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‘The Concertina’s Deadly Work in the Trenches’: Soundscapes of Suffering in the South African War

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Under the recurring headline ‘the Concertina’s Deadly Work in the Trenches’, several British newspapers reported in early 1900 that, during the ongoing siege of Mafeking, British army concertina players were capturing enemy soldiers by simply playing strains of the concertina to distract them out of their hiding places. ‘One is sorry to learn that the art of music should be pressed into service to lure persons to destruction’, a commentator in the Musical News noted, but then, it was rationalized, ‘all’s fair in war’. This hybrid use of the concertina during the South African War was further employed as a metaphor for the decay of the physical body itself: as has been noted by Elizabeth van Heyningen, food in Boer concentration camps was so meagre that the meat served to prisoners was once described as coming from a ‘carcase [who] looks like a concertina drawn out fully with all the wind knocked out’. Likewise, Krebs (1999) has discussed the presence of the concertina in the trenches as an example of contemporaneous stereotypes about the susceptibility of Boer soldiers to music in relation to perceived notions that they were backwards and easily manipulated. Drawing upon references to music – particularly the ubiquitous, anthropomorphised, instrument of the concertina – in concentration camps during the South African War, this paper will situate the use of British military music at the dawn of the twentieth century within the framework of trauma studies, proposing that the soundscapes of imperial war were implicitly tinged with traces of physical suffering.

Historian Thomas Pakenham famously referred to the South African War (1899–1902)¹ as, on the one hand, the ‘last great (or infamous) imperial war’ and, on the other hand, as the first conflict in which ‘a nineteenth-century army had to fight a twentieth-century war’.² The events of the South African War thus occurred

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¹ This conflict is also known as the ‘Anglo-Boer War’ or the ‘Boer War’. While most of British academia has historically used the term ‘Boer War’, I use ‘South African War’ in this article because it is the most inclusive term used by South African scholars today. Thank you to Philip Burnett for advice on this terminology.

² Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Abacus, 2004): xv. Historian Steve Attridge, by contrast, views the South African War more directly as the start of modern,

within a fluctuating turn-of-the-century environment that prefigured many of the forms of racism that would later be used as justifications for mid-twentieth-century warfare. The rise of mass disciplinary procedures that were employed by the British Army against the rival Dutch settlers (Afrikaners, or 'Boers' as they were known at the time),³ not to mention the Black South Africans who became cruelly caught up in the struggle,⁴ included the first widespread use of concentration camps.⁵ Explanations for and anxieties about colonial warfare were further

twentieth-century warfare: '[a] popular image of the Boer War is that it is the last Victorian war, with proper hand-to-hand battles, and that it is not until some fourteen years later that the slaughter in France heralded a new industry of death in which millions could die without ever making eye contact. My claim is that it is in the Boer War that we see the beginnings of modernity. It is not the last war of the nineteenth but the first of the twentieth, and this straddling of epochs is part of its unique history. It was a new kind of war and new forms of representation arose as part of it'; Steve Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 15.

³ The term 'Boer' is a literal translation of the Dutch word for 'farmer', and the late-Victorian use of the term directly reinforced the provincial and working-class associations that the British held about the Afrikaner settler communities in South Africa. The term 'Boer' referred to the Dutch settlers in South Africa for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was gradually replaced by 'Afrikaner' in the twentieth century. During the build-up to the South African War, derogatory associations of 'Boer' communities proliferated in Britain: as Paula Krebs notes, 'In Britain, the Boers were seen as backward, petty tyrants who sought to exploit British settlers'; Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourses and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 5. The term 'Afrikaner', or, originally 'Afrikaander', as noted by Abulof, was first used by the Dutch in South Africa to 'indiscriminately describe the natives, both slaves and free blacks. But the growth of a native white community, which regarded Africa and not Europe as their true home, reframed the term for whites alone. Its first documented use in this respect was in 1707'. According to Abulof, while the terms 'Afrikaner' and 'Boer' are often used interchangeably, 'Boer' emphasized occupation – farming – whereas 'Afrikaner' emphasized language and an identity on the 'new' continent. Uriel Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 228–9.

