⁸

The prisoners in Wünsdorf also became the target of scholarly interest when German anthropologists, musicologists and linguists carried out studies in the camp. The presence of men from many parts of the world, including North Africa and South Asia, attracted a great deal of attention from German scholars. Anthropologists and linguists regarded this camp as a particularly interesting laboratory and – sanctioned by political and military authorities – carried out research there. Between December 1915 and December 1918, the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission, founded in October 1915 under Wilhelm Doegen (1877-1967), recorded languages, dialects and traditional music among POWs in various camps. A total of 2,672 audio recordings were produced. Among them are nearly 300 in South Asian languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Garhwali, Baluchi, Nepali and Gurung. With regard to the South Asian POWs, German scholars like the aforementioned Indologist Helmuth von Glasenapp and the expert in Islamic studies Josef Horowitz (1874-1931) played a double role as researchers and as political consultants. Glasenapp was a member of the NfO and regularly published articles in the propaganda organ of the NfO (the *Korrespondenzblatt*, which was later renamed *Der neue Orient*). He was also a leading figure in the production of the camp newspaper *Hindostan*, and he selected books and journals for

28 Their graves are at the Zehrendorf war cemetery near Wünsdorf. Ravi Ahuja: »The Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)«, in: Liebau et al. (eds.), *The World in World Wars*, pp. 131-166; See also: PAAA R 21256, report from Halfmoon Camp, 11 May 1916.

24 The National Archives, London (TNA) FO 383/ 065, report signed 7 July 1915, concerning a visit to Halfmoon Camp on 8 April 1915. The same Mr. Jackson visited the camp again a year later and mentioned that he was accompanied »by the commandant, the officer in charge, and the English-speaking Gurkha sergeant whom I met on former visits«. NA, FO 383/153, report by John B. Jackson on the situation of the British-Indian POWs in Wünsdorf, signed 23 March 1916.

25 PAAA, R 21262, report, June 1917.

26 Heike Liebau, »Hindostan – a camp-newspaper for South-Asian Prisoners of World War One in Germany«, in: Roy et al., »When the war began we heard of several kings«, pp. 231-249.

27 For a detailed description of the social conditions and propaganda measures in Halfmoon Camp, see Gerhard Höpp. *Muslimen in der Mark. Als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen*. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1997, especially chapters 3 and 4.

the camp library. As a scholar with excellent knowledge of and interest in Indian languages and as a member of the Phonographic Commission, von Glasenapp carried out linguistic research and recorded sound samples in the camps.²⁹ Josef Horovitz strongly supported von Oppenheim's strategy of pan-Islamic agitation among the Indian sepoy. From his point of view, it was important to organise propaganda among the Indian prisoners that would include pan-Islamic ideas and take into account their sympathies for the Caliphate of the Ottoman Sultan. As a member of the Phonographic Commission, Horovitz made recordings in Hindustani and Baluchi. Besides linguistic research, anthropological research was also conducted in POW camps during the war.³⁰ Felix von Luschan (1854-1925), who was also a member of the Phonographic Commission, and his doctoral candidate Egon von Eickstedt (1892-1965) travelled with other anthropologists through POW camps to undertake body measurements and make plaster casts of faces. In December 1916, von Eickstedt carried out body measurements among South Asian prisoners in Wünsdorf. Later, after most of them had been transferred to Romania, Eickstedt continued his measurements there.³¹ As Andrew Evans argues, prisoner of war camps in Germany and Austria became »veritable laboratories for the study of race«. ³² These scientific endeavours during the First World War have to be contextualised within the development of racial theory in Germany, which later became a cornerstone of national socialist ideology.

A voice recording, a portrait photo and three drawings

My interest in Gangaram Gurung began when I first listened to sound recording number 271 of the Lautarchiv der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin (LA). It contains the *Parable*

²⁹ Glasenapp writes on his time in the NFO in his memoirs. Helmuth v. Glasenapp, *Meine Lebensreise. Menschen, Länder und Dinge, die ich sah*. Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1964, pp. 70-98.

