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# 1

## Introduction

### Colonial Situations and Sonic Events

*German Colonialism. Fragments Past and Present*—this was the title of a temporary special exhibition at the German Historical Museum in Berlin, which opened in October 2016.<sup>1</sup> At the time, an exhibition dedicated to Germany's colonial past and its legacies was a project long overdue at a major German institution. At the same time, it was a project destined to disappoint the high expectations of many postcolonial scholars and activists who had been dealing with colonial pasts and presents for years and decades. In spite of all criticism—sometimes more, sometimes less justified—, the exhibition and the negotiations surrounding it have decidedly influenced a growing debate on colonial entanglements among the German public.

In my role as an external research assistant, I was involved in the archival research for the exhibition. Based on my previous work, I was asked to compile a list of topics and objects to be incorporated in a display on colonial sound recordings. I believed that the inclusion of historical sound recordings was an enriching addition to the exhibition for addressing discourses on colonial knowledge production. But I was also hesitant to contribute to an exhibition project that I knew had major flaws in terms of its conceptual and institutional framing. This structural and inner conflict remained a close companion throughout both the preparation and duration of the exhibition and my ensuing research project, which forms the basis for this book. Often, I have felt torn between my commitment to historical research, analysis, and critique within an institutional setting and the awareness that much more radical and insistent measures are needed to work through and transcend colonial thinking. At the exhibition opening, I was *inside* the museum and it was my perception that there were both inspiring talks but also rather reactionary welcome speeches. A close colleague of mine remained *outside* the building, joining a small protest in

front of the museum entrance. As postulated for years, the protest demanded an official apology from the German government for the Herero and Nama genocide in present-day Namibia between 1904 and 1908. The protest also criticised the museum's failure to provide better conditions for the inclusion of more Black and activist voices in the exhibition's earliest curatorial concept. The slogan 'not about us without us' of the protesters gathered at the entrance served as a gateway, literally and figuratively—one that every invited guest had to walk through when entering the museum.

Although the exhibition did address current postcolonial struggles and included at least some decolonial initiatives, this was not its main focus, but rather appeared as an afterthought. At the core of the exhibition stood the curators' aim to display objects derived from the colonial archive as testimonies of colonial situations. In this way, they sought to negotiate German colonialism as a violent system of domination, legitimised by a racist ideology of European superiority, while at the same time producing intersecting experiences and relations of power. For the curators, the point of departure was the understanding of the colonial archive as determined by the Eurocentric and colonial gaze, but—as the exhibition wished to demonstrate—also full of ruptures and contradictions (Hartmann 2018: 49).

In this book, I follow the curators' approach of trying to productively link object histories to globally entangled colonial histories. Bringing together macro and micro levels in global history, as the historians Rebekka Habermas and Susanna Burghartz (2017: 306) argue, allows for questioning static spatial concepts and problematic epistemic orders. Looking at object histories as the physical traces of colonial situations offers the possibility to analyse the enduring coloniality of power inherent in colonial practices and hegemonic legacies. Moving beyond global and object histories, this book also deals with more intangible histories, that is, acoustic histories. Those histories derive from the sound archive of the Humboldt University—now known as the *Lautarchiv*. The core of the archive consists of an extensive collection of shellac records, compiled for scientific purposes by German scholars between 1909 and 1944. The content of the sound recordings ranges from short stories and songs, poems and personal testimonies to standard texts and phrases, lists of words and numbers.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of this study is on the archive's holdings whose production was underwritten by colonial arrangements in the metropolis of Berlin. This book therefore proposes to conceptualise the *Lautarchiv* as a colonial archive, consisting of sound objects generated 'at home,' in the heart of the metropolis, under colonial signs. In this sense, I wish to understand the *Lautarchiv* as a colonial

project involving the production, practice, and preservation of specific structures of power and knowledge which have, in part, survived to the present day.

The central concern of this book revolves around the question of how to deal with the *Lautarchiv's* sonic material that is at once project, product, and testimony of a colonial regime of power and knowledge. How to deal with archival material in which the ambivalence of colonial discourses and the tensions between coloniser and colonised, metropolis and periphery manifest themselves in a unique way. How to deal with the legitimising strategies that constitute the colonial archive, its racist ideology of European superiority, but also its imbalances and ambivalences, its silences and voids. How to deal with the marginalised traces of colonial presences that have found little or no place in established national narratives and collective memories. In other words, how to deal with the *absent presences in the colonial archive*.

This book examines colonial situations through single sound events preserved as historical sound objects. The archival objects indicate institutional, disciplinary, and personal histories; and they attest to colonial knowledge production. They point to narratives embedded in larger histories of media, science, and the project of Europe. As the visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards pointed out in relation to colonial photography, photographic images are “visual incisions through time and space” (2001: 3) that constitute ‘little’ narratives. Yet, for Edwards, these ‘little’ narratives are simultaneously “constituted by and [...] constitutive of the ‘grand’, or at least ‘larger’, narratives” (3). This study seeks to augment Edwards’ position with colonial sound recordings. According to sound scholar Jonathan Sterne, historical sound recordings “are the result of one particular moment in a much larger and unequal sphere of cultural interchange” (2003: 331). “Recording is a form of exteriority,” he writes: “it does not preserve a preexisting sonic event as it happens so much as it creates and organizes sonic events for the possibility of preservation and repetition. Recording is, therefore, discontinuous with the ‘live’ events that it is sometimes said to represent” (332). This discontinuity becomes manifest in the changing social presence (or absence) ascribed to the *Lautarchiv's* historical sound recordings in the course of time. Initially recorded for linguistic, musicological, and anthropological purposes and archived for an anticipated future, the sound recordings now bear witness to a colonial knowledge system and colonial subjects often silenced in the grand narrative. Notions of exteriority and discontinuity reveal the complex condition of colonial sound recordings. Their contents cannot be separated from the situations in which they were produced—from the practices of recording and preserving underlying the creation

and organisation of sonic events. I therefore agree with Anette Hoffmann and Phindezwa Mnyaka (2015: 6), who argued that it is not possible to engage with and listen to the recordings outside the colonial situation.