⁴ Liz Stanley notes that at the time most Black people supported the British in the '(mistaken) belief that, post-war, life would become better for them under British rule, compared with the – even at the time – notably racist Boers'; Liz Stanley, *Mourning Becomes: Post/Memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006): 3. There is not much written about Black South African experiences during the South African War (especially when compared to the vast literature that exists about British and Afrikaner experiences); indeed, the dearth of literature on this issue is precisely the cause of much of the scholarship on this conflict being so focused on white experience. Admittedly, this article is no exception, and I take this as a consequence of the erasure of Black experience from archives in the west – an issue that will only begin to be tackled by a deeper interrogation of colonial archives in the future. Exceptions to this trend include Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War 1899–1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); John Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, ed. John Gooch (London: Frank Cass, 2000): 107–25; and Bill Nasson, 'Africans at War', in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, 126–40. It is also worth noting that Pakenham's *Boer War* was fairly unusual at the time for taking into account Black experience at all.

⁵ The idea of a 'work camp' as a space of disciplinary enclosure for both Black and white labourers had already existed in South Africa for a few decades prior to the war: Cecil Rhodes, indeed, had instituted work camps for South Africa's diamond mines. However, the idea of a 'concentration camp' in the time of warfare was fairly new. On the history of

reinforced by late-Victorian ideas of imperial sovereignty, Protestant morality and racial degeneracy. For the defeated Afrikaners, cultural trauma,⁶ and by extension, 'perennial mourning',⁷ ran deep. While the manifestations of trauma in the musical memory of colonial warfare are challenging to navigate, particularly given the Eurocentrism of much existing trauma literature,⁸ the enduring associations of the concertina as an instrument of degenerate suffering during the South African War provide an opportunity to explore how sensory memory can reinforce and reconfigure legacies of collective mourning about a context that predates the historical timeframe of most academic studies of trauma.⁹

South Africa's diamond mines and work camps see Robert Vicat Turrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields 1871–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Lindsay Weiss, 'Exceptional Space: Concentration Camps and Labor Compounds in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa', in *Archaeologies of Internment*, ed. Adrian Myers and Gabriel Moshenska (New York: Springer, 2011): 21–32. More broadly, in terms of the development of concentration camps in the context of armed conflicts, the British were not alone during this era: as Scheipers notes, concentration camps sprung up as part of four major events of colonial warfare around 1900: the Cuban War of Independence (1895–1898), the Philippine–American War (1899–1902), the South African War (1899–1902) and the Herero and Nama Revolt in German Southwest Africa (1904–1907); see Sibylle Scheipers, 'The Use of Camps in Colonial Warfare', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43/4 (2015): 678.

⁶ The concept of cultural trauma will be discussed below. In using this term I am drawing primarily on Jeffrey Alexander, who has argued that the construction of cultural trauma is 'not automatically guaranteed' after a major crisis, but comes together for communities when 'narratives of triumph are challenged, when individual deaths seem worthless or polluted, when those who have fallen are seen not as sacrificing for a noble cause but as wasted victims of irresponsible chicanery'. Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012): 3.

⁷ 'Perennial mourning' is a term used by Vamik Volkan in 'Not Letting Go: From Individual Perennial Mourners to Societies with Entitlement Ideologies', in *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia"*, ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski and Sergio Lewkowicz (London: The International Psychoanalytical Association, 2007): 90–109. I will discuss Volkan in more depth below. On cultural trauma and the South African War, see also Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*.

⁸ The Eurocentric bias in trauma literature (coming largely out of work that has focused on Holocaust testimony, literature and history) has been addressed by Stef Craps, who notes that 'the founding texts of the field – works published in the 1990s by scholars such as Caruth, Felman and Laub, Hartman, and LaCapra ... tend to show little interest in traumatic experiences of members of non-Western cultural traditions'. Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 3. A similar trend has been identified by Fassin and Rechtman with regard to post 9/11 trauma in the USA: 'post 9/11 data on trauma pertained mostly to the white university-educated population'; Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, trans. Rachel Gomme (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 1. There have been moves to readdress these biases in recent scholarship, however, for example the examination of Indigenous Australian cultures by Katelyn Barney and Elizabeth MacKinley, "'Singing Trauma Trails": Songs of the Stolen Generations in Indigenous Australia', *Music & Politics* 4/2 (2010): 1–25, and Judy Atkinson, *Trauma Trails: Recreating Song Lines: The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002).

