



## Indian Seamen in World War I Prison Camps in Germany<sup>1</sup>

FRANZISKA ROY  
*[franziska.roy@zmo.de](mailto:franziska.roy@zmo.de)*

This article deals with the experiences of internment, camp life, and work in the labour corps of Indian civilian prisoners of war in Germany during the First World War. We still do not know exactly how many civilian colonial prisoners were interned during the war, but the number of Indians among them exceeded 860 out of a total 2.5 million prisoners approximately in German camps (Oltmer 2006: 68; Davis 1977: 623). This may seem like an almost negligible number in terms of quantity but a study of these men can enrich our understanding of the German 'campscapes' and of the structures that were constitutive in forming the experiences that Indian prisoners communicated to those outside the camps during and after the war.<sup>2</sup> Among these are the shifting hierarchies and networks in the camps, the tension between German expectations of prisoners' behaviour and their own life worlds, as well as their conscious adaptation to and subversion of German official knowledge about them.

63

In the Great War as the first 'total war', propaganda played an important role, and technical advancements such as the advent of the cinema and cheap reproduction of photographs accelerated the propaganda war. Internally, many warring states endeavoured to influence their prisoners in some way, especially those from colonial backgrounds or ethnic minorities. For instance, while Germany publicly decried France's and Britain's supposed crime against civilisation by letting non-white, barbaric "half-monkeys" or "dogs" fight 'white men', it attempted to win over these colonial prisoners at the same time (Koller 2001: 101-24). Such attempts were made in 'special camps' ('Sonderlager') (Poeppinghege 2006). Colonial prisoners, especially combatant Muslim prisoners of African and South Asian origins were interned in the 'Halfmoon Camp' at Wünsdorf near Berlin (Höpp 1997: 35-44).



The Ottoman proclamation of Jihad against the allied powers with the blessing and backing of the German Kaiser is a well-known fact of World War I history (Aksakal 2008). But the Germans also devised a long-term strategy for the 'revolutionising of the Orient' by winning over people from those societies and inducing in them 'German-friendly' feelings.<sup>3</sup> Long-term economic and cultural objectives as well as immediate military interests were fused together in the Halfmoon Camp that aimed at putting together an 'army of deserters'. To support the initiative, 'native' propagandists – typically nationalists in political exile – were hired to carry out propaganda as well as devise other methods to destabilise the colonial powers (Barooah 1997; Höpp 1997: 69-100; Liebau 2011; Oesterheld 2004). Given the diverging aims, it is not surprising that the propaganda in these camps shifted and changed over time in line with the fortunes of war and the ascendancy of certain officials and departments (Liebau 2011: 96-129).

The Indian POWs often found themselves caught between conflicting propaganda initiatives and agendas by various institutions in Germany and Britain, ranging from military authorities and foreign offices to the activities of international non-governmental organisations (Oesterheld 1996: 170, 205-12). The most important of these institutions were the Prussian War Ministry (Kriegsministerium, KM), which were responsible for the internal organisation of POW camps and the German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt, AA) which steered the 'jihad campaign' and worked together with the Indian Independence Committee (IIC) on the war propaganda. The IIC was an organisation formed by Indian nationalists and revolutionaries who had been brought together in Berlin to help the German state in destabilising the Entente powers at the front and at home (Oesterheld 2004: 46-51). The interests of these groups were divergent to begin with and differences became more marked over the course of the war – the Indian nationalists attempted to instrumentalise the German state for the Indian freedom struggle, for instance, while the German state explored avenues to weaken the 'Achilles heel' of their enemies: their colonies.

The Allies - especially the British (Indian) administration - viewed these camps, and in turn the prisoners, with suspicion. Procedures were put in place to screen prisoners before or after repatriation. Prisoners who were released early were regarded as potential deserters, spies or insurgents. The repatriation interviews routinely conducted for this reason are a rich source for the historian, despite – or maybe because of – all the difficulties in reading this highly problematic source corpus given all its underlying tensions: in such



interviews, the former prisoners had to prove their loyalty, while the state also sought to extract information that might be used for military strategy, or constitute grounds for reprisal, the latter being the chief instrument to enforce adherence to international regulations among the warring states in the absence of post-war institutions like the League of Nations (Jones 2011: 127-66).

### **From Ship to Camp**

In the following pages, I will look at civilian prisoners rather than Indian soldiers (sepoys). Among them, there were different groups: businessmen, students at German universities and finally the lascars, Indian seamen, our focus group in this essay. The Germans clearly made a distinction between them based on status and racial background. English and colonial students and businessmen who were in Germany before the outbreak of the war were initially not interned but merely had to report to police stations at intervals. One businessman described the experience as 'enforced holidays' (Stibbe 2005: 8-11). These people were later interned as a reprisal for the internment of German civilians in England.<sup>4</sup> For the lascars, the situation was rather different. Joseph Faithful, a Christian steward on a German ship, gave this description of 'arriving in the war':

Reaching Hamburg before the end of July, 1914 and unable to go to England I was put on a hulk, the ANCHORIA, [...] together with other Asiatics, Indians, Arabs and Chinese [...]. We Indians suffered very much and at Havelberg also [...]. I was the only educated Indian, the others were sailors and firemen. I was the youngest Indian prisoner in Germany, I believe. [...] They made us work on the ship, cleaning the decks, brass, washing the paint. The ship was very dirty. We kept the latrines ourselves. There were lice, fleas and bugs.[...] They never gave us any clothes. We were never allowed out. The discipline was severe; they cursed us as British and beat us. I was beaten once. [...] The ordinary punishment was to beat men with a rubber staff. I do not think that men were put into cells. [...] I complain of the cold weather, the badness and insufficiency of the food, the ill-treatment, people were beaten every day. All the Germans were the same. They treated Indians worst, the Arabs next badly and the Chinese the least badly. [...] They gave us 250 grammes of bread daily, bad bread. No one received parcels. [...].<sup>5</sup>

When Faithful was interned on the hulk, he was just 16-year-old. He is one of the most fascinating and ambiguous characters that I have found while leafing through archival documents pertaining to German



POW camps. As we shall encounter him time and again, a few words on him are in order. Faithful was born in 1898 in Shillong, Assam, was a Roman Catholic, and stated that his father was a government pensioner. His family lived in Calcutta and he found it necessary to emphasise that both his father Simon Faithful and his mother were 'pure blood Indians'. He was on his adventurous way to England, with, he stated, 50 pounds in his pocket, and working his passage to England, where, one might safely state, he had intended to jump ship (Ahuja 2006: 118-9, 126; *Idem*, 2008: 13-48; Balachandran 1996: 206-36). Most (but not all) of what we know about him is from a seven-page interview conducted after his repatriation to England in April or May 1919.

Faithful is an atypical case in some ways. He is not a professional, long-term lascar as many of his fellow prisoners were. Most of his fellow inmates hailed from the Bengal rural area and were not very educated, as Faithful emphasised.<sup>6</sup> Still the lascars whether professional seafarers or adventurers, were, one might say, quintessential products of a globalised labour market. Lascars were practised travellers (Balachandran, 2012: 17-21), and this what made them different from soldiers. The latter, though engaged in various imperial theatres of war on the South Asian continent, typically had never sailed across the 'kala pani', ('black water', the ocean), and their idea of 'vilayat', or Europe, was often hazy at the beginning (Ahuja 2011: 17-56; Markovits 2010: 29-54). Still, one should not overemphasise the boundless cosmopolitanism of the lascar. A web of formal and informal regulatory regimes from their recruitment to their discharge framed their world, and their contracts have been described as a variation of indentured labour (Balachandran 2008: 48; Balachandran 2012: 58-93; Ahuja 2006: 111-41).

