



ECHOES OF THE GREAT WAR: THE RECORDINGS OF AFRICAN PRISONERS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Anette Hoffmann

Abstract

Apart from army registers, some (often anonymous) photographs and the files of anthropometric examination, the involvement of thousands of African soldiers in WWI and their presence in POW camps in Europe seems to have left few traces in European archives. Vis-à-vis a mass of autobiographic texts on the Great War, written by Europeans and Americans, there are very few published accounts of African soldiers that would allow for their historical experiences and views to be included in historiographies of WWI. A collection of sound recordings produced with African prisoners of war in German camps by a group of German linguists, musicologists and anthropologists between 1915-18 offers a notable documentation of their presence. Yet, similar to the anthropometric registration, these recordings were not designed to accommodate the soldiers' accounts, but to create a collection of language recordings. If these cannot be considered as 'authentic voices from the past' and unmediated accounts of WWI, how do we understand and theorise these hitherto untranslated voice recordings, their form and content?

This essay understands the recordings not as 'voices' but as echoes, that is, as mediated, often effaced reverberations of accounts of the self and the war. The notion of echo in this essay grapples with issues of extraction, attenuation, limitation, distance and distortion, or outright effacement, that is the result of the form and the mediation of those speech acts, the belatedness of listening to them, as well as, the gaps in meaning and intelligibility the recordings entail. By conceptualising the recorded voices and their translation as echoes, I seek to understand the status of the recordings, the effects of this linguistic practice and gain a sense of the situation in the camps, so as to position these subaltern articulations in their mediated, distorted form as part of the colonial archive.

Keywords: Africa, First World War, prisoners of war, speech, translation, recording, echo

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Biographical note

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den kolonisierten Gebieten und über das fortwährende Wirken der Gewalt bis in die Gegenwart that is currently shown in the exhibition *Acts of Voicing* in Stuttgart (Württembergischer Kunstverein). Her recent publications include *What We See. Reconsidering and Anthropometrical Collection from Southern Africa: Images, Voices, and Versioning* (2009); *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem Anthropologischen Depot* (with Margit Berner and Britta Lange, 2011); *Was Wir Sehen. Bilder Stimmen Rauschen. Zur Kritik anthropometrischen Sammelns* (with Britta Lange and Regina Sarreiter, 2012).

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I Colonial soldiers and imperial knowledge production

Like a vagrant picking up every cigarette stub
he can find on the street,
the French are collecting even
the last man from West Africa
and send him to war.
It is a time of sadness.
Only women and children are left.
In the cities, only men liable to military service are
left,
they play big men now
When I come back, and such a guy comes to my
house and talks big about the war, I'll strangle him.¹

During WWI an estimated 650,000 colonial soldiers, recruited by the Triple-Entente, were sent to European

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I Citation of a Wolof-speaking prisoner of war in Carl Meinhof's letter to Felix von Luschan, 13.12.1917, (Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Handschriftensammlung, Nachlass Felix von Luschan, Korrespondenzen mit Carl Meinhof). The original reads as follows 'Wie ein Straßenjunge jeden Zigarettensammel aufliest, den er auf der Straße findet, so haben die Franzosen den letzten Mann aus Westafrika aufgelesen und in den Krieg geschickt. Es sind nur noch Frauen und Kinder da. Das ist jetzt eine Zeit des Weinens. In den Städten sind die Männer weg und nur noch garnisonspflichtige Gesellen sind zurückgeblieben, die spielen jetzt den großen Herren, aber wenn ich zurückkomme, und solch Kerl kommt in mein Haus und will große Worte reden vom Krieg, dem fahr ich an den Hals' (my translation from German). Since I do not have a re-translation yet, this quotation has to be treated with caution.

battlefields. France sent vast numbers of African troops to fight in Europe, including 172,800 soldiers from Algeria, 134,300 from West Africa, 34,000 from Madagascar and more than 2,000 men from the Somali coast (Koller, 2008, pp. 111-33; Koller 2011a, pp. 130-48). Whereas about a million Indian soldiers were sent overseas, the British army did not deploy Africans as combatants on European battlefields, but did draw on a large number of African 'war workers' (more than 30,000 of whom came from South Africa, for instance).² Altogether more than four million non-white men and women were actively involved in the war,³ which includes two million Africans and over a million Indians, who served in the British army. 'Indeed', writes Santanu Das,

... if one had been at Ypres [Belgium] during the war years, one would have seen Indian sepoys, tirailleurs Sénégalais, North African spahis, Chinese and Indo-Chinese workers, Maori Pioneer battalion and First Nation Canadians, in addition to white troops and workers. In a grotesque reversal of Conrad's vision, hundreds of thousands of non-white men were voyaging to the heart of whiteness and beyond to witness the 'horror, the horror' of Western civilization.

(Das, 2011a, p. 12).

Yet only in recent years has the involvement of colonial soldiers in the war been increasingly included into the historiographies, films and exhibitions, which engage with WWI.⁴ The wish to de-centre, multiply and

2 Whether or not this separation – between active combatants and war-workers – was always so neat, is questionable.

3 On the active role of West-African women in WWI see, for instance, Zimmerman (2011). For women and children accompanying the *askaris* in the East Africa Campaign, see Moyd (2011).

4 The sound recordings of the Lautarchiv feature in (at least) two films: *The Halfmoon Files – A Ghost Story*, by Philip Scheffner (2007) and *Boulevard d'Ypres* by Sarah Vanagt (2010), both of which showcase the relevance of the recordings in the presence. Given the complexity of speaking positions, and the opacity of the poetic language represented in some recordings, the use of the voice recordings of POWs in exhibitions demands careful curation. To my mind, the multi-directionality, complexity and haunting instability of meaning the recorded voices of the prisoners entail, as well as the significance of the Lautarchiv have been captured most profoundly by Britta Lange and Philip Scheffner's audio-visual installation *The Making of ... Ghosts. Voices and Apparitions in the Archives of the First World War*. The installation has been shown (again) from May to August 2014 at the Humboldt-University in Berlin. (See also the essays in Das, 2011b; Eschenberg, 1991; Fogarty, 2008; Ahuja et al., 2011; among others).

version the historiographies of WWI, as articulated by Das and others, is not easily achieved. As an example, vis-à-vis a mass of autobiographic texts on the Great War written by Europeans and Americans, there are very few published accounts of African soldiers. There are, for instance, only a handful of memoirs by West African veterans of WWI, one of which was written by a Senegalese *griot*, who attained French citizenship after the war.⁵ The absence of letters, poems and memoirs, which Das describes as the 'cornerstones of European war memories' from the side of the colonial troops may not only be the result of an often assumed illiterate background of many of the colonial soldiers, but, arguably, of the favouring of different forms of representation and cultural mnemonic traditions (2011b, p.6). In other words, autobiographies may not have been the chosen form to articulate war experiences, and the absence of letters in archives does not necessarily connote their non-existence. Nor does the unavailability of letters and the scarcity of written memoirs by African soldiers indicate an absence of memories, which may still circulate in the more elusive medium of oral poetry, songs and story-telling; rather, these memories are hard to trace and less likely to be held in European archives.