⁹ Much of the literature on music and trauma has traditionally focused on the contexts during and since the Holocaust. See, for example, Amy Lynn Wlodarski, *Musical Witness and Holocaust Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Shirli Gilbert,

In this article I examine how the concertina emerged as a ‘degenerate’ instrument in British narratives about the South African War, exploring how the ‘mournful’ and ‘diseased’ associations of the instrument that surfaced in colonial wartime reporting have continued to function as a metaphor for Afrikaner cultural trauma. Due to the growing associations of the concertina during the nineteenth century with working-class musicians (despite its origins in the middle-class Victorian parlour), and its ineffectiveness in ‘blending’ with standard classical concert ensembles, the instrument has also been marginalized in many written histories of western music.¹⁰ Furthermore, most musicological examinations of the connections between suffering and music in spaces of wartime incarceration (such as in concentration camps) have been overwhelmingly focused on European geographical locations.¹¹ When examining historical literature on the South African War, however, as well as studies of Afrikaner nationalism, the concertina emerges as a powerful metaphor for racial and cultural degeneration in musical constructions of both the imperial enemy and the colonial Other.¹²

In placing the colonial concertina into dialogue with trauma studies, both from a psychological standpoint and through acknowledging scholarly work on music as a tool for torture and weaponization,¹³ I will provide a contextualized reading of the concertina as a ‘traumatic’ instrument of the South African War. Drawing on

Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ For example, there is no discussion of the concertina in its own right in major histories of western music such as Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, Tenth International Student Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019). The concertina is also absent from publications such as Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (Mineola: Dover Publications, [1940] 2006). On the concertina specifically, and in particular its origins in the Victorian parlour, see Allan W. Atlas, ‘Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers: The Gendered Concertina in Victorian England, 1835–1870’, *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 39 (2006): 1–234.

¹¹ In the case of academic literature on music in concentration camps, the overwhelming focus has been on World-War-II-era concentration camps rather than their colonial predecessors. See, for example, Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*; and Emily Roxworthy, *The Spectacle of Japanese American Trauma: Racial Performativity and World War II* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008).

¹² For further reading on Afrikaner nationalism and music see: Kees van der Waal and Steven Robins, ‘“De la Rey” and the Revival of “Boer Heritage”: Nostalgia in the Post-Apartheid Afrikaner Culture Industry’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37/4 (2011): 763–79; Elsabé Kloppers, ‘The Hymnic Identities of the Afrikaner’, in *Music and Identity: Transformation and Negotiation*, ed. Eric Akrofi, Maria Smit and Stig-Magnus Thorsén (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007): 181–98; Schalk D. Van Der Merwe, *On Record: Popular Afrikaans Music & Society 1900–2017* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2017); Chris Walton and Stephanus Muller, eds, *Gender and Sexuality in South African Music* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005); and Carol Ann Muller, *South African Music: A Century of Traditions in Transformation* (Oxford: ABC-Clio, 2004).

¹³ See, for example, Suzanne Cusick’s study of music as an ‘acoustic weapon’ used by the USA in the War on Terror: Suzanne Cusick, ‘Music as Torture / Music as Weapon’, in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016): 379–92. See also Cusick, ‘“You Are in a Place that is Out of the World ...”: Music in the Detention Camps of the “Global War on Terror”’, *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2/1 (2008): 1–26; and Suzanne Cusick, ‘Towards an Acoustemology of Detention in the “Global War on Terror”’, in *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of*

newspaper reports and eyewitness accounts from the time, as well as on scholarship about the enduring legacy of the concertina in Afrikaner culture, I consider the frameworks of 'cultural trauma' as set out by sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, and 'perennial mourning' as defined by psychiatrist Vamik Volkan. While Alexander does not engage with Volkan's psychoanalytic models of trauma, a case study of the concertina as inhabiting and representing a 'traumatic sonic space' during the South African War is a useful opportunity for bringing these theories together, to consider how sonic legacies may become trapped in a perennial, traumatic 'holding place'. Furthermore, since much published trauma literature is considerably Eurocentric, the significance of examining the post-/colonial implications of a musical instrument for multiple generations of settler communities becomes all the more potent.