³⁰ For biographical information on Horovitz, see: Gudrun Jäger, »Orientalistik jenseits aller Nationalismen. Der jüdische Gelehrte Josef Horowitz und sein Verständnis von Annäherung von Judentum und Islam«, in: *Forschung Frankfurt* 3-4, 2004, pp. 80-83.

³¹ For a critical analysis of the scholarly activities, see first of all Britta Lange's research: Britta Lange, »South Asian Soldiers and German Academics: Anthropological, Linguistic and Musicological Field Studies in Prison Camps«, in: Roy et al., »When the war began we heard of several kings«, pp. 149-184; Lange, »Sensible Sammlungen«.

³² Andrew Evans, *Anthropology at War. World War I and the science of race in Germany*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 139.

of the *Prodigal Son* (Bible: Luke 15:11-32) in English, spoken with a strong accent by the Gurkha prisoner of Halfmoon Camp, Gangaram Gurung. Listening to the recording, one gets the impression that the man is not simply speaking the text, but trying to interpret it, to make it beautiful, and that he almost performs the story with his voice. Every prisoner whose voice was recorded was registered by the scholars of the Phonographic Commission. They asked questions about the

Lfd. Nr.
PERSONALBOGEN
 Lautliche Aufnahme Nr. 271 Ort: Wünsdorf
 Datum: 31.5.1916
 Zeitangabe: 6 Uhr
 Dauer der Aufnahme: Durchmesser der Platte: 30 cm
 Raum der Aufnahme: Ehrenbarakke
 Art der Aufnahme (Sprechaufnahme, Gesangsaufnahme, Choraufnahme, Instrumentenaufnahme, Orchesteraufnahme):
 in Englisch (vom Gurkha-gespr.)
 Name (in der Muttersprache geschrieben):
 Name (lateinisch geschrieben): Gangaram
 Vorname:
 Wann geboren (oder ungefähres Alter)? 35 Jahre
 Wo geboren (Heimat)? Chilgarhi
 Welche größere Stadt liegt in der Nähe des Geburtsortes?
 Kanton - Kreis (Ujeds): Kangra
 Departement - Gouvernement (Gubernija) - Grafschaft (County):
 Wo gelebt in den ersten 6 Jahren? Chilgarhi
 Wo gelebt vom 7. bis 20. Lebensjahr? von 17. Jahr an in Dharmasala
 Was für Schulbildung? Regimental School
 Wo die Schule besucht? Dharmasala
 Wo gelebt vom 20. Lebensjahr? Dharmasala
 Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt der Vater? Gurkha d. Nepal
 Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt die Mutter? Dharmasala
 Welchem Volksstamm angehörig? Gurung
 Welche Sprache als Muttersprache? Khas
 Welche Sprachen spricht er außerdem? Hindustani, Englisch
 Kann er lesen? Ja Welche Sprachen? Nagari, Arab., Roman.
 Kann er schreiben? Ja Welche Sprachen? " " "(auch etw. deutsche Buchstaben)
 Singt oder spielt er moderne europäische Musikweisen? Harmonika in Lager gelernt
 Religion: Hindu Beruf: Landmann
 Vorgeschlagen von: 1.
 2. Witzl, Baegen
 Beschaffenheit der Stimme: 1. Urteil des Fachmannes. (des Assistenten):
 2. Urteil des Kommissars:

PK Bogen 271. Lautarchiv Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

prisoner's life, about the education and the knowledge of languages and filled in a special form, the *PK Bogen*. From the *PK Bogen* and the corresponding documentation, we learn that Gangaram Gurung was at the time of recording 35 years old and originated from Chilgarhi, District Kangra in the Punjab. When he was 16 years old, he became a soldier. From the age of 17 he had lived in Dharmasala, where he was educated in a regiment school. There Gangaram Gurung also got married. He was a Gurkha; a representative of the ethnic group of the Gurung; and his mother tongue was Khas. He learned English from a Gurkha-teacher, especially when learning signaling. He knew a bit of German and had learned an instrument in the POW camp.³³

³³ Lautarchiv der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (LA), LA, PK 271 and corresponding documentation.