In the European discourses of the time, apart from racism in the armies,⁶ the presence of colonial soldiers was met with vitriolic, racist propaganda in the German *Kaiserreich*. But the response in Germany was also Janus-faced: on the one hand, African soldiers (especially, not exclusively) were verbally and visually abused as savages. In the German press and in propaganda pamphlets they were depicted as monstrous rapists – both in a metaphorical and literal sense, that is, as raping German women and the German nation/soil (Koller, 2011a). Germany's campaigning against colonial soldiers reached its hysterical peak during the French occupation of the Rhineland after WWI, when many African soldiers were based in the area.⁷ On the other hand, Muslim prisoners of war became the target of intensive German propaganda activities that sought to convince them to change sides and join forces with

the German armies and the Ottoman Empire to fight against the Triple Entente (Liebau 2011).

At the same time, linguists and anthropologists were alerted to the presence of colonial soldiers in the POW camps, who became targeted as objects of research.⁸ Both the research activities that took place in the camps, and the visits of photographers and artists led to the accumulation of a massive amount of written and visual documents, published and unpublished. The interlacing of propaganda material, racial studies and artistic depictions of the captured soldiers resulted in the rather uncanny accumulation of archival material, which refuses disentanglement. Unsurprisingly, the nationalist sentiments are by no means clearly separable from what was seen as scientific studies of race. There were various agendas at play: for instance, in the studies of the anthropologists Felix von Luschan, Egon von Eickstedt, Josef Weninger (1918) and Rudolph Pöch, the artistic portraits of Hermann Struck (von Luschan & Struck, 1917) and Otto Stiehl (1916), and Leo Frobenius' (1916) loud depiction of the British army as 'a dompteur in a circus of peoples' (*Dompteur im Völkerzirkus*). But the production of all of these texts, photographs, painted and drawn portraits was triggered by the availability of an always, albeit to different extents and ends, racialised Other in the camps.⁹ Much of the anthropological material from the camps in German and Austrian archives has been meticulously described and analysed by Britta Lange, who quotes the Austrian anthropologist Rudolph Pöch's enthusiastic response to the opportunity: 'The prisoner of war camps provide a hitherto unknown and unique opportunity for scientific research, they are an unparalleled *Völkerschau*!'¹⁰ (2011a, p.156)

This said, the representations generated in the camps cannot easily be disengaged from the history of *Völkerschauen* in Germany, which can be described as a cultural practice of displaying foreign people, often on fairs and in zoos, in a way that mainly staged European fantasies of 'the exotic' and 'the wild' in the presentation of colonised people to a German public. Much of the visual material generated in the camps was in some or other way related to either propaganda against the presence of 'savages' on German ground, as

5 For details on this example, see Diallo ([1926]1987), Lunn (1987, 1999 and 2011) and Koller (2011a).

6 Whereas the French included African soldiers in their army as actively fighting soldiers, the British army refused to train African American soldiers.

7 The severity and cruel effects of this propaganda speaks from the fact that in the Third Reich many of the children of German women and African men – who were called *Rheinlandbastarde* – where sterilised in a secret operation organised by the raciologist Eugen Fischer. (See, for instance, Lebzelter, 1985.)

8 For further reading see: Das, 2011a; Lange, 2011b, p. 93; Lange, 2012; Stoecker, 2008.

9 For further details see also: Weule (1915, pp.205-6 and pp.249-53); Vorst (1915); Backhaus (1915); Doegen (1925).

10 The original Rudolph Pöch quote can be traced to the journal *Die Umschau* (1916), 20, p.989. On the subject see also Lange (2011b); Berner (2003); Evans (2002); Evans (2003). I thank Britta Lange for generously sharing her research and thoughts with me.

well as to the aims of colonial knowledge production and racial studies.

However, in at least one case the profitable presenting of 'exotic people' to the curious German public produced a cautiously formulated criticism from the side of 'the object'. The articulations of Somali-speaker Mohammed Nur were published in an article on Somali grammar, and surfaced in preserved acoustic documents of the Lautarchiv. Nur had come to Germany with a group of performers, but left them after refusing to perform on the stage, only to find himself stranded in a foreign country. His attempt to join the German army to fight against the British, the colonial power that occupied his home country, Somalia, resulted in his internment in a camp for British civilians, where his voice was recorded. On Carl Meinhof's request he was released to become a 'language assistant' at the institute for colonial languages in Hamburg (*Institut für Kolonialsprachen*), under Meinhof's tutelage. A short account of his experience in Germany appears in Maria von Tiling's *Somali-Lautlehre* (1925). Mediated by practices of colonial knowledge extraction, in which captured soldiers presented an *opportunity*, Nur's experiences of war and captivity entered the grammar of Somali.

The systematic nature of the abusive practice of imperial knowledge production with prisoners of war and colonised people during and after the violent wars that led to their subjugation, as well as the gory results of measurement, casts, anthropometric photography, the registration of bodily features and the collection of human remains are not the focus of this essay.¹¹ Here, I wish only to remark that the results of these practices, which dissected and de-personalised the bodies of the prisoners beyond recognition, and left an archive of distorted fragments – photographs, results of measurements and the like – do not tell much beyond testifying to the symptoms of an anatomy of imperial epistemology.¹² Yet there are archival traces of the

involuntary presence of colonial soldiers in German camps, which resonate beyond the indexical (as trace to a person): voice recordings. Produced under the same conditions, the production and archiving of these recordings, at times, created a platform for the articulation of manifest experiences, or the interventions of the people who left the trace.

The Lautarchiv



Figure 1.1.1: Recordings with Indian Prisoners of War in the 'Half-Moon Camp' Wünsdorf, reproduced from Doegen (1941), xxii.