## Neither a Media History nor an Institutional History

This book is not a media history of the scientific use and implementation of early sound technology in Germany. Nor is it an encompassing institutional history of the *Lautarchiv*. Rather, it is a historical ethnography of constitutive moments of a metropolitan, colonial archive and its guiding concepts and aspirations. By considering sound objects, each dating from a different time and context, this study addresses the desideratum of a transversal investigation of the *Lautarchiv's* diverse colonial collections. It sheds light on the entanglements, conflicts, and relationships that come to the fore in the little narratives emerging in and through the colonial archive. I argue that taking a closer look at sonic events allows us to recognise the fragility and ambiguity of seemingly fixed and naturalised dichotomies of coloniser and colonised, materiality and ephemerality, the dominant and the minor. Moreover, this book seeks to engage with Germany's colonial past as not taking place only on formal colonial territory; nor as ending after the First World War in 1918 and with the Treaty of Versailles, concluded in 1919. Colonial ambitions, desires, and imperatives found expression in different ways and in different contexts. They triggered a multitude of reactions, resistances, and affirmations and brought about other hegemonies beyond the opposition between coloniser and colonised (Herzfeld 2002: 922–923). The recordings of colonial subjects recorded in or near the metropolis of Berlin are just one form among many in which complex colonial entanglements materialise. In contrast to other sources, the sound recordings of the *Lautarchiv*, however, have survived astonishingly well in the shadows of the colonial archive.

The range of approaches to different historical sound recordings that underpin this book draw on and add to important past and ongoing research on colonial legacies. This study addresses both conceptual and methodological questions relevant to strands in cultural anthropology as well as cultural theory and history. My research follows and contributes to research agendas concerned with the relation between memory and media; with historical ethnographies of

colonial knowledge production and the making of historical archives; and with questions of agency and institutional practices.<sup>3</sup>

## Absent Presences

*The absence [...], although [...] final in the physical sense, can be transformed into a 'meta-physical' or media-based presence.*

(Balke 2009: 74)<sup>4</sup>

In a physical sense, the absence of the speakers and singers in the *Lautarchiv's* sound recordings is final—they are dead, their bodies no longer exist. According to media scholar Friedrich Balke, however, in a meta-physical sense, their absence has been transformed into a sonic or medial presence. If not the presence of their voice, it is this medial presence that extends to find expression in my writing—on the pages of this book.

My ethnographic interest lies in presences hitherto marginalised in established historical narratives. What I am particularly concerned with is the constitutive character of these marginalised presences, which is precisely defined by their absence or omission in collective, or rather selective, memories. For Stoler, the “‘present-absence’ is not so much a contradiction as a marker of the phenomenon itself” (2002a: 158). It is a characteristic feature of the colonial archive and the production of history and cultural memory, determined by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Rebekka Habermas (2017: 331) pleads for not thinking exclusively in terms of omissions or gaps, but for considering absence and silence as active production, an active production of ignorance. A main aim of my work is to address this imbalance; and to redress it by raising awareness of the archival presence and absence of colonial subjects, generated under colonial conditions and epistemic violence.

While physical gaps exist in the archive itself due to missing information, actual loss or damage of records, silences also appear in an epistemological sense. The scientific procedures underlying the archival project of the *Lautarchiv* intended to focus on a certain kind of knowledge and consequently deemed only certain information valuable and discursively knowable. Likewise, the archival process considered only certain contents as “qualified knowledge” (Foucault

1978: 60) and “archivable material” (Mbembe 2002: 20). Contemporary politics of history and memory similarly ensure that certain (often subaltern) histories remain silenced, hidden, and forgotten. These politics do not depict history as intertwined and a reciprocal process of exchange and transfer. Rather, they approach history from a Eurocentric standpoint, in order to maintain the idea of a stable and monocausal European and national identity (Habermas 2017: 346; see also Römheld 2021: 691).

The sound recordings of colonial subjects are meaningful sources that have thus far only had a minor or even absent status within contemporary German colonial historiography—even though, or maybe rather because, the *Lautarchiv*'s acoustic stories, songs, and personal testimonies can offer new narratives and alternative histories. The sound files bear witness to transnational mobilities between Europe and colonised territories up to the first half of the twentieth century. Both established historical narratives as well as collective memories in Germany show a lack of awareness of diasporic, migratory, and cosmopolitan dynamics that have shaped German society, the academy, and the economy for centuries. These dynamics are not considered an integral part of Germany's or, on a smaller scale, Berlin's history. The matter of selective historical narratives and eclectic collective memories is, however, of great concern given the *Lautarchiv*'s relocation to the contested Berlin Humboldt Forum, an architectural copy of the City Palace (*Stadtschloss*).<sup>5</sup>