Cover page Otto Stiehl,
96 Charakterköpfe

In 1916, Otto Stiehl (1860-1940),³⁴ commander of the POW camp Weinberglager in Zossen since the beginning of the war and also assigned to the headquarters of the nearby Halfmoon Camp in Wünsdorf, wrote about a South Asian prisoner, most probably about Gangaram Gurung: »One of their sergeants was the only Indian among easily six hundred men of all races who understood and spoke some English. It was often amusing to see how very much he was aware of the importance that such knowledge lent him, and how actively he knew how to exert himself.«³⁵ This assessment may partly explain why Gangram Gurung

³⁴ The architect and photographer Otto Stiehl (1860-1940) enlisted as a volunteer in 1915 and was assigned duty as commander of the Weinberg camp. In 1916, Stiehl published *Unsere Feinde. 96 Charakterköpfe aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern*, a collection of portrait photos of prisoners classified according to ethnic and racial types. The book became a means of propaganda in Europe. On his photographic collection, see: Margot Kahl-eyss, »Indian Prisoners of War in World War I: Photographs as Source Material«, in: Roy et al., »When the war began we heard of several kings«, pp. 207-230.

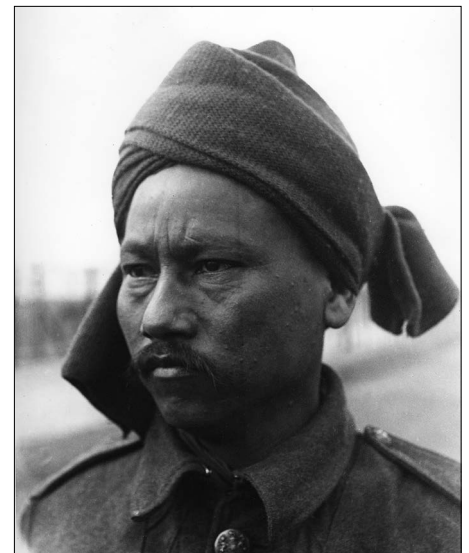
³⁵ Otto Stiehl, *Unsere Feinde: 96 Charakterköpfe aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern*, Stuttgart 1916, pp. 21f. »Einer ihrer Unteroffiziere war unter reichlich sechshundert Mann aller Rassen der einzige Inder, der etwas Englisch verstand und sprach. Es war oft erheitend zu sehen, wie sehr er sich der Wichtig-

spoke English, rather than his mother tongue Khas, when he was recorded. Another fact seems more astonishing: He recited the parable of the prodigal son although he was a Hindu. From a linguistic point of view, it might not be very interesting that a Hindu Gurkha sergeant reads aloud a Bible story. From the point of view of social history, it raises a lot of questions: Why English? Why the Bible story?

When one takes a closer look at the conditions under which this particular recording was made, even more questions arise: on 31 May 1916 at 6 p.m., a group of about 10 prisoners went to what was called the Ehrenbaracke (honorary barrack) of Halfmoon Camp. They were awaited there by two men who had come with a phonograph: Wilhelm Doegen, the head of the Prussian Royal Phonographic Commission, and Hans Stumme (1864-1936), a specialist in Arabic dialects. The prisoners who had been selected beforehand by Germans working in the camp knew that these men wanted them to speak in their mother tongue into the funnel of the phonograph. One of them was the South Asian Gurkha Gangaram Gurung. On that afternoon, the other prisoners who had come for recording were all men from North Africa who spoke various Arabic dialects.³⁶ Why Gangaram Gurung was together with the Arab POWs in the recording situation is a question one can only speculate about.