The 'veritable anthropological [and linguistic] tourism' to the POW camps, as Franziska Roy and Heike Liebau (2011, p.12) describe it, led to the accumulation of the *Lautarchiv* (sound archive) in Berlin, which, combined with the musical recordings with POWs (that are held by the Phonogramm-Archiv) amount to 2681 recordings of prisoners of war. All recordings with POWs were produced between 1915-18. On the initiative of the director of the *Phonogramm-Archiv*, musicologist and psychologist Carl Stumpf, and the philologist Wilhelm Doegen, a commission was established – the *Königlich Preussische Phonographische Kommission* – and funded by the Prussian ministry of science, art and education in 1915, with the aim of phonographically recording all languages present in POW camps on German ground.¹³ All recordings are accompanied by a written file (*Personalbogen*) that number the recordings (PK...), register the time and place of the recording, the (often misspelled) name of the internee, the name of the person who did the recording, the (often estimated) age of the internee, his place of birth, whether or not he was literate, if and where he went to school, where he had lived, the languages he spoke, the languages his parents spoke, his religious denomination, his

11 On this topic see Hoffman et al. (2011), among others.

12 I therefore wish to signal unease vis-à-vis János Riesz' assertion (2011, pp.93-4) of the anthropometric photographs of African POWs that were produced in the camp Turnu Magurele in (the at that time occupied) Romania by Josef Weninger (1927), as part of his anthropological research of Africans. Riesz rightly points out that these photographs, that are supplemented with information (often misspelled names, places of birth, language spoken by prisoners, age, marital status, religion etc.) may be the only surviving documents of African POWs, and therefore of some value for research. Yet his description of the photographs as artful and invested with a 'timeless aura', I find questionable. Further, as results of a practice of racial classification I think it is highly problematic to register the photographs as the result of 'a century-long discussion and collaboration' between African and Europeans.

13 For further details, see Lange (2011b) and Stoecker et al. (2013), as well as Hoffmann & Mnyaka (2014).

(pre-war) occupation, and the type of speech act or song recorded. Although there was a standardised procedure, and some standardised word lists were applied, there often was room for accounts of the speaker's own choice. Stories were told, whose content rarely entered the file, since for once, these recordings were objects (statement-things, in the Foucauldian sense) of linguist research, and their narrative content rarely attracted the interest of the researchers. Secondly, in most cases, the content of the speech acts or songs was screened off from the understanding of musicologists and linguists, since they were, in most cases, incapable of understanding the language. Not many of the recordings with Africans have been translated so far, and my project of organising the translation of (some of) the 360 recordings in African languages, although still at its beginning, has already shown that accounts, of war and imprisonment or even criticism of the process of archiving were relayed (and thus recorded) under the guise of 'telling a story'.

Some of the recordings in Indian languages, which have been translated since the digitisation of the archive in the 1990s, allowed for the emergence of surprising repercussions: the recording (PK 676) of Sundhar Singh, a Sikh imprisoned in Wünsdorf, a camp for Muslims who were the target of the German *jiḥād* propaganda and therefore enjoyed special treatment, harbours a direct message. Sundhar Singh appropriated the medium and the platform for speaking that emerged to ask for a clean blanket to enfold the holy book of their religious community in the camp.¹⁴ Recorded documentation of his direct appeal – 'Think about the case yourself and answer us swiftly' (*Denken*

sie selber über die Sache nach und geben sie uns schnell Antwort') conveys the urgency of his request (Lange, 2011b, p.124).

Even the recordings of formalised speech acts include the (uncertain) reverberation of small interventions inserted by the speakers: in the event of recording, a standardised series of words in isiXhosa was turned into a persiflage that revealed the irony of the exercise. On another occasion, a speaker inserted his sonic signature by shouting his name – Schihabeddin Imadeddinoff – into the phonograph at the end of a de-personalised speech act that was thereby converted into a *personal* speech act (Lange, 2011b, p.107). Yet even the most direct of these acoustic traces have been severed from their speakers, who remain *acousmêtres*, the invisible remainders of sonic ghosts of a colonial archive of voices.¹⁵

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. As echo-voices, the acoustic traces elude their containment or assimilation in the archive. The conceptualisation of the voice recordings as echoes offers an approach to understanding the recordings of African prisoners of war, which were generated under the auspices of a project of colonial knowledge production, as a locus of reverberation that evades complete containment. The notion of the echo-voice may be good to think with, since it allows for the re-surfacing of ambiguous responses that resided in the interstices of formalised speech acts, between the lines of grammatical examples, and that were at times emerging blatantly direct in the recordings of soldiers' songs and accounts of suffering and fear. Yet even in the case of the most direct enunciations, these voiced traces, as reverberating drift bottles encapsulated in a collection of sound-objects for linguistic research, risked remaining unheard.

II Echo

In the following passage, I offer a detour along Ovid's tale of Echo, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of the tale. This reading is an attempt to come to terms with the elusive, truncated, mediated quality of voices whose speakers remain unknowable.

¹⁴ The use of the event of recording as a platform for the articulation of criticism has emerged and is documented in other sound recordings as well: speakers sent messages to Germany in Hans Lichtenecker's recordings in South-West Africa in 1931, a Tswana-speaker articulates his dismay about the working conditions under South African rule in his recording in the Dammann collection (also in South-West Africa) in 1954 (see Hoffmann 2009a, Dammann collection (Basler Afrika Bibliographien) 1954). Nor should one assume that the function of the phonograph was unknown to the speakers. Meinhof describes a street-scene in Khartoum: 'Ausser den Läden für die Bedürfnisse der Eingeborenen, finden sich auch einige, die für den europäischen Geschmack berechnet sind. ... selbst ein Phonograph schmettert täglich europäische Weisen in die erstaunte Menge – das ist uns in diesem Fall willkommen, weil es dazu beiträgt, die Scheu vor unserem Apparat zu überwinden' ('Apart from shops for the needs of the natives, there are also some [shops] catering for European tastes ... even a phonograph daily blares out European melodies into the surprised crowd – which suits us well, since it contributes to losing the fear of our apparatus' (my translation) (quoted in Meinhof, 1916, p.13).

¹⁵ On this subject, see also the 2007 film *The Halfmoon Files. A Ghost Story*, directed by Philipp Scheffner.

The noun 'echo' derives from the Greek ἠχώ (*ēchō*) from ἦχος (*ēchos*), 'sound', it describes reverberation. Joan Scott writes:

Echoes are delayed returns of sound; they are incomplete reproductions, usually giving back only the final fragments of a phrase. An echo spans large gaps of space (sound reverberates between distant sources) and time (echoes are not instantaneous), but it also creates gaps of meaning and intelligibility.