Both the decision to partly reconstruct a Prussian king's castle and to realise the museum project of the Humboldt Forum have triggered intense debates within political circles as well as within German and Berlin civil society.<sup>6</sup> The resulting discourse has ensured that Germany's colonial legacies are now a distinct point of discussion not only at a political and academic level but also in public discourse and the media. While the actual construction work started in 2013, the discourse on what historical narratives the urban site does or should stand for began much earlier (Bach 2017; Binder 2009; Ha 2014).<sup>7</sup> Over the years, the Humboldt Forum has become a focal point of fierce controversy about the politics of memory and history, about competing and/or entangled historical narratives and cultures of remembrance in Germany and beyond. For some, the Humboldt Forum is a Eurocentric and reactionary project that contradicts notions of global equality and postcolonial justice (e.g. NoHumboldt21! 2017). Others hope that the project could point in the direction of a new cosmopolitan German culture of remembrance (e.g. Thiemeyer 2019). Following several delays and the setback of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Humboldt Forum celebrated its digital and subsequently its physical open-

ing in December 2020 and July 2021. The institution exhibits collections of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin and the Museum of Asian Art.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Stadtmuseum Berlin Foundation, along with Humboldt University, have their own exhibitions and project spaces. At the time I finished my research, the Humboldt Forum remained closed to visitors, but it was already known that a portrayal of the *Lautarchiv* featuring a number of acoustic and tangible objects would be included in the opening exhibition curated by the so-called Humboldt Lab. However, it was rather unclear how the archive's collections would continue to be accessible to international research communities and whether establishing collaborations with other stakeholders would be a major component of the new location.

Due to limited financial and personnel resources, the *Lautarchiv* has had a complicated status within the university over the past decades. Although large parts of the holdings were included in a digitisation project that started in 1999, the collections' accessibility always depended on temporary employment contracts and the courtesy of the respective staff. For many years, the management of the collection and research inquiries was largely left to student assistants, which, if one is looking for a silver lining, at least meant that the archive never had to close.<sup>9</sup> The increased attention prompted as a corollary of the Humboldt Forum project raised hopes that the call for lasting ethical care and a sustainable future for the archive's holdings would finally be met. So far, however, it seems that the authorities in charge have hardly been able to satisfy any of the desired commitments.

## Un/linear Historical Moments

This book rejects linear narratives; it refuses to follow only one story. It is far from a mere examination of dates and facts, as one might expect from a more conventional account of an institution's history.<sup>10</sup> It is not a history inching teleologically along historical events, leading up to the present. Rather, this book reconsiders and cross-references the *Lautarchiv's* collection history in a threefold manner: within the overarching history of science and the history of acoustics, within the wider context of the history of the university, and finally within the post/colonial history of Berlin. Seen from today's vantage point, this book brings together different archival collections from different times



and situations, and correlates them with other sources and current discourses. In other words, it approaches the *Lautarchiv* as a space in which different histories—histories of the past and the present, of here and there, absence and presence—meet and converge.

The book is particularly concerned with the period in which the medium of the shellac record was formative for the *Lautarchiv*.<sup>11</sup> Roughly divided into three institutional phases, these stages ultimately also determined the selection of the three case studies in this book. My case analyses proceed from three colonial situations in or near the metropolis of Berlin, from three globally entangled histories that manifest themselves in sound, materialise in historical sound objects, and each stand for different colonial collections of the *Lautarchiv*. The case studies involve different social spheres—military, public, and academic—but also overlap at times. In all three analyses, I contrast and correlate acoustic and previously neglected sources with other media formats and supposedly dominant forms (i.e. written and visual, *white*<sup>12</sup> and male).

The first phase relevant to this book is characterised by recording activities of the so-called Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission (*Königlich Preussische Phonographische Kommission*). Founded in late 1915, the Phonographic Commission was set up to compile sound recordings of prisoners of war (POWs) in German internment camps during the First World War. In addition to recordings produced for language learning<sup>13</sup> and a voice collection of public figures<sup>14</sup>, the set of recordings generated during the First World War is one of the oldest and most extensive archival collections of the *Lautarchiv* today. At the time, a range of well-established professors—in English, Romance, and Slavic linguistics, African and Oriental studies, musicology and anthropology—headed off to a considerable number of German POW camps throughout the German Empire. Their mission was to compile sound recordings for linguistic and phonetic, musicological and anthropological purposes. Among the soldiers and civilian internees were several people from the colonies, most of whom had either been fighting for the British and French Armies on the Western Front or had remained on German soil and waters at the beginning or during the war (e.g. Hoffmann 2014; Lange 2015a/b; Roy, Liebau, and Ahuja 2011). The Orientalists and Africanists among the Commission's members were especially interested in recording the voices of non-*white* people. For them, it meant that they did not have to travel to the 'non-European field' or colonial territories in order to explore 'their' research objects. For some of the scholars, this had been a common, but always costly and time-consuming practice. Instead, they could benefit from the state of war and the fact that numerous colonial soldiers and

civilian internees had become prisoners of war in Germany, where they would remain for what was, for them, an indefinite period.

The book's first case study, discussed in Chapter 3, revolves around a couple of sound recordings of two Indian prisoners of war, Baldeo Singh (approx. 1888–?) and Keramat Ali (approx. 1897–?). The Orientalist Helmuth von Glasenapp (1891–1863) recorded the Hindi-speaking colonial soldier Singh in a POW camp located on the outskirts of Berlin in January 1917. His superior, Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943), was in charge of recording a group of Bengali seamen, among them Ali, one year later, in February 1918.

For Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus (2015: 47), the initial collection history of the *Lautarchiv* proves to be a revealing example of research practices in the humanities and social sciences during the rule of the German Empire, and more particularly in relation to imperialism and the conditions of repressive colonial politics. The collection compiled during the First World War thus joined the endeavours of ethnographic and natural history museums in Germany and Europe as implemented during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

After the war, the Phonographic Commission was dissolved and the collection of shellac records became part of the Prussian State Library's newly founded Sound Department (*Lautabteilung*). The vision of a Sound Department formed around different collection foci already existed as a notion since before the war. The ambitious intention had been to collect (1) languages of all nations of the world, (2) all German dialects, (3) music and songs of all nations of the world, (4) voices of leading public figures, and (5) miscellaneous (Doegen 1925: 9). While the 'war recordings' formed the basis of the department's stock, one of its new aims was to systematically compile a collection of German dialects recorded in different parts of Germany and Switzerland. The making of recordings of non-German languages and non-European people lost importance but still occurred from time to time. Recordings of non-Europeans spending time in post-imperial Berlin were made for a variety of reasons. For example, non-*white* diplomats and researchers, or non-*white* artists came to the department in order to be recorded.