Let us look at the situation the lascars found themselves in and whether they were able to find some room for manoeuvre during their term of imprisonment. In another repatriation interview with six lascars after their return to England, the group narrated how, near Hamburg and Bremen, they were made to work for two and a half years in docks and harbours, and that there was considerable activity to get ships ready to sail immediately upon the declaration of peace, which was expected to be very soon. "During this time the Lascars were kept on board the ships at nights under guard, but otherwise were treated fairly well." The men also reported - with marked disdain - on being visited by three Indians all of whom were "thoroughly Teutonised" and had "probably married German wives".<sup>7</sup> But the lascars were not



regarded as the main objects of propaganda by the Germans since the military objectives took precedence over the other aim, i.e. the inducement of friendly feelings towards Germany. The military objective was to use prisoners to support the Ottomans by evoking religious loyalties with the jihad propaganda. So, instead of being transferred to the propaganda camps in Wünsdorf/Zossen, most of them were first brought to Havelberg. The same group of repatriated lascars who had complained about the 'Teutonised' Indian agents recalled:

They [the lascars] were all collected by degree in a camp at HAKLBURG [sic!] which was reserved entirely for Indians and others of the Lascar class. Here they were treated most disgracefully[,] were given only a little coarse grain to eat and would all have starved but for food parcels from England. Many died in this camp and those who fell ill had no proper attention [...] the German doctors merely handled them roughly, taunted them with being 'English' and did them no good. [...] they were allowed to write a few words home at long intervals. These lines had to be written in English or Urdu, there being a German Officer in the Camp who knew the latter language [...].<sup>8</sup>

67

Faithful, in his interview after being repatriated to England, paints an even bleaker picture:

We were put into barracks with other Indians there. Hauptmann von Zitzewitz of Lager 2 [...] ordered Indians to be put in prison for small offences. The corporals and sergeants were very bad, they were constantly hitting people even with bayonets, usually with their fists. No one was killed. [...] Our food was worse than on board the ship. The American Ambassador visited us, and sent us books, games and musical instruments. I never received any personal packages from England, but I was often given food sent in bulk for the Indian prisoners [...] Very much was kept back. [John] David said the food was lost. I suppose they sold the food or gave it to the Germans. The barracks at Havelberg were flimsy and leaked, they were very cold.<sup>9</sup>

A former waiter from Bombay, Frank Williams-Gonzague meanwhile complained not about the treatment in camp 2 or the German authorities but rather camp 4, "which was filled with Indian seamen and firemen", and where he acted as interpreter. He emphasised, however: "I do not complain of the treatment by the Germans at Havelburg [sic] but of the action of certain pro-German Indians three in particular..:", namely John David, Golam Ali (Rangoonwala) and one 'Senegali'. He described how David had maltreated fellow prisoners and had stolen



their food and parcels, and that Ali and David had denounced him and others, due to which he was “put into prison in Havelburg (sic) gaol for two months on the ground that I was against the Germans”. Williams-Gonzague was a Roman Catholic married to a French woman in Lille who had been working in the local leather industry and was, according to his own statement, captured by the Germans when they occupied Lille in the autumn of 1916 [sic]. Under his statement the interviewer, MS Pritchard, noted that he “was shaken by his experience. His memory is defective and does not present events in sequence”. He was said to become confused when pressed for details and could not remember the address of his wife in Lille.<sup>10</sup> However, Pritchard asserted that the information he was able to check turned out to be accurate.

We need to take into account that the situation in the camps could greatly vary due to Germany’s wartime ‘army corps district system’, i.e. in each district one corps commander was given near-absolute power during the war, and his orders superseded those of civilian institutions. The corps commanders received orders from the War Ministry (KM), yet were to a degree independent in the management of daily affairs and the interpretation of regulations. Some of them even ignored official agreements and orders of the War Ministry or gave out contradicting orders of their own (Gerard 1917: 111).

68

When the lascars were finally brought to the Halfmoon Camp, their terms of imprisonment were not the same as those of Indian soldiers. The Halfmoon Camp, for a time, was apparently a well-protected and closed off compound geared entirely towards creating an ideal surrounding for the indoctrination of prisoners (Höpp 1997). But we have to distinguish between an earlier and a later stage of the war, and the groups it was aimed at. The “wall of silence” (Höpp 1997: 57) and, quite literally, the wall surrounding the ‘Oriental’ compound in Wünsdorf partly broke down in the later stages: anthropologists visited the camp, Indian POWs were lent to filming companies as exotic extras, and the ‘secret’ camp propaganda paper *Al-Ġihād* was sent to individuals in other camps (Lange 2006; Berner 2003: 124-36).<sup>11</sup>

The KM admitted quite freely that it was not in favour of any continued propaganda being carried out once the ‘military option’,<sup>12</sup> that is the intent to recruit prisoners as fighters for the Ottoman front, faded away due to the tide of fortune turning and the Ottoman’s disinterest in incorporating former prisoners into their army. In 1917, the sepoys, Tartars and (North) Africans, apparently for health reasons, were deported to a new camp in Romania and the camp changed



its character radically.<sup>13</sup> The Subadar-Major Sher Singh Rana claimed that “[a]bout April, 1917 all the Indian prisoners except three Gurkha and one Sikh Officer were sent to Roumania!”<sup>14</sup> For the sepoys, this was not a far cry from the truth: by August 1917 approximately 500 sepoys had been transported to Romania, and “they were told they would be allowed more liberty, and be able to cultivate gardens of their own.”<sup>15</sup> It was only after this transfer of the soldiers that the remaining civilian Indian POWs were brought to the Halfmoon Camp and sent on labour corps.

### **The Intermediaries**

Despite popular claims to the contrary, as summed up by the American Ambassador Gerard when he stated that “[i]t was the policy of the Germans to put some prisoners of each nation in each camp...” (Gerard 1917: 111), the Germans did not whimsically mix prisoners of different ‘races’ just to annoy the Allies or to shun criticism of differential treatment. A lot of evidence points to a policy of strict segregation marking the ‘campscapes’ of World War I- not only in Germany. The ‘complete segregation’ and grouping together of nationalities in the propaganda camps targeting minorities (Polish, Tartars, Flemish etc.) or colonised people (Arabs, Indians) was of special importance, as is evident in the case of the twin camps of Wünsdorf and Zossen (Höpp 1997: 46-7). Segregation also worked along the lines of loyalty, status and class in the case of Indians students/businessmen vs. lascars, or in the separate camps that were established for rank and file and for officers (in accordance with the Hague agreement).

Race and nationality sometimes overlapped, at other times criss-crossed. These policies of segregation made it possible to selectively employ existing hierarchies and networks for different contexts, to reorder or subvert them and put supposedly ‘German-friendly’ individuals in charge. Thus an early report from the Zossen camp states: “The non-commissioned officers (prisoners) carried out most of the interior discipline [in the camp] with as little interference as possible on the part of the guards. In fact, there were few guards in evidence, M. Ador [the camp inspector for the U.S., the protecting power] remarked, such men were doubtless being better employed elsewhere.” (Gerard 1917: 111)

These structures also played a role in extracting labour and keeping order in the camp. In the case of labour corps, the KM, in charge of



regulating the conditions of work, put emphasis on the importance of local informants and (usually German) 'men of confidence' (Vertrauensleute), especially in the later years of the war when acts of sabotage by prisoners became known.<sup>16</sup> 'Native' interpreters appointed by the authorities played an important role in these regimes as well. But these structures could also be appropriated by prisoners, and particularly by the interpreters or other intermediaries, for their own purposes.

To make the role of intermediaries more explicit we can follow the young Joseph Faithful. In his extensive statement about his time as POW, recorded on 9 May 1919, the interpreters and collaborators, their privileges and power over other prisoners, occupy a prominent position. He gave a list of Indians 'hostile to England' and mentions, next to the Indian revolutionary Bhupendranath Datta who was a member of the IIC, the following names:

Kando Ambelal Desai, a Brahmin of Gujarat: "Desai would be a danger. He is not clever at all, but he likes to preach to the people";

N.N. Naik, the cousin of Desai: "I did not know him personally [...] At Ruhleben he gave the name of Kandu Thin Nayik, 42, Leibnizstraße, Charlottenburg. He went to Constantinople during the war, and returned";

Noor Hassan Khan, steward on the SS Greiffenfels is alleged to "have tried to become German, but did not wish to fight";

Golam Ali Rangoonwala was the president of the Indian committee in the steel works and alleged munition factory at Grossenbaum.

Finally, the president of the 'Indian Committee' at Havelberg, John David, whose real name according to Faithful was Mama Sami of Nilgiris (in the Madras Presidency): "The Indians were afraid of them, especially of David. He was big and beat them. Desai was small and talked".<sup>17</sup>

It is in this respect that Faithful's statement - together with a number of other similar ones by repatriated prisoners - shares a key feature with the approver's testimony and that is with regard to the typical structure of 'action and identification' Shahid Amin has identified, i.e. for every action performed, the micro-sequence is interrupted to detail who participated in what way (Amin 1987: 173). The external influence structuring the narration becomes clear at such points and we need to be mindful of it.