Gangaram Gurung was recorded with the parable of the prodigal son, a Bible story which was used as a standard text in language recordings at that time. Most of the Muslim prisoners would tell an individual story, a fairy tale, speak about their life and experience during the war or sing a song. The Hindu performed the Christian parable, one of the parables of Jesus, which talks about a father and his two sons. One of the sons asks for his inheritance and leaves home. After wasting the money, he returns home, awaiting the anger of the father. But the father welcomes him back. Gangaram Gurung stages the text by

Portrait of Gangaram Gurung. Photo taken by Otto Stiehl. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen / Otto Stiehl Collection, VIII Eu 27839.



keit bewußt war, die solche Kenntnis ihm verlieh, und wie rührig er sich zur Geltung zu bringen wußte.«

³⁶ Due to the meticulous documentations of the recordings, one can get exact information about the groups who came together in the recording's setting. A group of Gurkhas was recorded on 29 May 1916. Gangaram Gurung was obviously not among them. His PK Bogen is signed by Doegen; the others made on that afternoon are all signed by Doegen and Stumme together.

using the repertoires his voice and language skills provide. What seems to be absurd on first glance becomes meaningful when one considers the context of war and particularly the context of captivity.

Gangaram Gurung's sound recording started to tell me more, once I discovered other sources about or by him. A collection of photographs taken by Otto Stiehl preserved in the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin contains a large number of portrait photos, among them also one of Havildar Gangaram Gurung taken by Otto Stiehl himself. It was published together with 95 other portrait photos in Otto Stiehl's book *Unsere Feinde: 96 Charakterköpfe aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern*. It shows a man who looks thoughtful but self-confident. Searching further in Stiehl's collection, in one of his albums, one comes across three drawings described as »drawings by an Indian prisoner«. All three were signed with the initials GR. They were made in March and April 1917, in Wünsdorf, a few weeks before the South Asian prisoners were transferred to a camp in Morile-Marculesti in Romania. The drawings, which might have been produced for a religious festival or to decorate a temple corner in one of the barracks, depict Hindu gods with their attributes. One drawing titled *Ganesh ji* shows the god Ganesh, the elephant god of the beginnings, whom Hindus approach when they start a new undertaking. Ganesh appears with his animal, the rat. Another drawing is called *Sarwoti*. It depicts Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and sagacity, of learning, languages, arts and literature. She is shown with her musical instrument and the peacock, surrounded by swans and lotus flowers. The third drawing shows *Mahabir ji*. Mahabir, literally »big hero«, is one among other names of the monkey god Hanuman, who, in the classical Indian poem *Ramayana*, is the faithful friend of the main hero Rama. Gangaram Gurung obviously regularly produced such colourful drawings on religious subjects which were used to decorate the camp when Hindu festivals were celebrated. These three he might have gifted to Otto Stiehl and, thus, they survived the war in a collection of the German camp commander.

I could never have been sure that Gangaram Gurung was the artist of these pictures, if I had not come across the studies of Nepalese rituals and laws carried out by Leonhard Adam (1891-1960). Adam was an anthropologist and legal scholar, who had visited Half-moon Camp and later the Indian camp in Romania to study Nepalese rites. The results of

Three drawings. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen / Otto Stiehl Collection, VIII Eu 27625, 27626, 27627



his studies were published in 1934 in the journal *Man*. There he writes:

In October 1918, I took part in the great *Durga* Festival (*Dasahara*) of the Gurkhas as their guest, and I saw about ten or twelve sheep [sic] being sacrificed in honour of the goddess. Some of the soldiers were dancing, disguised as »nauch-girls«, while the drum was resounding, and the temple with the excellent water-colours of Hindu deities painted by Sergeant Ganga-Ram, was beautifully decorated with flowers and coloured paper-garlands.