(2001, p.291)

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the nymph Echo (*vocalis nymphe*), is punished by the goddess Juno for distracting her with beguiling talk (or stories) while Juno's husband, Jupiter, delights in other nymphs. The sanction, or say, measure against distracting talk, for Echo is her disablement: the loss of the ability to speak. From then on, she may only repeat an abbreviated and therefore distorted version of someone else's words. The disconnection of voice from intention has major implications: the figure of Echo becomes a repercussing automaton, the host of a mimicking voice that is severed from (her) intention and has become the sonic symptom of *palilalia*,¹⁶ which places each of Echo's utterances outside meaningful articulation or communication and thus is the verdict of her social death.¹⁷ Falling in love with Narcissus, she cannot respond, let alone address him, but merely repeat his words, and, as Scott has already told us, her response as echo can only be a deformed fragment of Narcissus' words. Her inability to speak or respond as a person, that is, to speak according to her own intentions and in her own(ed) voice, leads to Narcissus' rejection of Echo. In grief, her body withers away until nothing is left of her but a voice (*vox manet* – the voice remains). Her voice transforms into a disembodied, dislocated sound effect: an echo.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's article 'Echo' suggests reconsidering the tale – arguably in response to the discussion of her famous (and notorious) article 'Can the subaltern speak? (1988) – by offering a reading that seeks to fathom the elusive traces of female subalternity in hegemonic discourse and the colonial archive. In her reading, the myth of Narcissus is the tale of self as an object of knowledge, whereas the figure of Echo is staged as a respondent *as such*, albeit responding with a twist – creating gaps of meaning and

intelligibility, and leaving us with an ambiguous trace. While Ovid's tale narrates the instance of a *complete* severance of agency or intention from speech, in the instance of Echo's reverberations (that become a mere parroting, and thus are no longer 'human') Spivak grapples with the possibility of an ambiguity withheld in his tale. She writes:

Throughout the reported exchange between Narcissus and Echo she behaves according to her punishment and gives back the end of each statement. Ovid 'quotes' her, except when Narcissus asks: *Quid ...me fugis?* (Why do you fly from me?). Caught in the discrepancy between second person interrogative (*fugis*) and the imperative (*fugi*), Ovid cannot allow her to *be*, even Echo, so that Narcissus, flying from her, could have made of the ethical structure of response a fulfilled antiphon.

(1993, p.25, italics in original)

In other words, when Narcissus asks 'why do you fly from me?' according to Spivak, Echo's response (which is withheld in Ovid's text) would have been 'fly from me'. This move opens the possibility of a reverberation that carries a shift of meaning, a difference, which cannot be appropriated by that which it repeats (Hiddleston, 2007). In this way, Spivak's reading of the myth of Echo creates a space of ambivalence in which the echo that is almost, but never quite the same opens a space of ambiguity, or alterity, that allows for the possibility of a 'faint residue' of an uncontainable, yet slippery intention (Hiddleston, 2007, p.627).

Echo's voice is 'stable-yet-unstable, same-yet-different, and non-originary' (Spivak, 1993, p.27). Whereas the difference between Narcissus' interrogative phrase (*why do you fly from me?*) and her answer that involuntarily must turn into an imperative (*fly from me!*) marks the impossibility of echoing as sameness, and designates the asymmetric positions of Narcissus and Echo, it is Ovid's position to fill in the lacuna. This, as Spivak tells us, is impossible: the account of what happened is never quite what happened – but always a belated interpretation, which can only fill the gap with a difference. Echo, writes Spivak (1993, p.27), guards this dissimilarity, since her imitating-yet-not-quite-the-same response must always slightly alter the meaning of the phrase, which is her 'punishment turned into reward, a deconstructive lever for future users.'

For an understanding of the recordings of prisoners of war, the notion of echo may serve as a conceptualisation of these sonic traces as neither merely signifying the theoretically 'untouchable' figure

¹⁶ The compulsive repetition of syllables and words, described as a tic or pathological disorder of speech.

¹⁷ For Petra Gehrmann (2006), Echo's voice as *Wiederholungstimme* (voice as repetition) is therefore lifeless, yet unable to die.

of the subaltern¹⁸ – nor marking an unproblematic recuperation of subjective agency in collections of sound recordings. Instead, I seek to point to historical voice recordings as an attenuated trace or discursive space that allows for the possibility of resonance, in which several instances of narrative agency converge: that of the genre of speech and song itself, for instance. This might sound odd, yet if one takes, for instance, the generic conventions of *omitandu* (praise poetry in Otjiherero) into account, it becomes clear that there *can be* a narrative agency of the genre itself. Albeit inviting and actually pursuing the performative negotiation of historiologies and historiographies, in which events, phases and personalities of the past may take the centre stage, genealogies form the core of the genre. Genealogies thus are the heart of the ‘changing same’ of *omitandu*,¹⁹ without which they cannot be recognised or registered as *omitandu*. Alteration or additional inscription can only be accomplished within the existing frame of narrative conventions and by making use of the elements of its creative repertoire. The precondition for an *omitandu* to perform as an *omitandu* is recognition, that is, its citational quality. With genealogies as the sine-qua-non of this genre, the audience’s attention is inevitably directed towards filiation, descent, ancestry, derivation – as vital to notions of both community and personhood. The prerequisite of every instance of poetic license in *omitandu* is thus not merely the genre of speech itself, which affords the speaker the opportunity to criticise in a specific way, but also allows for the intimation of genealogies – the performer’s or those of the ones who are characterised, or both (at times in relation to each other). Thus genres carry their tropes and conventions, and with them a genre-specific agency, as something that is needed to be said in order to qualify as a performance of this specific genre, and to allow for recognition (Hoffmann, 2009a and 2012).

Further, instances of narrative agency may reverberate in the choice of the topics and tropes

18 Hiddleston writes: ‘Furthermore, with perhaps more nuance Peter Hallward criticizes Spivak’s concept of the subaltern for positing her voice as singular and inaccessible, and for failing to think through the means by which she might consolidate her identity and voice. For Hallward, ‘the subaltern, in other words, is the theoretically untouchable, the altogether-beyond-relation: the attempt to ‘relate’ to the subaltern defines what Spivak will quite appropriately name an ‘impossible ethical singularity’. The result is apparently that the critic deprives the subaltern of a voice while endlessly theorizing and retheorizing the mechanics of her own critical, and unavoidably Western, enunciation.’ (2007, p.624). (See also Hallward, 2001, p.30).

19 Paul Gilroy has established the notion of the ‘changing same’ in his interpretations of black music (1993, p.101).

that appear, at times, to be out of sync or estranged and bewildering from the *position* of their printed appearance. Instances are Mohammed Nur’s example sentences, which speak of the war in Maria von Tilings Somali Grammar; or Massaud bin Mohammed bin Salah’s account of his infelicitous defection, which appeared in a sketchy description of ‘the Mandara language’, published by the Lautarchiv (to which I will return below).

Accounts of the self were not requested by the linguists, yet do surface in the plethora of songs, stories and narratives that were recorded. Further, one finds speech acts, which seem to take flight, and thus cannot be contained by the intentions of the linguists. The echo of a deconstructive intervention also appears in a recording, which commences as a monotonous repetition of prescribed words, from where it takes a turn, deflecting the series of words and thereby inserts a trace of alternative meaning. In other cases it is the voice itself that seems to take flight, escaping the prescribed form of the recordings, an instance which is then deemed ‘meaningless ejaculations’ by the linguist, but (on hearing it again) succeeds in thickening the ‘plot’, and thereby exploding the logic of the grammatical examples and discipline (I come back to all these instances below).