At the same time, the account Faithful gives begs the question as to his own role. The repatriated lascars already cited above, were also brought to Havelberg and here met John David, Joseph Faithful and one "Kambu" (probably 'Kandu', i.e. either Desai or N.N. Naik). They complained bitterly about all of these "Madrassis, who had been employed as stewards or cabin boys and thus acquired some knowledge of the German language [...]. These men were employed by the German officers as interpreters and were more or less put in charge [sic!] of the other prisoners. They seemd [sic!] to have vied with their German masters in their brutality in the treatment of their fellow countrymen [...]". In particular, the lascars mentioned stolen parcels and being beaten or put under arrest when they complained about these men. The lascars' recorded statement concluded, "All the men hoped that when the prisoners are finally repatriated at the end of the war the conduct of these men would not be forgotten."<sup>18</sup> These complaints are to be taken all the more seriously since they were made during the men's captivity in Germany already: the IIC wrote to the camp authorities in Wünsdorf stating that the lascars from Havelberg "complained bitterly about the Indian interpreters *they were accorded*".<sup>19</sup>

71

In another interview with three lascars named as Hamid-Ullah, a serang [Indian boatswain] from the SS "Nordmark", Hamburg-America line; Riaz-Ullah, a serang from the SS "Kitfels", Hansa Line; and Albert, Butler it is stated:

When, after about two years they were sent from the seaports to the internment camp at Havelburg [sic!], their lot became a very miserable one, and for this the Indian interpreters were mainly responsible. These people were even more cruel in their treatment than the Germans themselves and the sailors have sworn that if they ever meet them again they will at least beat them soundly, even if they spare their lives. The following are the names by which the interpreters at Havelberg were known:

xxx [name crossed out in the file]

Faithful

xxx [name crossed out in the file]

Of the remainder the man against whom the lascars were loudest in their complaint was John David. They also spoke bitterly against Faithful and Nur Hassan.<sup>20</sup>

Education was one important factor, together with a degree of proficiency in the relevant language, former status etc., that fed into



the evolving hierarchies in the camps. In the report of an escaped civilian Russian prisoner, Michel Rosen, the intermediaries are described (erroneously) as German spies and students:

[...] about 1000 black British seamen were interned at Havelberg Camp. The Germans sent three black spies, of the names John David, Cambon [probably N.N. Naik's alter ego Kanduk] and Desai, who had been students in Berlin, to this camp. These men were able to induce the black prisoners to go and work in munition factories for the Germans.<sup>21</sup>

However, one of the striking features of the intermediaries among the South Asian civilian prisoners seems to be their pre-war cosmopolitanism briefly alluded to above (Vertovec 2008: 4). For instance Golam Ali Rangoonwala was reported by Faithful as being well educated and fluent in English. He and Desai, whom he must have met during this time (reportedly they often talked in Gujarati while at Grossenbaum so that the other prisoners could not understand them),<sup>22</sup> even managed to borrow money from the English Government for opening a company 'Rangoonwala & Co.' after their repatriation. But when the British tried to seek repayment of the loan, the company was no longer to be found, neither of the men possessed any property in their native villages that could be attached in lieu of repayment, and both had reportedly left for England again to start business afresh.<sup>23</sup>

72

Desai was the son of a petty landowner in Gujarat and an Anvelal Brahmin, but not well educated. Desai and Naik had left Gujarat in 1901 or 1904 for Cape Town and returned in 1906/1907.<sup>24</sup> Desai had been in Germany since 1908, proceeding from Paris where he had travelled in the company of K.C. Desai and Govind Amin, "the London and Paris revolutionary who subsequently committed suicide". The former hailed from the same village, the latter was an acquaintance of Ambelal Desai from Cape Town. The brother of Govind Amin, Chaturbhai, who went with the others to Europe, was wanted in connection with the Nasik conspiracy case, which revolved around the murder of the Nasik magistrate and ICS officer AMT Jackson in 1909.<sup>25</sup> Ambelal Desai was then variously reported to have opened a tea-shop-cum-restaurant in Berlin, to be working in a soap factory, and later as learning tailoring.<sup>26</sup> Both John David and Ambelal Desai are described as 'Commercial Travellers' in official accounts.<sup>27</sup> We know considerably less about David's background, but he held a passport issued in October 1914 by the US Consul in Breslau (now Wroclaw) and later the same month (after the outbreak of the war) was taken by the Police at



Schweidnitz (Silesia; now Swidnica). Hence we might assume he was travelling in the area independently of ship or crew.

It was no accident that it is this group of people especially who then became 'interpreters' in the POW camps. These intermediaries attained particular visibility (and notoriety) in camp prisoners' organisations. The lascars had complained about the interpreters they were 'accorded'. We know from the 'Engländerlager' Ruhleben that in the first instance interpreters had been chosen by the camp guards and then simply made captains of barracks. From this evolved an elaborate system of representation, appropriated, or rather, according to some depictions, a complete take over by the prisoners when the camp authorities proved unable to keep order in the camp. Here, each barrack had a captain and all the captains elected a camp captain (Gerard 1917: 122-3). It is reported that in many instances the camp captains' committee managed to force the camp authorities' hand by threatening to resign, and one ex-prisoner laconically observed that "[t]he military are, more and more, in a peculiarly insidious manner, being forced, to their utter mystification, into the position of a purely permissive body, and it may be of some interest to see where they eventually terminate their career" (Pyke 1916: 134; Powell and Gribble 1919). There were funds for poorer prisoners, an orchestra, a drama society and numerous classes.

While there are a number of memoirs published on Ruhleben by ex-prisoners (Lee 1917), we know very little about other civilian camps – especially from the perspective of the inmates – and we know next to nothing about the Indian organisations, but there is good reason to believe that camp authorities chose interpreters among South Asian prisoners, too, who then also assumed other responsibilities: according to Faithful, John David was president of an 'Indian Committee' in Havelberg, of which one Obermüller, who was in the "Russian barrack", was the secretary while one 'Louis' was "in command" of camp 4, and the post office reportedly was controlled directly by the camp commander, Zitzewitz, of camp 2 where most of the Indians were later on.<sup>28</sup>

In a camp report by the neutral inspector Dr. Römer (made after the lascars had been transferred from Havelberg to Wünsdorf), the inspector stated that according to the authorities, the Indians had "selected" Obermüller and "a Frenchman" to open their parcels for them (since the contents needed to be checked before they were handed over). There is no mention here of an Indian Committee, while it is implied that the Indians chose representatives of their own



volition. But how reliable such statements are, is open to debate. In this case, even the official note preceding the inspector's report criticises Dr. Römer for relying too heavily on the information supplied by the camp authorities and for not initiating any contact with the prisoners.<sup>29</sup>

What, then, can we deduce concerning the tasks fulfilled by such committees and the interpreters? The Indian Committee of Havelberg managed to inform an agent of the American Express Line about their transfer to Wünsdorf in July 1917,<sup>30</sup> while other interpreters - one might assume from the regular accusations of stolen parcels - helped with prisoners' mail or wrote petitions. For instance, we know that Golam Ali Rangoonwala acted as interpreter and was president of the Indian Committee at the Hahnsche Werke, Grossenbaum (see below). When British authorities reacted to reports that this was in fact an ammunition factory by stopping to send parcels to the Indians there, Golam Ali wrote letters to plead for a continuation of the practice.<sup>31</sup> Whatever their role exactly entailed, in all instances they are identified as 'interpreters' if not collaborators. Thus, Faithful stated that Ambelal Desai, John David and Golam Ali Rangoonwala acted as interpreters on the labour commando in Grossenbaum while underlining: "I interpreted but never acted as interpreter. *All the Indians talked a little German.*" In other reports we however find notes on the lascars' inability to speak any "but their own language"<sup>32</sup>, and Faithful earlier underlined himself that he was 'the only educated Indian' among the lascars, who were "simply natives" and that he had "learnt German to read and write" by himself.<sup>33</sup>

It seems significant that virtually all the complaints we have about individual 'natives' pertained either to propagandists or to interpreters, and it is these individuals we can therefore trace. Invariably, it comes up as a position that was exploitative and smacked of collaboration. Hence, Faithful's need to claim that he 'interpreted, but never acted as interpreter' while Williams-Gonzague, who had been transferred from Ruhleben where, as we have seen, the power relations within the camp were somewhat different, could state frankly, "I acted as interpreter".<sup>34</sup> Another element in this could be the inverted status of prisoners in the camp as opposed to their former positions. The most outspoken of the plaintiffs were often the 'serangs' and others that had a pre-eminent position on the ship. Whether this switch made for particular bitterness is speculation, of course. Certainly, the camps restructured the hierarchies amongst the POWs.