The second case study, discussed in Chapter 5, deals with two sound recordings of the female performers Venkatamma (approx. 1905–?) and Rajamanikkam (approx. 1901–?) from India. The sound recordings in Telugu and Tamil did not originate at the Sound Department but at a so-called *India Show* at the Berlin Zoological Garden in September 1926. The zoo, as well as many other urban 'places of amusement,' represented sites where colonial phan-

tasies were fuelled and where they resumed after the formal end of German colonialism.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the sound collections were again transferred, this time to the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin (today's *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*). Here, the archival holdings were assigned to the Institute for Sound Research (*Institut für Lautforschung*), newly founded in 1934. The Africanist Diedrich Westermann (1875–1956) became head of the department and divided the institute into three research areas, focusing on linguistics, phonetics, and music. A specialist headed each section: Westermann was in charge of the linguistics department, Franz Wethlo (1878–1960) managed the phonetics lab, and Fritz Bose (1906–1975) led the (folk) music section.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Westermann assumed responsibility for the editorship of the so-called Sound Library (*Lautbibliothek*). The Sound Library (published since 1926) consisted of records and textbooks in the form of small brochures, intended for phonetic studies and language learning. In some cases, the issues were based on sound recordings of prisoners of war recorded during the First World War. In most of the publications, however, there is no mention of the circumstances under which the recordings were made. Apparently, the inclusion of these details was not considered meaningful or necessary—a point I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 6. During Westermann's incumbency, recordings were made of so-called African language assistants teaching Swahili and Ewe, among other languages, at the Berlin University. Amongst those who attended the classes were people who sought to qualify for future colonial service, meaning for the moment when Germany would reclaim colonial territories. A recording of the language assistant Bayume Mohamed Hussein or Husen (1904–1944) dates from this period. Lending his voice, Hussein was recorded for the purpose of teaching and learning Swahili in July 1934. The joint examination of Hussein's recording together with Swahili speakers from present-day Berlin forms the basis of the last case study, discussed in Chapter 6.

After the Second World War and during the time of German partition, research foci shifted to more experimental and phonetic research. Relegated to the background of research interests, the collection of shellac records was slowly sliding into obscurity. This was due to media change and the end of the era of the shellac record, which had started to unravel in the 1940s. But it was also due to institutional and political influences, and not least to the post-war changes in the academic landscape in Berlin and Germany. In the following years and decades, the collection of shellac records moved between different departments. It was only at the beginning of the 1990s that a renewed interest

and a comprehensive indexing of the holdings began (Bayer and Mahrenholz 2000; Mehnert 1996). Digitised and made accessible online, the shellac records have ever since been subject to (historical) research on specific holdings of the *Lautarchiv*. With the growth of academic interest, so has public attention grown. In recent years, this was in large part due to the aforementioned decision that the *Lautarchiv* would be the only university collection to be moved to the Humboldt Forum.

## Sensitive Collections and Contentious Heritage

In institutions such as museums and universities, processes of dealing with Germany's colonial past and present have been described as "slow and erratic" (Fründt 2019: 138) in comparison to other former imperial powers. According to interdisciplinary anthropologist Sarah Fründt, it is only in the last decade that three important shifts shaping debates on the colonial past within German museums, as well as within political and medial discourses, can be observed. A first shift began with the process of a slowly increasing consciousness about Germany's colonial legacies and the responsibilities towards formerly colonised regions. Building on this, a nuanced understanding of colonial contexts developed. Although there is still a considerable judicial and ethical need for the resolution of formal and violent colonial crimes committed under German rule (e.g. in the case of present-day Namibia), there are also contexts that are more subtle and epistemic in nature; contexts that are still very effective today. Related to this and to Fründt's own field of expertise, a new type of contested objects emerged. These were objects related to cultural heritage and colonial knowledge production in general, and to anthropological and racial research in particular. National and international debates have influenced these developments. For the German-speaking landscape, a volume of essays on *sensitive collections* by Margit Berner, Anette Hoffmann, and Britta Lange (2011) has provided a thought-provoking impulse for the discourse.

Berner, Hoffmann, and Lange introduced the concept of sensitive collections in their engagement with practices and objects of anthropological and ethnographic research of the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. Proceeding from the guidelines formulated by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1986, which define human remains and artifacts with

a religious or spiritual meaning as sensitive material, the authors made a case for a broadening of this definition. By directing their interest to the depots of museums and scientific institutions, they focused on visualisations of anthropometric data, sound recordings and plaster casts of body parts. They not only looked at collections that have largely been excluded from historical inquiries, but argued that research should not focus solely on the physical objects and artifacts themselves. Instead, research should also consider the coherent practices and power relations involved; the processes that turned the material into epistemic objects. In doing so, they advocated a *sensitive* approach to objects and to their history of provenance, transfer, and circulation.

Often not sufficiently listed in the institutions' catalogues and inventories, sensitive collections, such as those negotiated by Berner, Hoffmann, and Lange, are less visible and accessible to the wider scientific community and the public. This is not least because plaster casts and historical sound recordings have to be stored and preserved differently. They also seemed more difficult to translate into other media and digital formats than, for instance, research data and photographic images (Lange 2011a: 37–40). Yet, over the past decades, historical sound recordings on wax cylinders or shellac records have increasingly been included in cataloguing and digitisation projects.