In hearing recorded voices as echoes – bouncing and fragmented – the listener’s sense of directionality is blurred: one cannot know from where the (recorded) voice speaks, and the genres are (often) not revealed in the fragment. Yet this severance of the recorded, archived voice from both the intention and/or position of the speaker and his subjectivity does not annihilate the content of speech acts or songs. The contents are not entirely unknowable, even if the speakers remain exactly this.

III An unruly archive

Western knowledge really does alter what it knows – while also embracing the possibility that what resists such power, both from within and without, will, if given the room to speak, tell us something ‘we’ are in no position to hear. About this of course, we can *know* very little. Nevertheless we must do everything in our power to listen.

—John Mowitt (1992, p.222, italics in original)

Again, vis-à-vis the recorded voice, I battle with ‘*Spensigkeit*’ (I did not have to make up the word, I just stripped it to its root) – an entity that is once recalcitrant (*widerspenstig*) but also ghostly (*gespenstig*).

The recordings appear like *djins* trapped in bottles, which will, once released from their 'reverberating tomb' explode both our expectations and our capacity to grasp and explain. I am acutely aware of not being able to trace all the genres to which these recordings in some 40 African languages relate. Nor will I be able to identify all the fragments of cultural repertoires of performing, singing, and story-telling that converge in these archives. The severance that separates the recorded voices from speakers, repertoires and, at times, from genres is permanent: it cannot be undone. Even when translated, the voices irreversibly retain the character of echoes, and that is what remains. A project that aims for recuperation of any notion of an 'authentic voice' would be a romantic overestimation of scholarly possibilities. On the scandal of incommensurability, of voice recordings, which are at once indexical, and indeed speaking, but *not answering* to the questions their speaking brings up, nor revealing the speakers, I wrote elsewhere (Hoffmann, 2009a). In the following I offer a somewhat sketchy overview of our²⁰ findings.

I The book and the dance

Let me start with a minimal intervention that was inserted into the repetition of words, which were most probably requested as examples for the pronunciation of clicks in isiXhosa.²¹ The following interpretation of the recordings with Josef T., an isiXhosa-speaker from the area of Port Elizabeth, stems from my collaboration with Phindeswa Mnyaka, who translated and analyzed the recordings.²² Josef T. most probably shared barrack number 13, which accommodated men of colour in Ruhleben, a camp for British civilians, with Mohammed Nur. Like Nur, he had not been a soldier of the colonial army, but has been caught up in the war for reasons unknown.²³

After having performed several songs and a story, Josef T. presented a series of words (PK 867/2) for Carl Meinhof's recordings.²⁴ The songs bring up the notions

of hunger and of being an initiate (866/1) – the latter an allegory that also appears in the West-African Tirailleur Kande Kamara's accounts of the war²⁵ – the train, and an uncertain future (865/1) as well as the request for work/labour (866/2). The previous series of words and the story (PK 867/1) evolve around terms for 'God' in isiXhosa, which refers back to Carl Meinhof's concern with the translation of the gospel into African languages (Meinhof, 1905 and 1907; Pugach, 2000). The last recording with Josef T., on 19 May 1917 in Ruhleben, consist of a repetition of the words 'book' and 'dance'.

*Umngqungqo, umngqungqo, umngqungqo,
umngqungqo, incwadi, incwadi, incwadi, incwadi,
incwadi, umngqungqo, umngqungqo, umngqungqo,
umngqungqo,
yincwadi, yincwadi, yincwadi, yincwadi, yincwadi*

(PK 867/2)

The intervals between the words, together with the repetition create the serial monotony of an itemisation or inventarisation, that point to the process of phonetic objectification, which follows the needs of archiving and speaks to the archive's utopic endeavour of stabilising language as an object for research. Seeking to undo one of the intrinsic characteristics of spoken language, its alterability and with that, its ephemeral qualities, in favour of creating stable, lasting objects for grammatical and phonetic purposes, must create floating objects. The result is an orderly series of word-objects, which the linguistic archive divorces from their indexical relationship to a speaker, but also from the semantics of words, since the changeability of meaning would be antagonistic to the archive's flirt with posterity.

Listening to recordings, instead of reading transcripts, allows for a consideration of the anticipatory relationship of archiving with the utopia of conservation and containment *in situ*, if mediated, yet there are disturbances in its proceedings. In the very act of creating an acoustic record of language that is mechanically reproducible and allegedly objective, one can detect a shift that accentuates and alters the meaning (or meaninglessness) of a predictable series of words: the speaker's shift in his enunciation of 'book'. Whereas initially he says the word *incwadi* thus denoting what in the English language would be the indefinite article 'a' (in other words, the translation would be 'a book'), he shifts in the last line to the

20 I refer here to the findings that were often the result of my collaboration with translators, who are always also interpreters.

21 There is more to say to the research of clicks in allegedly 'primitive languages', but that is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for instance, Bleek (1869); Stopa (1935); Bank (2000).

22 More on these recordings is to be found in an article we wrote together (Hoffmann & Mnyaka, 2014).

23 For more on the history of Ruhleben, see, for instance, Stibbe (2008).

24 The speaker's name appears as Josef Tuanumbee and Josef Twanumbee in different files, both of which most probably are misspellings (Personal Files of the Lautarchiv, Humboldt University Berlin).

25 'To be a soldier in those days was like being circumcised. [When you went into the] secret bushes, there were many things you never knew about ... And that's the same parallel as warfare, as being a soldier' (citation of Kande Kamara's account in Lunn, 1985, p.4.)

Lfd. Nr.