The trope of collaborators and 'native informants' has haunted some historians. Are they colonial or official 'inventions' or 'actual' spokespeople? We deduce from the emerging jigsaw puzzle that some of the interpreters occupied a higher status in their former surroundings – be it as Indian NCOs in the army, or on board their ships as stewards and cabin boys – who would at least have had some contact to the 'white' ship crew, maybe enough to make them more apt at acting as mediators. Others (like Naik and Ambelal Desai) were cosmopolitans in a broad sense of the word. But whether 'invented' or 'traditional' leaders, the spokespeople were simply those being taken as such by authority, and the people concerned had to use the intermediaries the officials would recognise in order to negotiate, or else find ways to bypass them – such as appealing to a higher authority directly by writing 'Bettelbriefe' (letters begging for help).

Examples of such letters pleading for material help or, in some cases, requesting information concerning family members were written by prisoners as well as their relatives in India, most often to British authorities or (semi-governmental) philanthropic bodies. The 'prose of petition' naturally represents a particular genre of writing, and the letters consciously likened themselves to an official form of address. Some of them were most likely written by scribes on behalf of those concerned but all the writers tried to the best of their linguistic abilities to keep in line with the expected, time-honoured style. The following letter was written by a group of lascars after having been repatriated to England and finding themselves destitute – the style, in its humble veneration, euphemisms and appeal to patriarchal protection and responsibility, resembles closely the letters from prisoners in the camps. The reference to the hardships experienced during imprisonment is recurrent among returnees and apt to remind the authorities of the (former) prisoners' need of and right to help.

Honoured Sir

We the undersigned crew of the late Hansa Liner, have already appeal [sic] to you for protection and also to look into our grievances, but sorry to say that we have no answer yet

Honoured Sir

as you are already aware that we were prisoners in the German land, through no faults of ours, and what sufferings, and hardships we have undergone for over three years, imagination can hardly compass the horrors of it, but thank God through the intercession of our good sovereign [sic], this day we are free to breathe once more.



Hon. Sir

We are grateful for all the kindness you have shown towards us, but as we are in need of some clothes, and also tobacco [underlined] of which we are in great need, so we therefore appeal to you if you can find a way to grant us this favour, and which kindness, we shall never finish pray nor do enough to show our great heartfelt gratitude if we try for ever.<sup>35</sup>

Much propaganda and counter propaganda on both sides was not carried out by pamphlets, but by the amount of tobacco and the quality of the food provided, on the assumption that the well-being of prisoners was, perhaps, the most important conduit for loyalty. These measures "to ameliorate [the Indians'] sufferings" had not only a philanthropic but also a Realpolitik dimension, as, for instance, Lord Curzon pointed out in a parliamentary debate: "Indian prisoners will return to their own country with tales [...] negligence [...] will react terribly in India after the war."<sup>36</sup> India was, after all, heavily contributing to the war effort while Indian nationalists were beginning to raise more stringent political demands in return. The Germans were not wrong in their assessment that it was a politically sensitive time, as the period after the war would prove.

76

German authorities had a similar view on the question of loyalty of prisoners. A good example of these concerns can be found in the debates on Indian prisoners' Bettelbriefe from the Halfmoon Camp: German officials gave orders to suppress Bettelbriefe where appropriate, and goods gained through these were to be handed out among all POWs since it was reported that prisoners were 'swamped' with such parcels which in turn encouraged them to write more letters giving exaggerated descriptions of the conditions in German camps.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, British officials concerned with postal censorship were "specially warned of the undesirability of passing communications in which undue stress is laid on the good treatment of Indian Prisoners of war."<sup>38</sup>

Colonial fears of 'sedition', revolt and the instigation thereof also figure as tropes in prisoners' accounts like in that of Joseph Faithful's assessment of various of his 'anti-British' fellow prisoners as well as the assurance of general faith and loyalty: "They (the prisoners) were all patient, they all knew they would win the war".<sup>39</sup> And "Bengali sedition mongers"<sup>40</sup> visiting 'loyal Indians' or Northern Indian Muslim lascars talking about pro-German (and in some cases Bengali) propagandists as 'Madrassis' are recurrent tropes. Such descriptions were playing on colonial clichés (the Bengali terrorist was one of the British nightmares given a strong network of extremist groups in Bengal



during that time which managed to kill certain officials or stage large-scale robberies), as much as actual disdain for a certain class, or a general 'othering' of certain groups to highlight their treacherousness vis-à-vis one's own loyalty, intermingle in the statements of those explaining their situation to British officials.

However, one should not single out calculation and opportunism to explain statements and letters from prisoners. Actual conviction as well as creative misconceptions and understanding played their part and might intermingle with the former depending on the context, the amount of pressure, the post-hoc rendering of stories in the memory of the narrator etc. A telling incident to illustrate these misunderstandings that surely could work both ways is the following narrative of the 55-year-old lascar captured by the S.S. *Möwe*, which can be found as a story told by the prisoner and recorded on shellac disc by linguistic researchers in the camp (Lange 2006):

[...] One day the chief of Oleum Savran came to visit us and asked us 'where are you from'. We said we are Muslims from India. He asked how we were doing at the camp. We said we are well and well looked after but there is just one thing we want from you. We want to go back to India. He misunderstood this and sent us to the Indian prison camp. We thought in our mind now we have to stay in this 'garod' till the war is over [...].<sup>41</sup>

77

Historians cannot read the intentions of historical actors. Whether the lascar thought it was actually within the powers of 'the chief' to send them to India, or whether he used a supposed misunderstanding to reiterate his complaint and longing for home among his audience of scholars making records for ethnographic purposes we cannot tell. When looking at the narratives of POWs under pressure from varying agents and expectations, we have to take all these possibilities and ambiguities into account and situate them in their specific context and against other statements.

### **Prisoners in Labour Commandos**

After the initial surplus of labour that war-time Germany experienced in 1914-1915, labour scarcity hit especially the arms industry, mining and agriculture (for figures, Oltmer 2006: 68 ff). By 1916, 90 per cent of all POWs (1.6 million) were employed in labour commandos, with 1.1 million of them in agriculture and the war industry (Oltmer 2006:70). A central body (Reichszentrale für Arbeitsnachweise) supervised the effective use and distribution of labour. A continuous flow of



regulations issued by the KM provided precise and ever-changing model contracts and details of pay and nutrition for POWs and guards, responsibilities of the employers etc. (Rawe 2005).<sup>42</sup> In 1916 the Indian soldiers (sepoys) interned in Zossen were among the few able-bodied POWs who were not sent on labour commandos. The argument put forth by the camp authorities was that making the sepoys work would interfere with the German propaganda, as these “work-shy elements” had actually joined the army in order not to work and were used to servants doing various things for them.<sup>43</sup>

As a rule, prisoners could be made to work by the captor states. The Hague Convention (IV) of 1907 (HLKO), which was signed by nearly all the countries at war a few years later, laid down basic rules for the conduct of war on land, including the treatment of prisoners. POWs were to be treated humanely and the states holding POWs had to provide food, clothing, shelter, and pay equal to that of the state’s own troops for work.<sup>44</sup> There were many reasons why prisoners might not have been opposed to be sent on a labour commando. ‘Even’ the Indian soldiers – to the surprise of the camp authorities – are said to have helped voluntarily with the potato harvest around Wünsdorf (Höpp, 1997:53). Readiness to work could be related to the dullness of camp life, dwindling food rations as the war dragged on and the pay that would enable POWs to purchase supplies in canteens and the like. But preferential treatment in terms of work regimes could be interpreted by their home state as the captor’s (maybe successful) attempt to gain the prisoners’ loyalty.