With the increased opening of archives and their inventories through digitisation, many institutions have undergone enormous changes in recent years and are facing ever new challenges. While these processes enable a democratisation of access to knowledge, the shift to digital archiving practices continues to affect questions of hegemonic knowledge production in and of the archive. As already mentioned, large parts of the *Lautarchiv's* sound recordings, as well as accompanying scripts, have been digitised. Searchable via a digital catalogue, the sound recordings are listed with information about the respective language, type, and date of the recording, as well as about format, length, and the name of the person recorded, among other things. Though intended to simplify the search pattern, the systematically designed categorisations of the catalogue yielded terms with pejorative and outdated connotations, as well as new exclusions and errors. Moreover, the decision over whether the sound recordings themselves ought to be published online has yet to be made. This decision touches upon ethical, cultural, and legal issues and may vary depending on the collection corpus (Hartmann, Hennig, and Lange 2015). At present, users can browse the metadata but cannot listen to nor download the sound. Only after personal or online contact with the archive's staff will users be given access to a selection of requested digital files.

In this book, I seek to discuss the *Lautarchiv's* holdings against the backdrop of discourses on collections that have been described as sensitive, but also on heritage depicted as difficult and contentious (e.g. Hamm and Schönberger 2021a; Macdonald 2009, 2021). What do the *Lautarchiv's* acoustic legacies signify today? In what way do colonial sounds from the past affect the current postcolonial situation? How does one assess sounds that may reveal more about colonial knowledge regimes and archival practices than the historical subjects recorded? How does one assess the ethical, legal, and social responsibilities of a researcher such as myself, as well as of the archive's custodians? While it may be the custodians' task to maintain and preserve the archival collections, it is also important to allow open and democratic access to the collections that prevents an exclusive power of interpretation as well as a restrictive sense of agency. What needs to happen to reconcile these two sides? What would an ethics of the *Lautarchiv* look like, as Lange (2019: 12) asks?

## European Imaginations and Archival Projects

The *Lautarchiv* with its sonic collections both meets and disturbs the master narrative of European heritage. As pointed out in a companion on contentious cultural heritage, the “classic master narrative of European heritage was built from the centre: Technical and architectural achievements found in large cities; language, knowledge and customs as signifiers of a nation; art and science as expressions of the rise of the middle class” (Hamm and Schönberger 2021b: 33). With its innovative implementation of early sound technology in the academy, its location in the imperial capital of Berlin, and its aim to document and preserve language and music as markers of cultural difference, the archival project of the *Lautarchiv* fits the above listed parameters. However, as critical Europeanisation and heritage studies seek to prove, European imaginations and hence European heritage are not as stable and static as they may seem. Regina Römhild (e.g. 2009, 2021) therefore suggests a reflexive stance towards processes of Europeanisation, the construction and reconstruction of imaginations of Europe. What defines reflexivity in this context is a “social practice of re-assessing and challenging given normalities” (Hamm and Schönberger 2021b: 33). The approach of reflexive Europeanisation allows for the contestation of naturalised ideas and concepts of Europe and the development of new European imaginations that acknowledge

the making of Europe as built on global transfer and unequal power relations. “Rather than seeing Europe – and its core identity labels of enlightenment, modernity, science, secularism etc. – as being autopoietic products of self-making,” Römhild argues, reflexive Europeanisation “aims at understanding both Europe and its intellectual, cultural and political histories as products of global entanglements” (2021: 691). Understanding the *Lautarchiv* precisely and explicitly as an intellectual, cultural, and political project, I follow the aim of making the archive’s “effective entanglements visible, approachable and reflectable” (689).

This book proceeds from an understanding of history as entanglement and histories of entanglements (Conrad and Randeria 2013 [2002]; Randeria 2019). In doing so, I seek to avoid the terminology of concepts of a shared history (and heritage), which tend to silence rather than stress the unequal relationships from which globally entangled histories result. In her account of a shared history and an entangled modernity (*Geteilte Geschichte und verwobene Moderne*), Shalini Randeria therefore highlights the connotations of shared and divided histories as expressed in the double entendre of the German verb *teilen* (1999a; see also Conrad and Randeria 2013 [2002] and Chapter 3). The sound recordings of colonial subjects made in or near Berlin are the products and physical evidence of a globalised world of (often unequal) interaction and mobility. At the same time, the making of the sound recordings relied on and reinforced the scientific and political understanding of cultural difference and European superiority. Linguistic and anthropological research of the time met the desire to provide legible and audible proof of racial categorisations.

Following the concept of entangled histories means to proceed from concrete situations and connections rather than to assume universal and trans-historical totalities. According to Conrad and Randeria (2013 [2002]: 40), it means to accept histories as fragmentary and porous rather than holistic and comprehensive. The analysis of entanglements allows for a change of perspective. It allows us to investigate moments of multidirectional exchange and relations of transfer that run transversely to dominant patterns (Bruns, Hampf, and Kämpf 2018). These dominant patterns may refer to the structures of European colonialism but also to the discursive production and order of knowledge in Western institutions. In addition, focusing on global and entangled histories offers the opportunity of a methodological change of perspective by taking into account non-Eurocentric and non-teleological analytical lenses. In this way, it becomes possible to turn away from the classic European master narrative and, instead, to get closer to the project of decentring and provincialising Europe (Adam et al. 2019a; Chakrabarty 2000; Conrad and Randeria 2013 [2002]).

## Voicing and Listening

What distinguishes this study from other analyses of colonial archives is its focus on objects of sound and practices of listening. While students of colonialism have long been concerned with voice and speech, with the question of who has a voice and who can speak, who is heard and remembered, attention has rarely been drawn to practices of listening. Hence, shifting the focus to the politics of listening means to acknowledge that it is insufficient to concentrate on the speaker and the act of speaking alone. Following Hoffmann and Mnyaka (2015: 8), this book therefore intends to revisit the colonial archive and its acoustic traces by deploying different modes of listening.