And the paragraph ends with the naive or even cynical impression: »Thus one was really under the impression, of being amongst the Gurkhas in their own country.«³⁷ In another text written by Adam, we learn more about Gangaram Gurung's past. When Adam interviewed him in Romania, where the Gurkha had been brought together with his fellow countrymen in spring 1917, the Havildar talked about his parents, his childhood and education. Because of his knowledge of English, the interview could be carried out without a transla-

³⁷ Leonhard Adam, 1934, »A Marriage-Ceremony of the Pun-Clan (Magar) at Rigah (Nepal)«, *Man. A monthly record of anthropological science*, XXXIV, 1934, pp. 17-21, here p. 17.

tor, as Adam points out. Gangaram Gurung was a line-boy, which means he was born in the garrison place where his father served, which in his case was in the district of Kangra in Punjab. The father was born in Nepal from where the British had recruited Gurkhas for the British Indian Army since the 18th century.³⁸ After joining the army, he had moved to Kangra. His mother was still alive at the time of the interview. Gangaram Gurung was married. He had never been to Nepal himself. Adam stressed that the interview with him was the only interview with a so called line-boy. From the perspective of the researcher, the interview was not very fruitful: Gangaram Gurung did not know much about traditions and rituals in Nepal, but instead he knew a lot about the Brahman and Hindu pantheon.

He knows English to the extent that the interview with him went very smoothly. His factual knowledge is, as the protocol shows, and as one could expect from a line-boy quite weak. Much better is his knowledge on the Brahmanical and Hindu pantheon, but that is of no interest here. It was Ganga Ram who had decorated the Durga temple as well as his office as a medical sergeant with excellently drawn and colourful painted pictures of Gods.³⁹

Despite the existence of these unique sources, it is not easy to trace Gangaram Gurung's trajectory throughout the war and his social position in the camp, since it is almost impossible to do systematic searches on his life in the documents of military and political collections. Sources that historians can study to explore the life and experiences of South Asian prisoners comprise official military and political papers, camp reports given by the International Red Cross or other inspectors and camp newspapers. Besides these sources, scholars can find scattered individual documents

38 About the Gurkha recruitment and the Gurkhas in the British Army, see: Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentlemen: »Gurkhas« in the Western Imagination*. Providence: Berghahn Books 1995; Gajendra Singh, »Gurkha«, *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10026.

39 »Seine englischen Kenntnisse sind so geläufige, daß die Protokollaufnahme mit ihm sich sehr fließend vollzieht. Seine sachlichen Kenntnisse sind jedoch, wie das Protokoll erweist und wie bei einem l i n e b o y nicht anders zu erwarten, recht gering. Weit besser sind seine - hier nicht interessierenden - Kenntnisse des brahmanischen bzw. hinduistischen Pantheons. Es war Ganga Ram, der sowohl den Durga-Tempel wie auch seinen Dienstraum als Sanitätssergeant mit vorzüglich gezeichneten und farbig ausgemalten Götterbildern schmückte.« Leonhard Adam, *Sitte und Recht in Nepal, Angaben und Schilderungen von Angehörigen der Gurkha Regimenter*. Aufgenommen, eingeleitet und herausgegeben von Leonhard Adam. Stuttgart 1934, pp. 255-256.

such as letters, petitions and (rarely) memoirs, as well as visual and audio documents. The censored and extracted letters of the South Asian sepoys, mostly from the Western Front in Europe, and the reports on them have led to a new understanding of the sepoys' own experiences and perceptions.⁴⁰ However, while these letters written by South Asian soldiers from the front or hospitals in England were documented by a special system of censorship and thus survived, we do not have the same information about letters from South Asian POWs in Germany. Although there was a special system for post control in Halfmoon Camp, and - as we know - suspicious letters were translated and commented upon at the Seminar for Oriental Languages (Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen, SOS) in Berlin,⁴¹ no special content-related reports on POWs' letters written in South Asian languages seem to have survived in the German archives. Experiences of former prisoners can be traced in the interviews or interrogations with ex-prisoners conducted in England after the war. Memoirs by South Asian combatants taken as prisoners of war are rare exceptions.⁴²