A further set of problems pertained to work in the war industry, which, naturally, was one of the biggest employers. According to the HLKO, POWs were not to perform excessive work or such tasks that related to the “operations of war”.<sup>45</sup> What that meant in practical terms became a topic of continuous dispute. Finally, there is the ambiguous status of civilian prisoners. The HLKO regulated the treatment of combatant prisoners. Nobody had reckoned with the masses of civilian POWs that the Great War produced.

Hence, the question of CPOW, forced labour and labour in the war industry became an issue for dispute between the warring states during and even after the war. The ban on war-related labour was subject to some rather idiosyncratic hair-splitting by German officials indeed. As the war progressed, the KM gave secret orders that the HLKO formula regarding ‘the operations of war’ was to pertain only to work that was directly connected with action in the theatres of war, i.e.





digging trenches, the actual assembling of munitions and "material whose unmediated use would lead to the destruction of our enemies".<sup>46</sup> A separate KM order stated that POWs could be compelled to do work, including that which POWs might have objected to as furthering the German war effort – by all means necessary. Only the forced work on the final assembly or transport of munitions and war material – the purpose of which was "obvious to the naked eye" – was to be avoided.<sup>47</sup> In 1917, more than 130 Indian civilians and British (combatant) POWs were employed at the steel works Hahnsche Werke, deemed 'essential to the war effort' [kriegswichtiger Betrieb], at Grossenbaum.<sup>48</sup> In the reports of former POWs, it is always described as a munitions factory and that was what British intelligence had long suspected.<sup>49</sup>

So how did the CPOW come to be employed here? As we have seen, the escaped Russian prisoner Michael Rosen, claimed that "[...] The Germans sent three black spies [...] These men were able to induce the black prisoners to go and work in munition factories for the Germans."<sup>50</sup>

As we have seen above, the interpreters were typically disliked but their status gave them a certain amount of power. Whether it was they who 'induced' the Indians to go and work at those factories is open to debate. Good pay and the threat of repression were no doubt also powerful motives. Rosen tells the story of one Indian CPOW by the name of Frank Williams-Gonzague: "[...] one nigger refused to work for the Germans and tried hard to prevent the others from going [...]. For his pains he was first of all imprisoned, and then sent back to an internment camp with the French."<sup>51</sup> Williams-Gonzague himself stated: "I told the men that we could not be made to work in a munition factory and I was denounced by Golam Ali [Rangoonwala; another interpreter] and Senegali. In consequence I was sent back to Wünsdorf Zossen."<sup>52</sup>

And Joseph Faithful said on the basis of what other lascars told him: "Many [prisoners] were sent back for punishment for refusing to work in the munition factory at Grossenbaum."<sup>53</sup> Generally, the KM approached the problem of prisoners' willingness to work with the time-tested carrot-and-stick policy: regimes of incentives like extra pay for good work went hand in hand with punishment for refusal. And the 'native' intermediaries seem to have fulfilled the role of foremen for their fellow countrymen. Faithful reports that John David, who worked as an interpreter at Grossenbaum, earned, instead of the usual



150 Marks, almost 300 by way of more informal arrangements.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, Gonzague was first sent back to the Halfmoon Camp, then to Havelberg and then to the 'punishment camp' in Holzminden.

Still, the camp commander, the factory owners and the camp inspector Dr. Römer (even as late as 1917) would always insist that no Indian prisoner was ever forced to work outside the camp. Dr. Römer, in turn, relied for his information on the authorities and the interpreters he had spoken to in Wünsdorf, namely John David and another intermediary.<sup>55</sup> This claim of Dr. Römer seems to sit awkwardly with an internal report from Wünsdorf, where he is reported to have given a speech in mid-June 1917, telling the Indian civilians, who had been complaining to him, that they all had to work "no matter where".<sup>56</sup>

In another instance, Indian CPOWs were visited by a Wünsdorf official at their place of work. He told them that all prisoners had to work and that, especially given the martial law, there were severe punishments for refusing to do so (that was certainly true for the combatants). The prisoners then ventured to ask whether the local guards were allowed to beat them, and though the answer is not recorded, the question itself suggests that such things did occur with some frequency.<sup>57</sup> Notwithstanding official regulations, when ascertaining what rights the POWs could draw upon, it is important to ask what they could reasonably know and expect from their interpreters who were their only interlocutors, and what forms of redress they had otherwise.

Nevertheless, even at Grossenbaum Indian prisoners enjoyed special status. The camp commander of Zossen/Wünsdorf and the head of the "Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient" (the organisation responsible for the propaganda efforts among the colonial POW), visited the captives to settle them in, discuss their treatment, work and accommodation with the factory owner and settle certain 'disputes'. Apparently, there was an Eid [festival at the end of Ramadan] celebration for the Indians too.<sup>58</sup> The Halfmoon officials claimed that "[t]he prisoners are content with their situation there and work to the entire satisfaction of the company."<sup>59</sup>

Regarding the degree of how 'voluntary' work actually was within the ambiguous framework regarding CPOW' status, the final example we shall consider here is that of a potash salt mine at Steinförde, not far from Fürstenberg/Havel. 15 to 19 Indians were transferred here "with their consent to work underground."<sup>60</sup> To volunteer for work in a



mining company would be somewhat surprising. Mining work, one of the big employers during the war, was generally abhorred by the POWs (Oltmer 2006:81-82; Davis 1977: 629) – so much so that special agreements were implemented in early 1917 to stop the forcible employment of ‘intellectuals’ underground.<sup>61</sup>

Joseph Faithful was among the Indians employed here. His is one of the longest repatriation statements, not least because officials considered using it as evidence of forced labour and other German infringements on the laws of war for an enquiry committee with an eye to holding post-war trials. The dispute became the topic of an official exchange of letters (Roy 2011). Faithful worked at Steinförde between December 1917 and March 1919. According to him, the POWs were put in barracks on the factory grounds set apart by barbed wire – an arrangement typical for combatant POWs (Rawe 2005: 96-117). He claimed that “everybody was forced” to work here. The factory owner and the head of the local police claimed that it would have been “absolutely impossible” to employ the Indians against their will. They said Faithful had actually lived in the city, not on the factory grounds and there was no strict surveillance in place. Besides, none of the prisoners had ever complained, they had worked willingly even if they could not do their work very well.<sup>62</sup> William-Gonzague stated that the Indians at Grossenbaum “lived in the manufactory [sic] itself in barracks. We were not allowed out in the town at night but were allowed out during the day.”<sup>63</sup>

81

Faithful paints a dire picture of work conditions at Steinförde: longer hours for POWs than those of German workers, intense heat and related maladies, heavy work underground and compulsory double shifts if the quota was not met. He also claimed that the sentries beat the prisoners with bayonets and sticks. The only reason the prisoners did not complain was that they could not make themselves understood. The POWs did their work badly “not from inability but purposely from unwillingness to work well”.<sup>64</sup> Beyond providing another contrasting example about the varying conditions in different places, Faithful’s statement is interesting for its rhetoric and the related problem of reading these sources. He was careful to emphasise the abiding loyalty of the Indians, adding that they always knew “they would win the war”.

A German-British dispute arose around the question of the forcible employment of POWs after the armistice, and Faithful was for some time considered as a potential witness and victim of such practices. Faithful claimed that the prisoners at Steinförde had not been informed



of the armistice and were made to continue work well into December. In the original intelligence report on Faithful noted down in Cologne as a matter of routine, there is no reference to the sensitive topic of forced labour:

Faithful was interrogated today ... [in 1914] Faithful was arrested and interned with the other Britishers on board and was kept in various camps until December 1918 when he was released at Steinforde (Landkreiscelle) [sic] near Hannover *and found temporary employment there.*

... He states that attempts were made by the Germans to influence him politically. *He appears to have remained, however, an entirely loyal British subject, and was only prevented from leaving with his countrymen owing to his being ill at the time they were repatriated.*<sup>65</sup>

The first explicit mentioning of forced labour is to be found in the long interview with Faithful on 9th May 1919 after being repatriated to England.<sup>66</sup> It remains an open question whether the later insertion regarding forced work was due to the formulaic brevity of the interviews, or because Faithful did not have the vocabulary at that time. Or whether he even altered his interpretation or the facts of the case later. At any rate, the CPOWs' ambiguous status here became a potential topic for official international reprimands and trial.