According to Jenny R. Lawy, one needs to question the focus on voice and the claim that only the speaker or singer is responsible for what is said or sung. She warns, “using presence as evidence that voice is being heard is a rather superficial measure to use” (2017: 196). How do these arguments relate to the acts of speaking and singing—the sonic events—as performed in the recording situations I have chosen to place at centre stage in this book? As indicated at the outset of this introduction, no act of speaking and singing can be divorced from the situation and context in which it was performed *and* recorded. The situations of recording created a prescribed and scripted mode of speaking, an act of speaking often practiced in advance and then repeated in front of the technical device. But not only was the speech act prescribed; so too was the mode of listening. The mode of listening, as practiced by linguists and musicologists, objectified the act of speaking and the recorded voice. Content and content producers were usually not the focus of interest. What mattered to the recordists was the phonetic quality of the voice and its exemplary nature of a specific language type. Here, Hoffmann and Mnyaka speak of an excess of meaning and information that had no significance for the listeners at the time but has nevertheless been registered in sound. It is for this reason that they suggest applying a different way of listening—“one that seeks to retrieve what the collection of and files on statement-things omit” (2015: 8). In this book, I follow their attempt to explore modes of engaging with the excess of meaning; to ask whether the acts of both speaking and listening were always as restricted and limited as the colonial setting suggests. Are there moments or forms of subversion, irritation, and fragmentation? How does one approach these glimpses? Where does one fail to reach them? Applying different modes of listening seeks to contest the prescribed mode of listening as stipulated by disciplinary and normative logics.



But what kind of listening practices enable what kind of strategies in dealing with the *Lautarchiv's* recordings today? These concerns form guiding questions for this book.

Once again, according to Lawy, “it is the ways that the audience or listener reacts to, accepts, or rejects what has been put out into the social milieu that reveals the (political/social) impact of that voice” (2017: 194). Therefore, when wishing to shed light on voicing and speaking, we must also address hearing and listening. In a similar vein, Tom Rice points out that “listening practices must be understood by reference to the broader cultural and historical context within which they are formed” (2015: 102). For Nina S. Eidsheim, a focus on perception reveals that listening is never neutral or passively practiced. Rather, listening “always actively produces meaning,” which prompts Eidsheim to think of listening as “a political act” (2019: 24). Finally, this also points to one of the reasons why hearing and listening should not be equated. “Listening is a directed, learned activity: it is a definite cultural practice,” Sterne reminds us. “Listening requires hearing but is not simply reducible to hearing” (2003: 19).

Irrespective of the prescribed setting, the desire remains to mis/interpret historical sound recordings as vehicles for the authentic and unmediated expression of a historical subject. Voice is, however, always mediated: it emerges from the body of a person, but is also detached from its source. Historical voice recordings are both disconnected from their corporeal source and separated in time. Corporeality, mediality, and temporality are significant notions that will resonate throughout this book. Again referring to Sterne, recapitulating the temporal contradiction, the practice of recording “created sound events designed to be reproduced later and elsewhere, even though the method was justified in terms of saving tradition in the ‘here and now’” (324).

## The Structure of this Book

The book consists of six main chapters comprising both theoretical and empirical elements. The triad—*the Ethnographic*, *the Archival*, and *the Acoustic*—forms the larger framework. I understand these parts as introducing overarching concepts, but I also see them as references to the deployment of reflexive practices. In this sense, I consider ethnography, the archive, as well as sound and listening as analytical tools, as methods and practices, and as sites of knowledge produc-

tion. However, these three stages are not to be understood as separate, isolated modules. Rather, the sections stand for the transdisciplinary discussions within which I wish to situate this study; for debates on historical anthropology (Chapter 2), archival theory (Chapter 4), and sound studies (Chapter 7). Yet aspects of postcolonial and cultural studies, as well as media and memory studies, also influence this broader framing.

Apart from this larger structure, the core of the study consists of three case studies (Chapter 3, 5, and 6), informed by and positioned against the backdrop of notions of the ethnographic, the archival, and the acoustic. Three modes of listening—*failed listening*, *close listening*, and *collective listening*—form a second framing of this book. The listening modes that I develop in the three case analyses or apply to the material provide an additional frame. As with the theoretical accounts, I do not assume that the case studies stand in complete isolation. Rather, I propose three different modes in which to approach different colonial collections of the *Lautarchiv*. By deploying these modes, I show how different listening practices allow us to illuminate the complex and interdependent positionalities and practices connected to the project of the *Lautarchiv*.

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Under the heading of *the Ethnographic*, Chapter 2 revolves around the question of what it means to approach the *Lautarchiv* reflexively and under the premises of the project of historical anthropology. Hence, this part explores conceptual considerations and methodological instruments that appear useful for a historical ethnography of the *Lautarchiv*. From the perspective of the present, historical ethnography offers the possibility of analysing subjects, practices, and events of the past, which in their interplay constitute social realities and collective memories. The chapter endorses the conceptual idea of a historical ethnography as aiming at correlating past and present beyond clearly separated temporal modes. It thus suggests a multitemporal and multidirectional practice that allows an investigation of the relationships between past and present. On the one hand, this means to examine how the past is experienced, understood, and produced in the present, a practice that Sharon Macdonald (e.g. 2003, 2012, 2013) conceptualised as that of ‘past presencing.’ On the other hand, the suggested approach goes beyond a presentist perspective, by also interrogating immanent logics in the past.