PERSONAL-BOGEN

Lautliche Aufnahme Nr: *PK 1116* Ort: *Morbo.*
 Datum: *8/10/17*
 Zeitangabe: *12 Uhr 20 Min.*

Dauer der Aufnahme: Durchmesser der Platte: *27 cm*
 Raum der Aufnahme:

Art der Aufnahme (*Sprechaufnahme, Gesangsaufnahme, Choraufnahme, Instrumentenaufnahme, Orchesteraufnahme*): *1. Böhle bis 28. Mosi (Junges)*

Name (in der Muttersprache geschrieben):
 Name (lateinisch geschrieben): *Jamafada*
 Vorname:

Wann geboren (oder ungefähres Alter)? *etwa 20.*
 Wo geboren (Heimat)? *Bakoma*
 Welche größere Stadt liegt in der Nähe des Geburtsortes? *Futagurma*
 Kanton – Kreis (Ujeda):
 Departement – Gouvernement (Gubernija) – Grafschaft (County): *Nosi*
 Wo gelebt in den ersten 6 Jahren? *Bakoma*
 Wo gelebt vom 7. bis 20. Lebensjahr?
 Was für Schulbildung?
 Wo die Schule besucht?
 Wo gelebt vom 20. Lebensjahr? *seit 1914 Orbo.*
 Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt der Vater? *Bakoma*
 Aus welchem Ort (Ort und Kreis angeben) stammt die Mutter? *Bakoma*
 Welchem Volksstamm angehörig? *Nosi*
 Welche Sprache als Muttersprache? *Nosi*
 Welche Sprachen spricht er außerdem? *Nosi, ein wenig Kousi*
 Kann er lesen? Welche Sprachen?
 Kann er schreiben? Welche Sprachen?
 Spielt er ein im Lager vorhandenes Instrument aus der Heimat?
 Singt oder spielt er modern europäische Musikweisen?
 Religion: *Heide* Beruf: *Fürst*
 Vorgeschlagen von: 1. *Munkof*
 2. *Vilddregen.*

Beschaffenheit der Stimme:
 1. Urteil des Fachmannes (des Assistenten): *Munkof*
 2. Urteil des Kommissars: *Juniper*
Mittelstimmig mit hinreichender
Resonanz. Vilddregen.

FIG. I.1.2: Personal file PK 1116: Jámáfáda. With the permission of the Humboldt University Berlin.

definite article ‘the’ by using the word *yincwadi*, which is translated as ‘the book’. Such a subtle modification in determiners destabilises the exercise; moving away from the realm of the mundane repetition of phonemes whose value, for the linguists, solely lay in the peculiarities of clicks. Phindeswa Mnyaka writes:

By deploying the definite article ‘the’ (and one could also translate the word *yincwadi* to ‘that/this is a book’) the speaker seems to denote a dialogue between him and another, not necessarily conversational but intimating that he is not speaking alone by referring to a manifest object (‘the book’).

(Hoffmann & Mnyaka, 2014)²⁶

²⁶ I thank Phindeswa Mnyaka for generously allowing me to include this part, which is really her analysis, in my paper.

This does bring up the question of possible, imagined addressee(s), which is difficult to assess. Although one does hear, in one recording a sound in the background that may be laughter, or coughing, this does not indicate that Josef T. would have spoken to someone specifically. Can we read the list as progressing, from dance to book, and finally to *the book*, that is, from performance to writing, as an implicit theorising, or commentary – *en passant* – that gestures towards the result of this exercise and process of archiving?

The move from *a book* to *the book* (*the Book*), of course, might have been a reference to the bible, and with this move, Josef T.’s recording may have crystallised the peculiar significance of the combination of terms: the dichotomy of ‘the [W]ord’ and performance, and with that, of archive and repertoire, which inevitably refers to the colonising mission. The dichotomy is

already inherent in the choice of words, but it is also marking the realms – of the written word and the performance – as spaces and concepts, between which the imperial project of recording did oscillate. The production of the recordings was underpinned by Meinhof's request for missionaries to learn 'native' languages, which led to the converging of the evangelising mission and the project of archiving. Josef T.'s minimal shifts of wording transform his recorded articulation from the mechanical pronunciation of 'random' clicks/sounds to the enunciations of a speaking subject.

The only statement of Meinhof on the recordings I could trace is: 'Einige kafirische Aufnahmen sind merkwürdig wegen der Schnalzlauten, bieten aber wissenschaftlich sonst nichts bemerkenswertes.' ('Some of the Kafir recordings are strange, because of the clicks, but do not offer anything scientifically noteworthy').²⁷ Although Josef T.'s pronunciation or accent was seen as peculiar (*merkwürdig*), which brings up questions of the representation of language (in this archive of languages), since no other isiXhosa speaker was recorded. Most probably, this is again related to *availability*: the linguists did not find another speaker of the language. Josef T. became the representative speaker of a language, he might not have spoken most of his life (the file says, he lived in India before 1897), simply because he was present and thus available.

2 Giving an account of oneself (at war)

Much like in the epigraph – albeit translated recently by a Mòoré speaker during the project of producing the film *Boulevard d'Ypres*, by the Belgian filmmaker Sarah Vanagt – the following quote from the recording of a man named Jámafáda speaks of his experience as a soldier in the colonial army.

They took me and gave me to the whites.
They have thrown me into the war
The war is not interesting
We marched off. I have not forgotten my wife.
I left my wife and went to war.
Since I left FadaN'Gourma, I marched.
And I have not seen my compatriots again.
I do not know whether they have died or not,
but I have not seen them.
I continue to march without having news of
them.
In the war since three years, I haven't seen my
mother and father again.

I do not know if they have been informed of my
departure.

I continue to march.

It is now three years in which I haven't seen my
child.

Where I am now, I don't know, nor if I will
return.

In the time of war, if I will return or not, I don't
know.

I will return, but in the war, I don't know.²⁸

(PK 1116/2)

Not much needs to be added to Jámafáda's recorded account of his situation as a French colonial soldier and prisoner of war. On the file, his age is estimated as 21, he is said to be a soldier since 1914, his recording was produced 24 November 1917. The file further states that he was illiterate, spoke 'Mossi' (Mòoré) and French, and that he was heathen. Being a soldier since 1914 – and much like the unnamed Wolof-speaker (of the epigraph) – stating that he has been 'taken' by 'the Whites', to be 'thrown' into a war that was 'not interesting' – points towards the conscription campaigns of the French army. Christian Koller (2008, p. 115) describes French recruitment politics as based on the mixture of enlisting volunteers and conscription. Yet, 'the customary procedure [during the first years of the war in West Africa] was to ask local chiefs to provide potential recruits. Most often, men from lower social strata, especially from the group of domestic slaves, were presented to French recruitment officers.' Melvin Page writes that although many African men enlisted for various reasons:

far more did not want to leave their homes for
a cause they did not comprehend, or did not
wish to understand. Many simply refused to be a
voluntary part of any white man's enterprise. ...
[r]ecruiting in Africa took a variety of disguises
which nonetheless only masked what were really
methods of involuntary conscription.

(1987, p.7)

According to Jonathan Derrick (2008, p.45), the considerable resistance against the French military's conscription campaign was a crucial cause for the revolt against colonialism in Upper Volta in 1915-16, which is the area Jámafáda called home.

In a letter of Carl Meinhof to Felix von Luschan Jámafáda appeared as an anthropological '*curiosum*':

²⁷ This comment by Meinhof is found in the 'Bericht an die Phonographische Kommission', files of the Lautarchiv (my translation).