This case study thus considers how the 'soundscapes of suffering' associated with the Victorian concertina were shaped by imperial systems of control, which in turn reinforced Afrikaner nationalist ideologies of the 'collective memory' of traumatic suffering. Fassin and Rechtman have defined 'collective memory' as a 'traumatic relationship with the past in which the group identifies itself as a victim through its recognition of a shared experience of violence'; notwithstanding different contexts, 'the moral framework that emerges is the same: suffering establishes grounds for a cause; the event demands a reinterpretation of history'.¹⁴ Another helpful starting point here is Ron Eyerman's work on cultural trauma, slavery and African American identity, where he claims that 'there is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process. As cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory'.¹⁵ In the context of South Africa, moreover, Uriel Abulof proposes that collective transgenerational trauma has been endemic to Afrikaner identity, reaching a crisis in the late twentieth century when as a community they were caught up in an 'ontological insecurity, running into an identity void'.¹⁶ Similarly, Abulof reminds us that 'Afrikaner ontological insecurity is multifaceted, exerting a different effect on different groups'.¹⁷ Jacob R. Boersma, further, has argued that Afrikaner identity was never homogenous nor straightforward, particularly in the context of late twentieth-century South Africa, when post-Apartheid neoliberalism alienated ongoing strains of Afrikaner nationalism and exacerbated economic class disparities.¹⁸ Boersma's method is to address the gaps left by a blanket concept of 'collective' trauma through the use of case studies.¹⁹

Focusing on what I consider to be the sonic – and inherently subjective – presence of the concertina during the South African War, I draw upon Boersma's 'case study' approach to focus on how collective mourning can be present within the body and sound of a particular musical instrument. My case study is thus an

Public and Private Experience, ed. Georgina Born (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 275–91.

¹⁴ Fassin and Rechtman, *Empire of Trauma*, 15–16.

¹⁵ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 1.

¹⁶ Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*, 227.

¹⁷ Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*, 295.

¹⁸ Jacob R. Boersma, 'Afrikaner, Nevertheless: Stigma, Shame, and the Sociology of Cultural Trauma', (PhD diss., Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, 2013).

¹⁹ Boersma, 'Afrikaner, Nevertheless', 239.

exploration of how sonic trauma can be 'sounded' within a context of colonial war and reframed over time in postcolonial musical contexts. In looking historically at the biopolitical soundscapes of imperial incarceration, my understanding of the word 'soundscape' is based on R. Murray Schafer's notion that a soundscape can refer to 'any portion of the sonic environment regarded as a field for study',²⁰ which, in my case, includes references to and metaphors about the concertina in the incarceration of Afrikaner communities. More relevant to the nineteenth century, I also embrace John Picker's notion that the Victorian soundscape 'was so varied and vast as to be too much for one pair of ears to apprehend', and that 'the subjective nature of sensation was of central interest to the Victorians'.²¹ I therefore understand the colonial concertina to be: 1) a signifier of a particular kind of sonic environment that, aesthetically, came to embody traumatic connotations of degeneration and death for Afrikaner victims of the South African War, and 2) emblematic of a soundscape in which there was room for subjective agency to emerge through and beyond traumatic and degenerative connotations.²²

On an aesthetic level, I also hold that the concertina's geographic porousness (as an instrument of travel) and grainy timbre in part make room for sonic legacies of trauma that are ubiquitous across Afrikaner folk musical practices today, as well as aurally reminiscent of generational suffering. If the idea of the concertina as a means of luring Boer soldiers to their incarceration and/or death was a way of manipulating the power of a discordant 'voice', then its exclusion as a viable instrument from British classical music culture during and since the late nineteenth century can also be understood as an example of the censoring of a soundscape that is acutely susceptible to connotations of degeneration. By extension, that the 'wailing; wheezing' sound of the concertina is both uncomfortable yet ubiquitous in Afrikaner folk music today points not only to the instrument's distance from 'established' imperial forms of music-making, but also to a traumatic tension between alienation and belonging that has followed the concertina in South Africa since the late nineteenth century.