How does the past materialise? How is history documented, encoded, archived, and thus continuously selected? What are the mechanisms ensuring that certain material and stories survive over time and are regarded as evidence of the past, while others do not count as such or get lost? What characterises the approach I adopt here is a methodology of mobility and juxtaposition. By this, I mean both the productive comparison of different perspectives and temporalities as well as their relational juxtaposition. This involves, for instance, the approach of reading the *Lautarchiv* both along and against its grain or of examining different modes of listening—listening then and listening now.

The first case study on *failed listening* follows my reflections on the heterogeneous field of historical anthropology and takes ethnographic episodes as starting points. Those episodes do not stem from my research in the *Lautarchiv* in Berlin, but occurred during a research stay at the University of Delhi in India. Short extracts from my interview transcripts and field notes set the ground for my approach to sound recordings of Indian prisoners of war housed at the *Lautarchiv*. The ethnographic material includes conversations I had and observations I made in Delhi. The extracts presented in the chapter concern sound recordings of the Indian prisoners of war Baldeo Singh and Keramat Ali and the failed wish to get closer to these historical figures.

Consequently, Chapter 3 explores whether and how the notion of failure can be productive in ethnographic work. It suggests the mode of a *failed listening* as one way of dealing with the *Lautarchiv*'s colonial sound recordings. It acknowledges the difficulties of coming to terms with the past, which will always leave a sense of dissatisfaction behind. In this chapter, I ponder over different listening positions: the positions of the recordists and internees in the past, my own position today, and the positions of my Indian interlocutors. I depict the positions as both separated from each other in temporal, spatial, or epistemological terms; but also interconnected in unique ways. Since my positionality as a *white* and female anthropologist belonging to the very same university as the researchers that first recorded the voices of prisoners of war indicates a certain continuity, I ask how to both reveal this fact and break with it. Proceeding from Kamala Visweswaran's proposition of a *feminist ethnography as failure* (1994), the chapter introduces an intersectional position towards the *Lautarchiv*. It argues that the *politics of listening* are closely connected to the *politics of location* (Rich 1987; Braidotti 1994). It matters from where you think, speak, write, and listen. It matters who is recording and who is being recorded, who is speaking, who or what is heard at what moment in time, who is listening or who is listening in.

Problematising these formations is crucial to the outline of the chapter and the discussions that follow this first case study. Although the chapter also deals with the colonial dimensions of the First World War and the marginalisation of non-European perspectives within its history and memory, the conceptual core of the discussion seeks to negotiate the limitations and constraints of my research endeavour and positionality. Pointing to the existing, but sometimes rather complex, imbalance of the availability of ostensibly subaltern and dominant sources, the chapter develops a critical stance towards the colonial archive. Dealing with the colonial archive entails acknowledging the inability to know everything, accounting for the archive's limited and incomplete condition. Dealing with the colonial archive is not merely about stories of the past, but also about the history of the present and how it is interrupted by the past (Hartman 2008). Lastly, and inspired by perspectives in queer studies, the chapter introduces the notion of failure as a form of critique (Halberstam 2011): a critique of normative standards of historical narratives and source analysis that not only tend to ignore silences and their active production, but also the diversity of archival traces.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the archive and *the Archival* and is preceded by a discussion of genealogies of archival theories. My reflections on the archive begin with classic accounts by Michel Foucault (1972 [1969]) and Arlette Farge (2013 [1989]), Jacques Derrida (1996 [1995]) and Carolyn Steedman (2001a/b), and end with contributions by Ann L. Stoler (2002, 2009), Saidiya Hartman (2008), and Anjali Arondekar (2009), among others. While Derrida famously went back to the Greek *archons*, the guardians of parchment and law, I conclude with a recourse to the archival technology of sound reproduction (Hoffmann 2004; Lange 2017a). On the basis of theoretical reflections on the archive—on knowledge and power—, the chapter seeks to discuss how the *Lautarchiv* can be grasped in its discursive order and hegemonic logic. Here, considerations of the imperial, the colonial, and the European archive help to conceptualise the *Lautarchiv* as a colonial archive 'at home.' Furthermore, the chapter deals with the power dynamics between the making of archives and the production of history (Trouillot 1995).

Drawing on the *archival turn*, I plead for an understanding of the archive as simultaneously a "subject of inquiry, site of research and critical practice" (Eichhorn 2013: 4). Hence, I advocate for a conception of the archive not as a place where the past can be reconstructed, but rather as a methodological approach to an investigation of the legacies and the epistemic forms and formations of the past that influence present and future. This book is thus based on a twofold notion of the archive—the archive as institution and workplace, but also the archive as concept and metaphor.

In my second case study, in Chapter 5, I examine the gendered and racialised orders of the *Lautarchiv*. The focus of this case analysis is on two sound recordings by the female performers Venkatamma and Rajamanikkam from India, recorded at the site of a so-called *Völkerschau* in the Berlin Zoological Garden in 1926. As the majority of the *Lautarchiv*'s recordings are of men, the 'femininity' of these sources represents a unique feature. By concentrating on female colonial subjects, I argue that it is possible to defy much of the scholarship on historical migrations and transnational mobilities. For a long time, a large part of the literature focused on male and physical labour. Although the *Lautarchiv* is another good example of the paucity of sources attesting to female presence and historicity, the chapter allows me to highlight Indian temporary workers and their artistic background.

The chapter suggests another mode of listening, that of a *close listening*. Assuming that the recordings housed at the *Lautarchiv* contain more than verbally communicated content, namely non-verbal information, Hoffmann (2015) and Lange (2014) first introduced the method of close listening. For this approach, it is important to recognise that, in addition to the noise of the technical apparatus, the recordings contain pauses and silences, unplanned speaking and misspeaking, coughing and laughing. As part of my analysis, I argue that a close listening offers the possibility of perceiving interruptions, if not disruptions, of the otherwise very strict and rigid recording process. I put forward the argument that a close listening allows for paying attention to aspects that appear imperceptible or inaudible within the archival or media order that underlies the production of the recordings. I demonstrate that these aspects are nevertheless part of the archive and can become visible and audible by means of a close reading *and* listening.