I did not come across any letters written by Gangaram Gurung. But because of his role as an ambulance man and because of his knowledge of English, he (directly or indirectly) appears from time to time in official sources. The already mentioned J. B. Jackson, who visited Halfmoon Camp on behalf of the American Embassy in Berlin in July 1915, wrote in his report: »I spoke with each of the [Indian, HL] officers, at first through the German interpreter, and then with the assistance of the English-speaking Gurkha sergeant, whom I had seen on my former visit, ...«⁴³ Since, as we know from Stiehl (see fn. 35), there was only one

40 See: Omissi, David: *Indian Voices of the Great War Soldiers' Letters, 1914-1918*, Houndsmill et al., 1999; Markovits, »Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I«.

41 Founded in 1887 by the Foreign Office and the Prussian Ministry of Culture, the School of Oriental Languages was meant to provide training in »Oriental« languages. At the same time, it became an institution to educate colonial personnel. Larissa Schmid, »Competing Visions of Area Studies in the Interwar Period: The School of Oriental Languages in Berlin, in: *Middle East - Topics and Arguments* 04 (2015), pp. 50-60.

42 Ravi Ahuja, »Lost Engagements? Traces of South Asian Soldiers in German Captivity, 1915-1918«, in: Roy et al., »When the war began we heard of several kings«, pp. 17-52. Santanu Das, *Indians at Home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914-1918: towards an intimate history*, in: Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, pp. 70-89.

43 TNA, FO 383/ 065, report signed 7 July 1915, concerning a visit to Halfmoon Camp on 8 April 1915. The same Mr. Jackson visited the camp again a year later and mentioned that he was accompanied »by the commandant, the officer in charge, and the English-speaking Gurkha sergeant whom I met on former visits«. TNA, FO 383/153, report by John B. Jackson on the situation of the British-Indian POWs in Wünsdorf, signed 23 March 1916.

sergeant who understood and spoke English, we can be quite sure that Jackson is speaking of Gangaram Gurung. The Gurkha Havildar also was a member of the Indian Medical Service (IMS),⁴⁴ an ambulance man who worked in this field in the camp, a position that secured him a number of privileges not granted to ordinary prisoners. Medical workers with the same ethnic and religious background as the prisoners supported the work of the German camp doctor and the medical staff. They took care of »their« sick prisoners. Men with mild illness were treated in a special barrack within the camp; more severe diseases were treated in the military hospital in Wünsdorf outside the camp. If one of the South Asian prisoners was in hospital, other South Asians cooked for him and took care of his daily maintenance. If necessary, Gangaram Gurung was allowed to leave the camp to visit his fellow countrymen in the military hospital outside. Obviously, there was even an Indian doctor at the hospital at Wünsdorf.⁴⁵ Seriously wounded prisoners were sometimes exchanged to neutral countries, for instance to Switzerland or the Netherlands, but were not allowed to proceed to the Entente countries.⁴⁶ Gangaram Gurung also figured as a contact person for representatives of the Indian Independence Committee, an association of Indian intellectuals, anti-colonial political activists who collaborated with the German Foreign Office. Members of the IIC, like Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Abhinash Chandra Bhattacharya, Tarachand Roy, Mansur Ahmed, Maulvi Barakatullah, Taraknath Das, Birendranath Dasgupta, Bupendra Nath Dutta and Kartaram regularly visited the camp for propaganda purposes.⁴⁷

In mid-1917, Gangaram Gurung, together with most inmates of the »Inderlager« at Wünsdorf, was transported to the state farm of Morile-Marculesti

44 On the organisation and role of medical service, see: Simon Doherty, Tom Donovan, *The Indian Corps on the Western Front. A Handbook and Battlefield Guide*, Brighton: Tom Donovan Editions 2014, pp. 18-19. »Each infantry battalion, or cavalry regiment, had a Medical Officer (MO), a doctor and a member of the Indian Medical Service (IMS), who was attached to the union on a permanent basis to look after the men's health, both in and out of the line.« (p. 18).