The Concertina in the Trenches: A Victorian Construction

Towards the final months of the notorious Siege of Mafeking, which lasted from October 1899 – May 1900,²³ several British newspapers published short articles

²⁰ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994): 36.

²¹ John Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 5, 14.

²² For further reading on colonial soundscapes see Ana Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); see also, with regard to soundscapes and Holocaust memory, Carolyn Birsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology, and Urban Space in Germany, 1933–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012): 11.

²³ The Siege of the town of Mafeking, in which the British were attacked by a grassroots army of Boer soldiers who held them captive for 217 days, was a significant event in the South African War that created a great deal of anxiety for the British, attracting media attention in South Africa and Britain alike. The eventual success of the British made a war hero out of Colonel (later General) Robert Baden-Powell and fuelled British patriotism and support for the war. See Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, particularly chapter 1, on the construction of the 'Mafeking Myth', 1–31.

that used the concertina as a way to belittle the musical faculties of the Boer soldiers. The press reports implied that, because the Boers as a race did not possess the ability to resist the concertina's sound, it was possible for the British to lure them out of their hiding places and into captivity and/or death simply by playing a few notes of music on the instrument.

On 28 March 1900 an article appeared in the *Daily Mail* entitled 'Mafeking – March 16: Concertina's Deadly Work in the Trenches: Music as an Adjunct to Sharp-Shooting'.²⁴ Here is the way a 'war correspondent' described the scenario:

Like wary trappers decoying a wild animal from its lair, a month of close quarters has taught our colonial contingent what are the habits peculiar to the enemy.

Except Sunday, when we do not fire, our boys discovered that he possesses abnormal curiosity, and the effect of music is very similar to that upon other underground creatures. So arranging among themselves, one played a concertina, and three or four conversed.

This continued for half an hour. At the other end of the trench one of our best shots awaited developments. The music proved too much for the Boers. First one and then another head peeped through the porthole or round the corner.

This was our man's opportunity. whiz! and the owner of one head fell backwards.²⁵

A week later London's musical journalists had taken notice, and the *Musical News* published a similar summary, this time drawing out the metaphor of a Pied Piper's 'seductive strains':

The instrument had a particular attraction for the Boers, over whom it appeared to exercise as much charm as ... the strains of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Whenever the performer began his seductive strains, the Boers could not resist the temptation to pop their heads out of their cleverly-constructed defences in order to gratify closer their very natural curiosity.²⁶

These provocative narrations, which, like much wartime propaganda, may well be apocryphal, offer a formidable example of how British constructions of the Afrikaners as a degenerate white race was a powerful way to undermine the threat of the enemy in the press.²⁷ In the *Daily Mail* article, for example, the Boers are likened to wild animals that a 'trapper' watches in order to incarcerate. A day later, the *St James's Gazette* commented that the *Daily Mail* article had 'amusingly' described how the Boers 'seem to be as easily charmed by [music] as snakes', concluding that when the British soldier 'breathed forth an alluring strain as deadly as that of ... the Pied Piper of Hamelin', the 'Boers, like the rats, soon popped their heads out of their holes under the impulse of irresistible curiosity, and a British rifleman, specially placed for the purpose, quickly exacted the

²⁴ 'Mafeking – March 16: Concertina's Deadly Work in the Trenches: Music as an Adjunct to Sharp-Shooting', *Daily Mail*, 28 March 1900, 5. The same article was reprinted in the *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 31 March 1900, 6; and the *Gloucestershire Echo*, 28 March 1900, 7.