In my investigation of the archival traces of the two performers (on the level of technology and materiality, of the recording device and discourse networks, as well as of the subject), I show that the logic of the scientific recording procedure of the time followed a patriarchal norm and a gendered order of knowledge. I discuss whether Venkatamma's laughter and Rajamanikkam's free narration can be understood as disruptions of the procedure and thus, to a certain extent, as subversions of the archival and hegemonic order. I contemplate to what extent this touches upon moments of agency of the recorded subjects, who had otherwise been degraded to objects. Are they marginalised by and within the patriarchal system, exploited by the colonial labour regime? Are they early cosmopolitan workers 'from below,' subversive in their artistic practice and speaking position? Or is neither the case? Instead, do the archival traces of the two women point to the ambiguities of colonial dialectics?

In my third and final case study, in Chapter 6, I develop the mode of a *collective listening* in order to investigate the historical and current meanings of a sound recording by Bayume Mohamed Hussein. Hussein is a prominent figure in the historical reappraisal of colonial migration to Berlin. Compared to the other colonial protagonists in this book, there is quite a lot of knowledge about Hussein's life. Hardly any other biography seems so closely entangled with German (colonial) history. Hussein was born in Dar es Salaam in 1904 and fought as a child soldier in the First World War in the then colony of German East Africa. At the end of the 1920s, he came to Berlin, where he worked as a waiter and actor, but also as a Swahili language assistant at the Berlin University. Denounced for 'racial defilement' by the Nazis in 1941, he died in the *Sachsenhausen* concentration camp in 1944.

Hussein's voice recording was produced at the Institute for Sound Research in July 1934. The sound recording features a text read by Hussein in Swahili, dealing with Swahili wedding traditions. The recording was primarily intended for language teaching purposes and was published as a companion to a language-learning booklet. In order to approach this specific sonic source, I organised a listening workshop together with the anthropologist Jasmin Mahazi. We invited Swahili speakers to share views on the conditions under which the recording was produced, about the content and its meaning. By bringing together different expertise, perspectives, and positionalities, we intended to produce a collective, collaborative, and open-ended investigation of the historical material. The chapter explores whether collective listening presents a way to overcome traditional forms of academic knowledge production by recognising a variety of knowledges and experiences.

The workshop revealed that the research and recording practice at the time was accompanied by several—culturally- and gender-specific—border crossings. Today's listening experiences showed how fundamentally necessary it is to classify historical voice recordings as the results of unequal power relations and the product of research and teaching methods of a colonial knowledge system. Any present or future engagement with Hussein's recording must take into account the doubly sensitive character of the recording. The recording is sensitive because of its conditions of origin in an apparatus of colonial knowledge production. But not only the recording situation, also the content of the recording itself is sensitive. The recorded and published text stands for an *othering* and for the gendered, colonial gaze.

With the perspective of collective listening, the chapter moves between three, at times contradictory, premises. Does the approach taken here simply

complement the colonial archive and thus update it? Does it allow for the establishment of an alternative or ‘second life’ for the colonial archive? Or does it create an entirely new archive consisting of contemporary and intersubjective projections and speculations?

By taking into account perspectives from the field of sound studies, the final chapter, before the coda, tackles the notion of *the Acoustic*. It further interrogates the relationship between sound preservation and the paradigm of ‘salvage anthropology,’ and hence relations between race and sound. I show that the ‘salvage paradigm’ was emblematic of the archival project of the *Lautarchiv*. It was the attempt to preserve not only the voices of the deceased, but the sound of (native) culture. As the chapter points out, this notion runs like a red thread throughout the book.

Introducing a variety of approaches to the object of sound, I take up the proclamation to break with static and naturalised conceptions of sound (e.g. Novak and Sakakeeny 2015). Such critical voices wish to understand sound events as highly dynamic and multisensory phenomena. Eidsheim, for instance, postulates the necessity to reject a static and essentialist “figure of sound” (2015: 2). Instead, she seeks to conceptualise sound as a composite of visual, structural, and discursive information. As indicated above, Eidsheim advocates for a shift away from the source of sound, as well as ostensibly given qualities of mediated sound. Instead, one should concentrate on the processes of hearing and listening, including not only acoustic but also tactile, spatial, and physical sensations. Accordingly, the focus is no longer on the sound subject or object alone, but on reflecting and historicising listening practices. This, then, reflects the purpose of developing three diverging listening modes in the preceding case studies. In summary, the chapter suggests that, in dealing with sound objects of the *Lautarchiv*, one ought to detach oneself from both the archival objects themselves as well as from the recorded historical subjects and instead focus more on listening, then and now.

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In negotiating my position in relation to the contested project of the Berlin Humboldt Forum, I understand my case studies and the three different modes of listening as a way to develop a stance towards the Forum’s present and future. In my opinion, it is essential to reflect upon and problematise the limits of the

Western institution and decentre its position. It is crucial to pay close attention to archival forms, to contextualise the sources, to historicise practices of listening, and to consider ambivalence and ambiguity. Lastly, it is important to approach colonial material from different perspectives and, if feasible, collaboratively. For only then—if at all—does a post- and decolonial approach to the acoustic legacies of the *Lautarchiv* become possible.

All in all, my research has largely remained outside the institution of the Humboldt Forum, keeping a critical distance from the planning process and personnel decisions regarding the *Lautarchiv's* relocation to the Forum. But just as the activists in front of the German Historical Museum expect to be heard at some point, I humbly hope that this book will encourage more critical and reflexive engagements with the *Lautarchiv's* colonial holdings at its new location.