²⁸ I thank Sarah Vanagt for making the translation available. The sound file was translated by Ousmane (no last name given). The quote also appears in Lange (2012, p.61).

I further wanted to inform you that there is a Mossi from Fada n Gourma in Wünsdorf. As far as I can see, he is of anthropological interest, his face is covered completely with scars, in a way I have not seen before. His facial expression and very fair skin color reminds me of Bushmen, although the man is not short. His nose is completely dented and his eyes are extraordinarily sunken, and he opens them barely. The impression is rather daunting for the uninformed, yet he is rather smart and when I asked him for textual examples, he spoke of not seeing his father and mother, his wife and two children, and said he fears to die before he will see them again. There is only one Mossi in the camp, you should find him easily.²⁹

Meinhof's last sentence calls for an anthropological examination of Jámafáda, and unsurprisingly, his photograph appears in Doegen's publication (1925, p.32), which was based on the research of the *Kommission* in the camps, with a note on the scarification of his face. His recording is not mentioned.

3 'My old friend and slave trader from Bornu'

By the way, my old friend and slave trader from Bornu, who had much dealings with Ful, is in Wünsdorf and he will certainly be able to inform you on these issues.³⁰

The first of the Lautarchiv's publications of recordings in African languages - 'Mandara' - appeared in 1929, as issue No. 48 of the series. In the foreword, the initiator and (at times) director of the Lautarchiv, Wilhelm Doegen stresses that the written text is supposed to be concordant with the vital sounds (*lebendige Laute*) of the record, as far as the ear can capture the sound (*soweit das Ohr die Laute erfassen kann*). Yet in the ears of linguists the account of the prisoner presented in the following was merely an example of a foreign language that was yet to be researched. Under the heading 'Kriegserlebnisse eines Gefangenen' (war experiences of an internee) one reads the following text that was, according to the publication, spoken by Massaud Bornawi and recorded in Wünsdorf:

29 My translation from Meinhof's German letter to von Luschan (13.12.1917, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Handschriftensammlung, Nachlass Felix von Luschan, Korrespondenzen mit Carl Meinhof).

30 Letter from Meinhof to von Luschan (28.2.1917). The original reads as follows: 'Übrigens befindet sich in Wünsdorf mein alter Freund und Sklavenhändler aus Bornu, der viel mit Ful zu tun gehabt hat und sicher über die Sachen Auskunft geben kann.' (Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Handschriftensammlung, Nachlass Felix von Luschan, Korrespondenzen mit Carl Meinhof, my translation).



95. Massaud ben Mohammed ben Salah, Neger aus Mandara, Südsudan, 30 Jahre, Händler, 5. Thallus-Touren.

Figure 1.1.3: Massaud ben Mohammed ben Salah drawn by Herman Struck. Image from Luschan and Struck, 1917, fig. 95.

I came to the French, I have done service with them for four years. I did not want to go to Morocco. But ... said: you go and you stay in prison for two years. When I went to war against the Germans, and came to France and Belgium, I said (to myself): 'The Germans are friends of the Turks, and I as a Mandara am an ally of the Turks and the Germans, the Mandara are allies of the Turks and the Germans and the Austrians. We are under one flag.' So I threw away my gun and ran away and came to the Germans. The German soldiers beat me with a rifle on my feet and hurt me with the bayonet on my hand. That's how I came to the Germans. And this white person said: 'How did you come here from your country?' And I replied: 'I come from Sudan and am a French soldier.' Then he said to his brothers: 'Leave him, don't kill him. He is our friend, he changed sides to come to us.' And they said: 'You are our friends, therefore we may not kill you, it would be a sin. We are now under one flag.' They brought me to their captain and now ... I spoke to him and said: 'I crossed over.' And he said: 'Who knows you from then, when you crossed over?' And I said: 'Captain ...' And he said: 'I will see'. I am now interned here since 21 months. You have assembled the others who changed sides. They go to work outside the camp,

while you are keeping me here. I sat down and wrote three letters to France with the following content: 'I am here. My money, 600 Francs, is at the post office, the book has been lost. Take all my money and send it here!' But they answered: 'You defected. We are not allowed to send you the money. Stay with the Germans!' And now all people, the soldiers spend their money and you send them fruit and dates. But I don't have a friend. Now the Germans must let me go! All the people buy food in the canteen for their money, they eat and do not give me anything, I see it with my own eyes, but I do not have a friend who speaks the German language. Won't you let me go out to your cities, so that I can stay there and work until the war is over? Then, when I have earned something, I say to the king: 'I am going to Constantinople and then I go on a pilgrimage, and after the pilgrimage I will go to Mandara country.'³¹

(in Klinghenben, 1929)

The text in this publication leaves many questions unanswered. In the publication, it is referred to as a translation of the sound file PK 275. On the written file that documents the sound recording PK 275, the name of the speaker is Massaud ben Mohammed ben Salah (not Bornawi). In a letter to von Luschan, Meinhof stated that he met a man he had known already in the camp: 'Übrigens befindet sich in Wünsdorf mein alter Freund und Sklavenhändler aus Bornu, der viel mit Ful zu tun gehabt hat und sicher über die Sachen Auskunft geben kann.' ('By the way, present in Wünsdorf is my old friend and slave trader from Bornu, who knows about Ful and might inform you in this case').³² When did Meinhof 'become friends' with the man who was now interned in Wünsdorf?

The Africanist, August Klinghenben, who was the translator in this case, stated that his knowledge of the language was far from elaborate and that he may have mistranslated some words. The omission of words (indicated with ...) is sometimes related to Klinghenben's inability to understand them, but he also stated that 'einige dunkle Ausdrücke mussten unübersetzt bleiben' (Klinghenben, 1925, p.10), which translates as 'some dark expressions had to remain untranslated'. What exactly he means by 'dark expressions' – whether this refers to unknown words or, for instance, to utterances seen as too direct or obscene – is not clear to me.

31 My translation from German.

32 Letter 28.2.1917 (Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Handschriftensammlung, Nachlass Felix von Luschan, Korrespondenzen mit Carl Meinhof).