²⁵ 'Mafeking – March 16'.

²⁶ 'Boers and Music', *The Musical News*, 7 April 1900, 320. This source describes the 'concertina's deadly work in the trenches' as a 'sensational heading'.

²⁷ The veracity of these stories is, certainly, unreliable, but that the stories existed at all demonstrates the significance of using 'degenerate' music to denigrate the imperial enemy – particularly during a time when the outcome of the war was unclear.

penalty'.²⁸ In such accounts the Boer soldiers are unfailingly framed as being musically and evolutionarily backwards – and consequently, their 'natural curiosity' about the concertina is given as an evolutionary flaw that renders them fragile – in the face of an army that prided itself as being immune to sensory manipulation.²⁹

There are a number of implications in these accounts about race, degeneration and musical susceptibility, not to mention the narratives of myth-making that regularly occurred as part of war reporting.³⁰ In this framework not only does the concertina operate as a technology of wartime entrapment, but its power over the Boers also degrades them to a lower stage of racial evolution than the British: they have no more musical agency than the unguarded animals who are compelled to follow a Pied Piper.³¹ Such depictions of Boer soldiers contrast with an idealized notion of the British military hero, who, according to historian Linda Colley, was associated even from the beginning of the nineteenth century with 'masculine' definitions of commerce, industry, war, and the successful spread of empire.³² By extension, several late nineteenth-century public (male) figures in Britain even specifically prided themselves on being 'unmusical': as Phyllis Weliver notes, 'prominent men like Gladstone, Tennyson, Charles Lamb and the Archbishop of Canterbury all declared with pride during this period that they knew nothing of music'.³³ Thus, a Boer soldier's susceptibility to music was presented in opposition to British military resilience. Moreover, the fluid, skeleton-like physical frame of the concertina itself, combined with the distinctive timbre of its wailing and

²⁸ 'Notes', *St James's Gazette*, 29 March 1900, 3.

²⁹ The musical subjectivities of the British army around this time have been discussed by Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity*, in particular chapter 1, 'The Music Hall', 16–43. Consider also Attridge's conclusion: 'In the range of songs, acts, films, sketches and plays which constituted music-hall repertoire during the South African War it is not possible to identify representations of the soldier which coalesce into a generally accepted endorsement of the war. Neither can the variety of performances be easily reconciled to a clear sense of nationhood. The soldier figure is both accommodated and distanced, supported and derided, an expression of unity and class antagonism.' *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁰ As Krebs notes, British newspapers were so desperate to sell good news of the war that at times apocryphal stories were invented to keep readers happy. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 11.

³¹ On the relationship between Victorian science, music, and evolution, see Bennett Zon, *Evolution and Victorian Musical Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³² Colley articulates a 'masculine' vs 'feminine' dichotomy growing in the early nineteenth century between Britain and France. While her construction predates the more bombastic displays of military masculinity seen later in the nineteenth century, the seeds of British 'masculine' culture as existing in a separate sphere from artistic and musical activities is certainly relevant as a backdrop to this article. As Colley claims, '[t]here was a sense ... in which the British conceived of themselves as an essentially "masculine" culture – bluff, forthright, rational, down-to-earth to the extent of being philistine – caught up in an eternal rivalry with an essentially "effeminate" France – subtle, intellectually, devious, preoccupied with high fashion, fine cuisine and etiquette, and so obsessed with sex that boudoir politics were bound to direct it'; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 252.

³³ Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860–1900: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000): 20. On the gendering of British chamber music at this time, see also Christina Bashford, 'Historiography and Invisible Musics: Domestic Chamber Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63/2 (2010): 291–360.

wheezing tones, could be understood as a metaphor for a weak, if not diseased, human body that was intrinsically 'other' to a notion of national strength, whether this otherness had resulted from categories of class, race or militaristic opposition.