45 PA AA, R 21244, His story is still fragmentary: at the beginning of December 1914 (5 Dec. 14), the Foreign Office informed the Reichskriegsministerium (war ministry) about the number of Muslim POWs in Germany. Among them, one Indian Officer (a medical doctor) was mentioned; Nadolny immediately asked to transfer him to the »Mohammedaner«-camp in Wünsdorf (15 Dec. 14). At the same time, the members of the Berlin Indian Independence Committee asked for permission for the doctor and the other Indian officers to travel to meet with the Indian revolutionaries there. On 5 January, Nadolny agreed to send the Indian doctor for observation through the Indian Committee to Berlin.

46 Ahuja, »Lost Engagements?«, p. 42.

47 Liebau, »The German Foreign Office«; for a concrete example, see for instance PAAA, R 21255, f. 209, Chattopadhyaya's letter to Hauptmann Warenholz, 16 April 1916.

in Romania, where he was interned for more than a year. There, as we learned from Adam, he continued medical work as well as the drawing of religious pictures. From Romania he probably was repatriated after the war. According to documents in the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Havildar 1840, Gangaram Gurung from the 1/3 Gurkha Rifles was in the Netherlands for internment in October 1918. It's at that point that his time in Europe ends. Whether he finally reached India, whether, when and how he met his family again, we do not know.⁴⁸

Life trajectories from a global conflict - conceptual and methodological reflections

This story of a South Asian participant in the First World War can open a window to better understand the role of colonial actors in this global conflict. How did Gangaram Gurung, as a historical person, perceive and engage the challenges he faced because of the war, and how can we as historians conceptualize this interplay between the individual life and the global conflict? We do not know about his motivation to fight in the war. What we know is that he was not an ordinary soldier and that, as a line-boy, he grew up in a military environment. Thus, for him, a career in the army was probably the logical consequence of his family background. This creed might have begun to totter after the experience of violence, death and cruelty during his first days at the front in November 1914. When there was no other way out, a group of Gurkhas surrendered near La Bassée. The men probably saw this step as a chance to escape the cruelties of the front and to survive the war, although at that point it could not have been clear to them what they had to expect from the German side. Eugen, Crown Prince Ruprecht of Bavaria described the behaviour of the Gurkhas near Festubert: »Most of the Indians at Festubert fled obviously from the attack of the VII A.R. [Army Regiment, HL]. Those who have been captured layed «down their arms by command of a native officer.«⁴⁹ Once in the prisoner of war camp, the main strategy for a prisoner was to survive and to reach the end of the war. Unlike the majority of the captured men, who were simply condemned to wait and en-

48 Geneva, ICRC archive (International Committee of the Red Cross), R 51747, List of Non-Commissioned Officers Arrived in Holland from Germany for Internment October 13, 1918. See also: BL, British Library, London, IOR MSS EUR F120/272, October 15th, 1918, Indian Soldier's Fund, prisoners repatriated from Germany and Romania.

49 »Die Inder in Festubert scheinen vor dem Angriffe des VII A.R. [Armeeregiment HL] größtenteils geflohen zu sein. Diejenigen, welche gefangen wurden, hatten die Waffen auf Befehl eines eingeborenen Offiziers gestreckt. Meist waren es Gurkhas.« Frauenholz, Eugen, *Kronprinz Ruprecht von Bayern. Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Erster Band, Berlin 1929, p. 279.

dure the deadly dullness, Gangaram Gurung, with his medical skills, good knowledge of English, and interest in Hindu religion as well as his talent to draw, could be active. Due to these capacities and the need to constantly translate and mediate between various levels of camp hierarchies, cultures and religions, he also enjoyed a number of privileges, which might have caused conflicts with other South Asian prisoners. However, although being involved in various networks and intermediary positions, he was an outsider among the Gurkhas as well as an outsider among the soldiers recruited in the Punjab. Gangaram Gurung's story challenges the still prevailing concentration on European perceptions of the war in scholarly discourses. It also argues for a more differentiated discussion on South Asian participants of the war, taking into consideration social, religious and military differences as well as the various ethnic and regional backgrounds of the men.