Still, the account of the internee is quite compelling, and the next question brought up by his account would be whether or not his narrative, apart from being a complaint, was also contradicting the propagandist promises made to Muslims who were actively asked

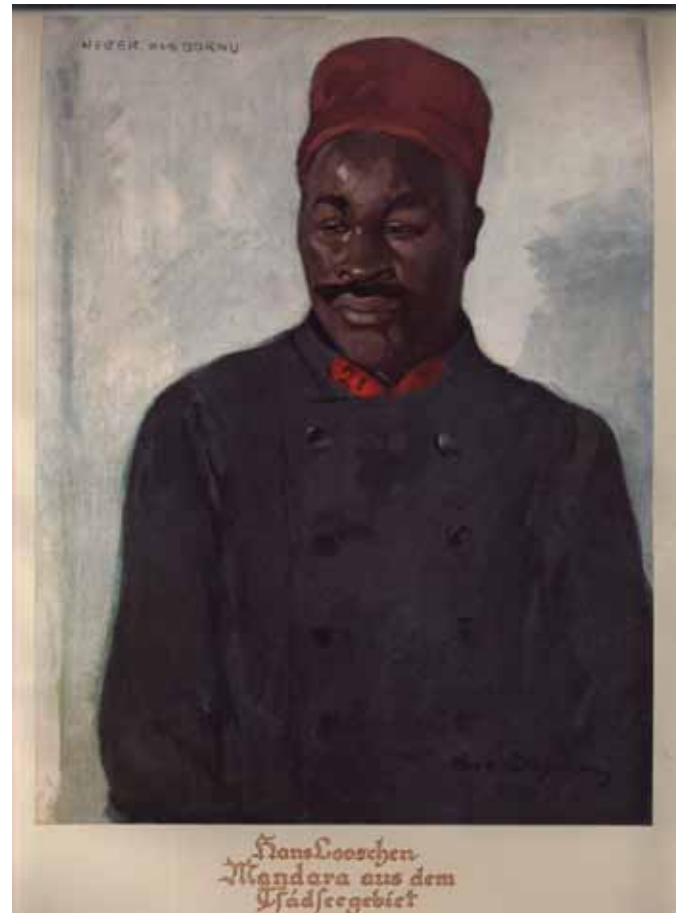


Figure 1.1.4: Massaud ben Mohammed ben Salah, drawn by Herman Loeschen. In Frobenius and Freytag-Lohringhoven, around 1924, fig. 27.

to cross over; and was therefore a *scandal*. The so-called *Halbmondlager* (Half-Moon Camp) in Wünsdorf was designed as a propaganda camp in which mainly Muslims were interned (as for instance Sundhar Singh, who had asked for the blanket to wrap the holy book) (Liebau, 2011). The activities and special treatment of prisoners (with regard to food supply and religious activities, but also the circulation of a propagandist camp newspaper in Hindi) can be read in this respect. When Turkey entered the war in November 1914, the Sultan issued a *fatwa* calling all Muslims to join the *jihad* against the Triple-Entente (Liebau, 2011). The German Foreign Office used the opportunity to harness Islam in their attempt to convince Muslim soldiers to cross the lines. Heike Liebau writes that the main target group of the agitation were *sepoys*,³³ but how explicit did this become within propagandist discourses of the time? Did the speaker believe in the rhetoric of 'one flag' only

33 Indian soldiers in the British army.

to find himself interned and excluded from the ‘favors’ other prisoners in Wünsdorf enjoyed? ‘... and you send them fruit and dates. But I don’t have a friend.’

Bringing up the notion of ‘one flag’ may also speak of Senegalese Commissioner Blaise Diagne’s recruiting campaign in West Africa, during which he succeeded in negotiating concessions for the Senegalese soldiers, such as an exemption from the head tax, and forced labour, but most importantly the prospect of military service as an avenue towards a status of equality for the men who had served France in WWI. ‘Those who fall under [German] fire, fall neither as whites nor as blacks, they all fall as Frenchmen and for *the same flag*’ (Blaise Diagne in Lunn, 1987, p.43, my italics).³⁴ Diagne’s promises and campaign had an immense resonance throughout West Africa and resulted in the enlistment of 60,000 recruits. This is of some importance, especially given the history of revolts against recruitment mentioned above, and in the light of Jámafáda’s statement: the war is *not interesting* (which referred to conscription campaigns in or before 1914).

The unpublished files, which include the transcription of PK 274, inform us further that Massaud ben Mohammed ben Salah was a Tirailleur Tunésien who had volunteered for the French army in Tripolis, to where he had fled after the outbreak of a war in French Sudan, during which he had lost his trade goods (among which were slaves). Remarkably, his image appears in three different publications: he had been drawn by Hermann Struck (von Luschan and Struck, 1917, fig.95), painted by Hans Loesch (Frobenius and Freytag-Loringhoven, 1924, fig.27) and appears on a photograph in Frobenius’ *Völkerzirkus* (1915, p.115).³⁵ Could the fact that he appears on all these images be credited to his diplomatic efforts to find a way to leave the camp? Or did he simply have a mercantile habit that enabled him to socialise with people who visited the camp?

Would the account Massaud gave, when he spoke into the phonograph, have passed the censor if it had been written, as in a letter? Since it was not even allowed to write the word *hunger*, I am quite sure it would not. As what kind of a document can (or must) one consider a text that evaded censorship as a recording, but then got published as a written and (however poorly) translated text more than a decade later, and which probably is merely a faint echo of the

recording, which, again, is probably merely a fragment of an account – since it was restricted to the length of a wax cylinder?

Postscript

Framing the recordings not as voices but as *echoes* – of accounts of the self, and of the war at times – I use the concept of echo as a means to grapple with extraction, attenuation, limitation, distance and the distortion or outright effacement that is the result of mediation, the delay (or belatedness of listening), the gaps in meaning and intelligibility. Here the restraints imposed on the speaker are a result of the linguist’s will not to punish the speaker but to *extract* language from semantics, so as to limit the potential distraction that a narrative of an ordeal (being hungry, wounded, homesick, betrayed, insulted) would entail. This need not mean that the speaker was restricted in the choice of narratives he could tell, or the songs he chose to sing. Instead, the language barrier, and often (not always) the belated understanding of what was said, prevented this kind of censorship, or indeed, allowed an evasion of censorship. The speakers’ accounts were restricted to the length of a wax cylinder (only in one case so far did I find a tale that continues on three cylinders), which is a technical limitation. Yet, the constriction of meaning lies in a prescribed practice of (extractive) listening.

Conceptualising the recorded voices and their translation as echoes, I seek to understand the status of voices recorded under the restraints of linguistic practice, the situation in the camps, so as to position these subaltern articulations in their mediated, distorted form as part of the colonial archive. These are neither subjective utterances (although the speech acts themselves may have been exactly this), nor can they be heard as the political voices of POWs from colonised countries who saw the horror of the Great War. Yet, they are *echoes* of these positions and still provide us with a lever to multiply and deconstruct Eurocentric narratives of WWI.

³⁴ Blaise Diagne’s comment can be found in *L’Afrique Française* 28 (1918) 26, for further details see also Fogarty (2008, p.1).

³⁵ The photography in *Völkerzirkus* is in profile and can therefore not have been the basis of Loesch’s painting in *Deutschlands Gegner*.

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