82

Faithful also stated that the soldiers simply had not been informed of the armistice, which, if accurate, would point to a remarkable level of segregation in their case. From other reports, we know that shortly after the armistice, 'masses of prisoners' rushed back from their rural labour corps to the 'Stammlager' and "demanded to be set free immediately". Scenes of near-revolt occurred in several camps,<sup>67</sup> and sometimes the 'soldiers councils' (*Soldatenräte*) that were in charge of the camps after the German revolution shot prisoners they thought would soon attack them, as happened in one camp where POWs broke down a theatre barrack to use the wood for heating.<sup>68</sup> In other incidents, POWs left the camps without authorisation and supposedly created havoc in the cities to which the local population reacted with what the 'Kommission Schücking', which was essentially set up to forestall British endeavours to set up a commissions looking into human rights violation by the Germans, described as 'emergency force'.<sup>69</sup>

Faithful's case gets even more complicated, though. He said he had contracted "the Grippe" (the Spanish flu) and was made to work off



the accruing debts for lodgings etcetera before being able to leave the factory.<sup>70</sup> Was Faithful a POW or a civilian worker with a contract that he had (voluntarily) accepted? British and German officials had very different views on this subject. For Faithful, this meant that he could stay in England and, with a small stipend, pursue an education as he had set out to do at the beginning of the war, while the question of whether he would be called up to testify before an official British commission was being considered.<sup>71</sup> In the end, the commission did not use Faithful's testimony. Maybe they lost interest, could not come up with sufficient circumstantial evidence, or found that the accusations against Faithful by some of his former fellow prisoners might prove problematic. At any rate, while the bureaucracy was still pondering their course of action, Faithful succeeded in completing a telegraphy course,<sup>72</sup> and in March 1921, he obtained a position as general service clerk with the Indo-European Telegraph Department back in India.<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This article has sought to shed light on the microcosm of the camps and workplace as enclaves of social life of civilian South Asians in First World War Germany by tracing a small group of Indians who have left a paper trail that can be followed up to a point. Their reactions to material pressures and pressures to conform have been highlighted. In the little space to manoeuvre open to prisoners we can see how terms like 'collaboration' and 'resistance' become fluid. The prisoners had to move in the in-between spaces open to them. What makes the scenario so complicated (and the paper trail accordingly convoluted) are the variety of contested spheres and actors: from British and German propaganda efforts; the unclear role of Dr. Römer as camp inspector; German employers and their need to extract labour; the German War Ministry ruling over the camps; and the prisoners attempting to navigate the scenarios they encountered in the various camps.

Following the jigsaw puzzle of contested narratives in different archives, we encounter a set of people who do not write (or at least do not publish) articulate memoirs about their war experiences, and hardly ever get written about. The sources for these voices are contradictory, refracted, heavily mediated, censored, and most often only fragments, the context of which often cannot be reconstructed in its entirety. We encounter these prisoners when they complain about



their interpreters, food shortages or the cold, when they write petition letters to get additional tobacco, or contest the stories of others. It is only in these disputed moments that we can get a glimpse of their lives. From this overview, we can gather information about the interplay of official propaganda, local conditions and international regulations, all of which shaped the room for prisoners to manoeuvre their lives in captivity. Despite their difficult lot, we have also seen examples of how they skilfully navigated the plethora of regimes, regulations and circumstances of this contested environment. It gives a rare insight into some of the conceptions 'ordinary' Indians had of the colonial regime, foreign states and cultures, and contemporaneous stereotypes they knew existed about themselves.

Whether prisoners appealed to British authorities as if to a benevolent patriarchal figure in their 'Bettelbriefe', singled out 'sedition-mongers' in their own ranks to make them appear as isolated cases, or sought ways to deflect suspicion of collaboration after the war, prisoners experienced a semantic confinement which followed their actual captivity and rendered their experiences impossible to articulate. The war-time censorship of letters, and the restrictions of imprisonment was thus succeeded by a post-war regime that was concerned with deconstructing degrees of loyalty, disloyalty and potential for insurgency. The best expression of the problematic position of former German prisoners can, perhaps, be found in Mulk Raj Anand's novels. Anand was himself from a military family, and had already written the story of a soldier being thrown into the Great War when he produced a sequel, 'The Sword and the Sickle' in which the (anti-)hero returns to his native village in the Punjab after having been captured and, his superiors suspect, indoctrinated by the Germans.

Nilly-willy he becomes an organiser of local agrarian protests only to wind up with a motley gang of 'communist' rebels and terrorists. Predictably, the story does not end well. But it does sound plausible given the authors' insight and accurate information including the names of Indian propagandists and German camps which suggests that Anand had interactions with returned soldiers or at least the tales about them (Anand 1942). The story seems like a dramatised blueprint for a handful of stories regarding the problematic return of soldiers to British-India that we can actually glean from a few files and references in books and articles that exist (Amin 1995: 38-40; Kumar, 1984: 165 ff.).<sup>74</sup> More research on the actual post-war environment and continuities in terms of culture and prevalent themes would surely be worthwhile.




---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article is an edited and abridged version of an earlier piece that appeared as 'South Asian Civilian Prisoners of War in First World War Germany' in Franziska Roy, Heike Libeau and Ravi Ahuja (eds), *When the War began We Heard of Several Kings*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011, pp. 53-93.

<sup>2</sup> See for lists of lascars: National Archives, London [henceforth NAUK], Foreign Office [FO] 383/417, file 110553; and the list with more than 347 lascars known to be POWs from Parchim, Güstrow and Wünsdorf in mid-1917, in: India Office Records, British Library, London [henceforth IOR] L/MIL/7/18547. The IIC estimated more than 600 lascars outside of Wünsdorf in November 1917, see Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes [PAAA], R21262, f. 134. For an overall number of Indian civilians (at this stage mostly lascars) see the list from Wünsdorf giving 830 Indians in its report of 1 April 1918: PAAA, R21262, f. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Max von Oppenheim, advising the German Foreign office, developed this strategy to 'revolutionise the Islamic areas'. On the idea of an army of deserters see also: Max von Oppenheim, telegram to HQ, ? Nov. 1914, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin [PAAA], R.21244-1, f. 24; and idem, letter dt. 25 Nov. 1914, PAAA, R.21244-1, f. 28.

<sup>4</sup> NAUK FO 383/62, file 56717, also NAUK FO 383/ 62, file 76795, 12.06.1915.

<sup>5</sup> Statement of Joseph Faithful, in: BL, IOR/L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>6</sup> NAUK, FO 383/417, file 110553; IOR/L/MIL/7/18547, L/MIL/7/18733, No. 425, file 1492; L/MIL/7/18574, file 425/ 1376.

<sup>7</sup> 'Note on Interview with repatriated Indian Prisoners of War at the Strangers' Home for Asiatics, West India Dock Road, on the 19th April 1918'; Board of Trade to POW Dept, 06.05.1918 in: NAUK, FO 383/390, file 80717.

<sup>8</sup> Note on Interview with repatriated Indian Prisoners of War at the Strangers' Home for Asiatics, in: FO 383/390 file 80717.

<sup>9</sup> Sworn Statement of Joseph Faithful: BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>10</sup> All quotes from: Sworn Statement of Frank Williams-Gonzague, in: BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276, M54153, 1918, dt. 6.12.1918.

<sup>11</sup> PAAA, R 21260, f. 193, 199, 237. For Indian POWs being lent to a filming company, see R21262, f. 29.

<sup>12</sup> PAAA, R21262, f. 52 f.

<sup>13</sup> PAAA, R21261, f. 96-7. Suba Sing Gurung, FO 383/390 file 63826; Letter of Wylie, NAUK, FO 383/417, file 98725, R21258, f. 83-4; NAUK, FO 383/191 files 101065, 108458, 112639, 131613, 136777 and 143811 (for the year 1916) and NAUK, FO 383/ 387, file 203 (for 1918).

<sup>14</sup> Sworn Statement of Subadar-Major Sher Singh Rana: BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18480.

<sup>15</sup> Sworn Statement of Suba Sing Gurung: NAUK, FO 383/390, file 63826.

<sup>16</sup> KM, UK, No. 2296/4.16. U.K., 25.4.1916 in: GStAPK, I HA Rep 87B, No. 16099, f.137. See on the importance of trusted people for 'Aufklärungsarbeit' on labour corps: PAAA,R21262, f. 87 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Faithful: BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/1726.