From a methodological point of view, it is useful to look at the story of Gangaram Gurung as an example of how to analyse, interpret and connect various kinds of historical sources, such as audio, visual and textual material, in order to understand an individual life within a global conflict. Admittedly, it is impossible to find much information about him, and it is impossible to systematically search for traces in the archives. However, the rare sources we have, if related to one another as well as to Gangaram Gurung's lifeworld, speak to the historian. While there have been discussed and developed methodological approaches to interpreting visual documents from the First World War, such a systematic approach to studying audio sources is still being developed. Utilizing these sound recordings as historical sources on the social history of the First World War can provide new insights into the experience of ordinary soldiers, especially of colonial combatants who left few written documents. Sound recordings should be seen as »sensitive collections«, and thus be analysed as being the result of complex historical processes of knowledge production, reflecting not only the conditions of war and captivity, but also an often highly problematic, racist and colonial past.⁵⁰ Anette Hoffmann understands these recordings »not as ›voices‹ but as echoes, that is, as mediated,

often effaced reverberations of accounts of the self and the war«.⁵¹

I suggest to understand these acoustic traces as echo-voices, that is, not only in the sense of their sonic qualities as abbreviated, mediated and often distorted traces of speech acts, songs and stories, which implicate the modification of the voice that spoke, but also as the uncertain reverberations of accounts, messages, interventions, commentary and critique that was articulated from subaltern positions in the process of producing an archive of languages.⁵²

Listening to Gangaram Gurung's voice 100 years later, we try to imagine the body and the emotions of the speaker, both of which are present through the voice. The recording, which has been made under conditions of captivity within the frame of a cruel war, was by no means a free experience for the Gurkha. We can imagine the hunger, homesickness, desolate situation and pain of the man speaking to us, but at the same time also his will and agency to cope with the challenges the war causes for him. So these sources provide a certain intimacy to the historical speaker. At the same time, they can be seen as stories that give fragmented glimpses into the lives of such speakers. A methodological difficulty is the intentionality of using the recordings, which one has to be aware of. We don't use the collection (of photos, recordings etc.) as a whole; we use only selected examples, which we de-contextualise and then re-contextualise again in a specific research context.

Through the combination of various kinds of evidence - visual, auditory, textual - produced about Gangaram Gurung but also by himself, a tessellated war-time trajectory of a single individual can be reconstructed: from being a line-boy in Kangra to an IMS member helping wounded South Asian soldiers to the time of his repatriation. The three paintings which survived the war in a private album are especially astonishing. Moreover, Gangaram Gurung emerges as someone who might have been a captive, but also had will and agency: a man who could venture outside the camp, had contact with Indian nationalists, and spoke English. He emerges as a transcultural broker, whose services were needed in the camp.

50 So, the dynamics of the situation of the recordings have to be considered. Britta Lange and others have underlined the pressure of captivity and the situation itself. The social relations as well as hierarchies in camp life might become visible in the situation of recording. See for instance: Lange, »Sensible Sammlungen«; Lange, »South Asian Soldiers«; Irene Hilden, »The (Im)Possibility of Subaltern Articulation: Sound Recordings from German Prisoner-Of-War Camps During World War I.« M.A. Thesis, Institut für Kulturwissenschaft, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin 2015.

51 Anette Hoffmann, »Echoes of the Great War. The Recordings of African Prisoners in the First World War«, *Open Arts Journal*, 3, 2014, pp. 8-23, here p. 8.

52 Hoffmann, 2014, p. 9.

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