<sup>18</sup> 'Note on Interview with repatriated Indian Prisoners of War at the Strangers' Home for Asiatics, West India Dock Road, on the 19 Apr. 1918'; Board of Trade to POW Dept, 06.05.1918 in: FO 383/390 file 80717.

<sup>19</sup> Indian Independence Committee to Wesendonk, Legationssekretär AA, 26 Nov., 1917: PAAA, R21262, II, folio 134. (My emphasis).



<sup>20</sup> Extract from Note on Interview with repatriated Indian Prisoners of War, dt. 14 Jan., 1919, in: 'Case of Joseph Faithful, p/w in Germany', BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18795, file 1552, no ff nos.

<sup>21</sup> Report concerning the statement of Michel Rosen; British Consulate General, Rotterdam to Arthur Balfour, FO, 2 July 1917, in: NAUK, FO 383/306, file 135699.

<sup>22</sup> Statement made by Faithful, untitled note, s.l., s.a., in: BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18795, file 1552, no ff. nos.

<sup>23</sup> NAI, Home Departmental Proceedings, War, March 1920, 303-309 B: Question of recovery of an advance of £ 63.10.6 from Ghulam Ali Rangoonwala and N. A. Desai, two repatriated prisoners of war, Asst. Secretary, Military Dept, India Office, to Secretary to GOI, Finance Dept., 12 April 1919 and Asst. Secretary, Home Dept. GOI, War Branch, to Secretary of State for India, 26 March 1920. I am indebted to Ravi Ahuja for sharing this source with me.

<sup>24</sup> Confidential Note by the Circle Police Inspector of Bulsar, Surat district, No. 57, dt. 4 Sept. 1916, Bulsar, in: 'Relief of Indians interned in Germany (Havelberg camp) during the war; emergency passport applications', BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18715, Collection 425/1474; and Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Bombay Presidency, to Secretary of Government, Special Department, dt. 10 Dec. 1909, in: NAUK, FO 383/166, file 241744, Nov. 1916.

<sup>25</sup> Confidential Note by the Circle Police Inspector of Bulsar, Surat district, No. 57, dt. 4 Sept., 1916, Bulsar, BL, IOR, IOR/L/MIL/7/18715, Collection 425/1474.

<sup>26</sup> Official Note titled 'Khandoo Ambelal Desai', J&P 2724, 07.06.1916, BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18715, Collection 425/1474.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Sworn Statement of Faithful, in: BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>29</sup> Camp report on Havelberg by Dr. Römer, 16 Aug. 1917 in: PW Dept., NAUK, FO 383/306, file 175002, Sept. 1917.

<sup>30</sup> NAUK, FO 383/306, file 146424.

<sup>31</sup> Golam Ali Rangoonwala to Ambassador of the Netherlands, 10 Sept. 1917, in: NAUK, FO 383/306, file 229707.

<sup>32</sup> Camp Report on Parchim, May 1918, NAUK, FO 383/390, file 76595.

<sup>33</sup> Sworn Statement of Faithful, BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>34</sup> Sworn Statement Williams-Gonzague: BL, IOR/L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>35</sup> Letter, dt. London, 27-1-18, BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18733, No. 425, file 1492, no ff. nos.

<sup>36</sup> Earl Curzon of Kedleston, House of Lords, 18.5.1915, BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>37</sup> Generalstab Politik [GenSt/Pol] to AA, and KM/UK, 21.1.1915, PAAA, R21253, ff. 239-241. See also on the fear of propaganda by parcels: PAAA, R21258, f. 326.

<sup>38</sup> Secy to GOI (Army Dept) to military Secy, IO, 19.01.1916, BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/17277.

<sup>39</sup> Sworn Statement of Faithful, BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>40</sup> See Statement of retired Lance Naik Rajwali Khan, in: National Archives of India [NAI], Home Political, KW II to 9/V of 1932. For a similar statement about seditious Bengalis see also the sworn Statement of Suba Sing Gurung: NAUK, FO 383/390, file 63826.

<sup>41</sup> Mohammed Hossin, "Geschichte von der Möwe, Teil II." recorded in Wünsdorf on February 7, 1918 (PK 1151). PAAA, R21261-I, ff. 7, 27 and R21261-II, f. 172.





<sup>42</sup> The various model contracts and orders for labour corps can be found in Geheimes Staatsarchiv – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin [GStPK], I HA Rep 87B, Nos 16098–16099. Things are more complicated than this, however, since war-time Germany had replaced much of its civil administration by a military administration, giving the acting generals of the military districts great power to be wielded at their discretion.

<sup>43</sup> PAAA, R 21250, esp. ff. 161, 223.

<sup>44</sup> See esp. articles 4, 6, 7, 17 of HLKO 1907, chap. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Art. 6 of 'Abkommen betreffend die Gesetze und Gebräuche des Landkriegs, Vom 18. Oktober 1907', in Reichsgesetzblatt No. 2 from 1910, No. 3705: GStPK, I HA Rep 90 A, No. 2688.

<sup>46</sup> K.M. 15.IV.15 No. 700/4.15.U.K., cited in: Kommission Schücking, 'Grundsätze des Kriegsministeriums ... bei Arbeitsverweigerung', PAAA, R 24336 (emphasis mine).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. order of K.M. 30 September 1915, No. 109/15 g.U.K, cited in: PAAA, R 24336.

<sup>48</sup> By July 1917, more than 130 lascars had been brought to Grossenbaum, cf. PAAA, R21262, f. 83, also PAAA, R21261, f. 97; and report by Dr. Römer stating that 148 lascars had been transported there: report on camp inspection, 14 July 1917, NAUK, FO 383/288, file 168242. See also Sworn Statement of William Stevenson, NAUK, FO 383/417, file 112503. A list showing the names of 110 Indian civilians employed at Grossenbaum can be found in: NAUK, FO 383/306 file 184951. See also PAAA, R21262-II, f. 134. Regarding the internment on the factory grounds and British combatants employed there, cf. report by Dr. Römer, NAUK, FO 383/288, file 168242.

<sup>49</sup> This is repeatedly emphasised in the official correspondence, see for instance: NAUK, FO 383/524, file 5207(306).

<sup>50</sup> Report concerning the statement of Michel Rosen, British Consulate General, Rotterdam to Arthur Balfour, FO, 02 July 1917, NAUK, FO 383/306, file 135699.

<sup>51</sup> Statement Michel Rosen, NAUK, FO 383/306, file 135699.

<sup>52</sup> Sworn Statement of Frank Williams-Gonzague, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>53</sup> Sworn Statement of Faithful, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>54</sup> Sworn Statement of Faithful, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>55</sup> Dr. Römer's report on Wünsdorf, Aug. 1917, NAUK, FO 383/288, file 168242.

<sup>56</sup> Camp report, 15 June 1917, PAAA, R21262, f. 29.

<sup>57</sup> See the report on a visit paid by Oberstleutnant Wetzel to Muslim prisoners [Afridis] employed in Cadinen 01 July 1917, PAAA, R21262, f. 58-60. Officially, guards were not allowed to beat prisoners, see: K.M. from .4 June 1915 (No. 1615/2.15. U3.), PAAA, R 24336. See also Art. 4 and 8 of the HLKO.

<sup>58</sup> Eid refers to the Muslim festival of breaking the fast at the end of Ramadan. Cf. Camp report Halfmoon camp, 01 January 1918, PAAA, R21262, f. 143.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 143-4.

<sup>60</sup> Camp Report, Halfmoon Camp, 01 January 1918, PAAA, R21262, f. 144. The number of Indian CPOW here varies in the files relating to it. Cf. IOR/L/MIL/7/18795. The list from the potash works states 19 people, the local police registered only 15. Cf. NAUK, FO 383/524, file 6713 (317).

<sup>61</sup> Defined here as people whose 'major work' was of an intellectual nature. See PAAA, R24353 (no folio nos). Cf. papers on the agreement between Germany and France, in: Kommission Schücking, Arbeit der Intellektuellen, PAAA, R24353.

<sup>62</sup> NAUK, FO 383/524, file 6713 (317).



<sup>63</sup> Sworn Statement of Williams-Gonzague, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Intelligence Office, Cologne (British Rhine Army), 14.4.1919, BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18795, file 1552, no ff. nos. (My emphasis).

<sup>66</sup> Untitled note, s.l, s.a., ibid.

<sup>67</sup> For Mannheim, see PAAA, R2439, f. 38; for Sagan: PAAA, R24390 ff. 34f.; for Langensalza: PAAA, R24357.

<sup>68</sup> For the order of the KM stating that all forms of mutiny had to be suppressed by force immediately, see K.M. 20.V.1917 No. 406/17 g. U3, PAAA, R24336 (no ff nos.).

<sup>69</sup> PAAA, R24390, ff. 35-36, 39.

<sup>70</sup> Sworn Statement of Joseph Faithful, IOR, L/MIL/7/17276 [pp. 6-7].

<sup>71</sup> Cf. IOR, L/MIL/7/18795, file 1552; and 'Faithful, Joseph Alexander General Service Clerk, Indo-European Telegraph Department Secretary of State', IOR, L/F/8/20/1612.

<sup>72</sup> BL, IOR, L/MIL/7/18795, file 1552.

<sup>73</sup> Faithful, Joseph Alexander General Service Clerk, Indo-European Telegraph Department Secretary of State', BL, IOR, L/F/8/20/1612.

<sup>74</sup> See the ex-sepoy Brijpal Singh and the Karhaiya Riot of 1921 in: Telegram from Chief Secy to Govt. of UP to Secy to GOI (Home Department), 22 March 1921, in NAI, Home Political A, F. Nos. 335-339, March 1921. Brijpal, a soldier with a good record, was one of the leaders in the riots and the Government saw itself forced to lessen the sentences for all the other people involved as they could not sentence a sepoy to death under the prevailing circumstances. He is also mentioned in Kumar 1984. I thank Ravi Ahuja for sharing this file with me.

## Bibliography

Ahuja, Ravi. 2006. Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c. 1900–1960. *International Review of Social History*, 51 (S14), pp. 111-41.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2008. Networks of Subordination – Networks of the Subordinated. The Case of South Asian Maritime Labour under British Imperialism (c. 1890-1947). In: Harald Fischer-Tiné & Ashwini Tambe, eds. *Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region*. London: Routledge, pp. 13-48.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2011. Lost Engagements? Traces of South Asian Soldiers in German Captivity, 1915-191. In: Franziska Roy et al. *When the War Began*. Delhi: Social Science Press, pp. 17-56.

Aksakal, Mustafa. 2008. *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914. The Ottoman Empire and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Amin, Shahid. 1987. Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura. In: Ranajit Guha, ed. *Subaltern Studies V*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 166-202.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. *Event, Metaphor, Memory, Chauri Chaura 1922-1992*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Anand, Mulk Raj. 1942. *The Sword and the Sickle*. London: J. Cape.
- Balachandran, Gopalan. 1996. Searching for the Sardar, The State, Pre-capitalist Institutions, and human Agency in the Maritime Labour Market, Calcutta, 1880 -1935. In: Sanjay Subrahmanyam & Burton Stein, eds. *Institutions and Social Change in South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 206-36.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. Cultures of Protest in Transnational Contexts: Indian Seamen Abroad, 1886-1945. *Transforming Cultures eJournal*, 3 (2), pp. 45-75.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012. *Globalizing Labour: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870-1945*. Oxford et al: Oxford University Press.
- Barooah, Nirode Kumar. 1977. *India and the Official Germany 1886-1914*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- 89  
Berner, Margrit. 2003. Die "rassenkundlichen" Untersuchungen der Wiener Anthropologen in Kriegsgefangenenlagern 1915-1918. *Zeitgeschichte*, 30, pp. 124-36.
- Davis, Gerald H. 1977. Prisoners of War in Twentieth-Century War Economics. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (4), pp. 623-34.
- Gerard, James W. 1917. *My Four Years in Germany*. New York: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Heine, Peter. 1980. Al-Ğihād' – eine deutsche Propagandazeitung im 1. Weltkrieg. *Welt des Islam*, 20 (3-4), pp. 197-9.
- Höpp, Gerhard. 1997. *Muslimen in der Mark: als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen, 1914-1924*. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch.
- Jones, Heather. 2011. *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France, and Germany, 1914-1920*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Koller, Christian. 2001. 'Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt'. *Die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik (1914-1930)*. Stuttgart: Steiner.



- Koselleck, Reinhart. 1992. Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege auf das soziale Bewußtsein. In: Wolfram Wette, ed. *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: eine Militärgeschichte von unten*. München: Piper Verlag, pp. 324-43.
- Kumar, Kapil. 1984. *Peasants in Revolt. Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886-1922*. Delhi: Manohar.
- Küttner, Sybille. 2000. *Farbige Seeleute im Kaiserreich: Asiaten und Afrikaner im Dienst der deutschen Handelsmarine*. Erfurt: Sutton.
- Lange, Britta. 2006. *Ein Archiv von Stimmen. Kriegsgefangene unter ethnografischer Betrachtung* (Preprint 321). Berlin: Max Planck Institut für Wissenschaft.
- Lee, Richard. 1917. *In Ruhleben. Letters from a Prisoner to his Mother. With an account of the 'university' life, classes, sports, food, accommodation, etc, of the internment camp of British prisoners*. London: Hurst and Blackett.
- Liebau, Heike. 2011. The German Foreign Office, Indian Emigrants and Propaganda Efforts Among the 'Sepoys'. In: Franziska Roy et al., eds. *When the War Began*. New Delhi: Social Science Press, pp. 96-129.
- Markovits, Claude. 2010. Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the rear of the front. In Liebau, Heike, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah & Ahuja Ravi. eds. *The World in World Wars. Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 29-54.
- Oesterheld, Frank. 2004. *"Der Feind meines Feindes ist mein Freund" - Zur Tätigkeit des Indian Independence Committee (IIC) während des Ersten Weltkrieges in Berlin*. Unpublished Thesis, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin.
- Oesterheld, Joachim. 1996. Zum Spektrum der indischen Präsenz in Deutschland von Beginn bis Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts. In: Gerhard Höpp, ed. *Fremde Erfahrungen - Asiaten und Afrikaner in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Schweiz bis 1945*. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, pp. 331-46.
- Oltmer, Jochen. 2006. Kriegsgefangene in Deutschland 1914-1918. In idem, ed. *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkrieges*. Paderborn: Schöningh.



- Poeppinghege, Rainer. 2006. *Im Lager unbesiegt. Deutsche, englische und französische Kriegsgefangenenzeitungen im Ersten Weltkrieg*. Essen: Klartext.
- Powell, Joseph and Francis Gribble. 1919. *The History of Ruhleben. A Record of British Organisation in a Prison Camp in Germany*. London: Collins.
- Pyke, Geoffrey. 1916. *To Ruhleben-and Back*. London: Constable & Co.
- Rawe, Kai. 2005. "...wir werden sie schon zur Arbeit bringen!": *Ausländerbeschäftigung und Zwangsarbeit im Ruhrkohlenbergbau während des Ersten Weltkrieges*. Essen: Klartext.
- Reimann, Aribert. 1997. *Die heile Welt im Stahlgewitter*. In: Gerhard Hirschfeld et al., eds. *Kriegserfahrungen. Studien zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*. Essen: Klartext, pp. 129-45.
- Roy, Franziska, Heike Liebau & Ravi Ahuja, eds. 2011. *When the War began We Heard of Several Kings*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Rübner, Hartmut. 2004. "Ausländer nach Möglichkeit sofort ausmerzen" - Konflikte um die Beschäftigung chinesischer und indischer Seeleute vom Kaiserreich bis in den NS-Staat. In: Peter Kuckuk, ed. *Passagen nach Fernost. Menschen zwischen Bremen und Ostasien*. Bremen: Ed. Temmen, pp. 62-117.
- Siddiqi, Majid. 2005. *The British Historical Context and Petitioning in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Aakar Books.
- Stibbe, Matthew. 2005. A Question of Retaliation? The Internment of British Civilians in Germany in November 1914. *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23 (1), pp. 1-29.
- Thomas, Cecil, with a foreword by Lord Birdwood. 1939. *They also served*. London: Hurst & Blackett.
- Vertovec, Steven & Robin Cohen. 2008. Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism. In: idem, eds. *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism, Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-22.