Conspicuously, such otherness was represented in numerous accounts as a diseased and inherently degenerate musical instrument precisely at the moment when unprecedented atrocities of imperial surveillance saw the containment of tens of thousands of Afrikaners, including women and children, being placed in British concentration camps.³⁴ Indeed, the word 'concentration' as applied to acts of incarceration was first used by the British during the South African War.³⁵ The destruction wrought by this first major conflict of the twentieth century, which historian Aidan Forth has described as 'an early example of "total war" in the dawning age of mechanized violence',³⁶ had lasting consequences on Afrikaner communities in South Africa. The losses for Afrikaner, Black South African and British troops were substantial. According to Steve Attridge, the British lost 7,792 men in action and 13,250 from disease; the Boers lost 6,000 men, and 26,370 women and children died in concentration camps.³⁷ Over 20,000 Black South Africans died in separate Black concentration camps, most of them incarcerated because, as Attridge argues, 'the British feared they might help the Boers and because a cheap labour force would be needed once the gold miners in Witwatersrand were reopened'.³⁸ Several scholars have also noted that 'the trauma of black people after the South African War was "ignored"',³⁹ and that there remains a gap in the historiography of the Black experience of the war.⁴⁰ While my focus here is on how the concertina has been constructed as a metaphor for Afrikaner cultural trauma, it is also worth noting that the instrument has a long association with Black South African music-making; even before the South African War it was referred to derogatively as a 'k****r instrument' in Victorian travel writing.⁴¹

³⁴ The most comprehensive recent critical history of the British camps of the South African War can be found in Aidan Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism: Britain's Empire of Camps, 1876–1903* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

³⁵ As Forth notes, particularly with regard to disease by overcrowding, '[t]he description "concentration camps" is appropriate because it was the concentration of people that killed them', Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 121.

³⁶ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 2.

³⁷ Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity*, 3.

³⁸ Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity*, 3.

³⁹ André Wessels, *The Anglo-Boer War 1889–1902: White Man's War, Black Man's War, Traumatic War* (Bloemfontein: Sun Press, 2011): 148.

⁴⁰ See note 4, above.

⁴¹ See 'South Africa and the War', *The Academy*, 5 May 1900, 384. The concertina is also referenced as the instrument played by a Black servant boy in Alice Balfour's diary of her 1894 wagon journey across South Africa, where she recounts, pejoratively, that the boy 'plays one dismal ditty of four notes repeated about a thousand times consecutively'. Alice Balfour, 'Twelve Hundred Miles in a Waggon', *The National Review* 25/146 (April 1895): 185. Note that I have chosen not to spell the word 'k****r' out in full because it is a derogatory term that is offensive in South Africa today. A useful account of the history of the word has been given by Olwage, who notes that until about 1900 the word largely referred to Xhosa-speakers. Grant Olwage, 'Music and (Post)Colonialism: The Dialectics of Choral Culture on a South African Frontier' (PhD: Rhodes University, 2003): 31n20. For a discussion of the 'K'-word in South Africa more recently, see Sonia Mbowa, 'Whose "K-Word" is it Anyway!' (MA diss., University of Witwatersrand, 2019).

In terms of perceiving how these negative connotations were manifest at the time, it is worth noting that while the term 'trauma' was not in wide use during the nineteenth century, the concept was of growing interest in medical circles. Indeed, the Victorians themselves invented the term 'traumatic neurosis'.⁴² The widespread idea of individual trauma as a medical condition was not systematically recognized, however, until the twentieth century.⁴³ That said, the experiences of trauma that can be found in Afrikaner memories of the South African War point to distinctive symptoms of collective trauma that emerged in post-war communities. Relevant here is Kirby Farrell's concept of trauma as 'an interpretation of the past', in which trauma becomes 'a kind of history' for grieving communities.⁴⁴

In the British media coverage of the Siege of Mafeking, then, the susceptibility of the Boer and Black soldiers to the strains of the concertina was given as evidence of their racial and social degeneracy. This coverage was part of a larger movement to reassure British readers that the enemy was physically and even evolutionarily weak despite the slow pace of the war. As Krebs notes, 'the predominant image of the Boers as ignorant, backward peasants was often reinforced by stories about the siege'.⁴⁵ Even in private reports, such as personal diaries, parallel accounts of the concertina emerged. As an Irish soldier recounted:

The Cape Boys shot a Boer today ... The former were playing a concertina, jigging and singing and shouting to the Boers to send over some of their [women], as they wanted dancing partners. One of the Boers looked over the fort wall and was immediately shot dead by our riflemen. Ruse of War.⁴⁶

The Boer soldier's inability to 'escape' the sound of the concertina here stems from the pervasive idea that the instrument was effectively an extension of a Boer soldier's identity. Indeed, British wartime accounts of the concertina are consistent in characterizing the instrument as endemic to a Boer's innate 'idleness'. As noted in the *Musical Herald* in July 1900:

⁴² See Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 2, 24; and Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002): 15–21. Note, however, that 'traumatic neurosis' as a diagnostic category was largely overtaken after World War I by the more unstable category of 'traumatic hysteria', which, as Peter Leese notes, 'yielded no compensation' upon diagnosis, versus the pension rights afforded in Britain to those who were found to have 'traumatic neurosis'. Leese, *Shell Shock*, 19.

⁴³ See Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ 'As an interpretation of the past, trauma is a kind of history. Like other histories, it attempts to square the present with its origins ... Because not everybody in a given culture is likely to be neurologically afflicted, or affected the same way, trauma is always to some extent a trope ... People may use [trauma] to account for a world in which power and authority seem staggeringly out of balance'; Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture*, 14.

⁴⁵ Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 21–2.

⁴⁶ This story is referenced in Dan Michael Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History* Vol. 2 (Fulshear: Concertina Press, 2010): 14–15, and also appears in Willemien Froneman, 'Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty: Perspectives, Retrospectives and Speculations on *Boeremusiek*', (PhD diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2012): 100n14.

The Boer's one musical instrument is the concertina. He plays this everywhere – while trekking in a wagon, in laager, or while tending cattle. On a quiet moonlight [sic] night, as you sit on the *stoep*, and the weird charm of the South African night holds you captive, the concertina is said to please. Boer women never play the concertina. This would not be considered correct. When the Boers are disarmed, their concertinas will be left to them.⁴⁷

The concertina is thus ubiquitous and inextricable from the (male) Boer's life; by extension, Boer women live within the concertina's aural remit, although, unlike mid-Victorian ladies, they appear powerless to play it.⁴⁸ This linking of the instrument so closely to the physical body of the Boer farmer/soldier was further complicated, moreover, by the fact that the concertina player in the *Musical Herald* anecdote was himself a British soldier, and so the instrument does, uncomfortably, 'belong' in a sense to the British Army, even though it is intrinsically associated with the enemy.

The broader framework for these constructions reveals deeply pervasive attitudes in Britain about the concertina as an allegory for inertia and social decay. Furthermore, if the concertina as a degenerate instrument became tied to a brand of Afrikaner identity that was intensified during the South African War, then it can also be placed within a framework of cultural trauma. Marc Howard Ross has claimed that for many Afrikaners the South African War 'constitutes their "chosen trauma", a significant loss that a group cannot fully mourn and integrate into the present'.⁴⁹ This kind of 'chosen trauma' can be linked to the mass deaths that occurred for innocent civilians, particularly children, in the concentration camps, and, consequently, can be found embedded within the rise of Afrikaner nationalist movements.⁵⁰ The experience of a 'chosen trauma', moreover, also unites the Afrikaners against the British. The terminology that Afrikaner communities have used to refer to the camps is revealing in this regard: as André Wessels has noted, the camps have been 'referred to by many British sources as "refugee camps"', while in some Afrikaner circles, they are still referred to as "murder camps".⁵¹

Victorian constructions of the Boer as musically degenerate are thus in dialogue with a larger process of sonically memorializing the experience of the South African War as traumatic for Afrikaner communities. This process was reinforced by British war reporting, which, in the words of Hermann Gillomee, culminated in a 'propaganda contest in which a large amount of British resources went into denigrating the Boer population',⁵² something which Attridge has also noted with

⁴⁷ 'Echoes of the Month', *The Musical Herald*, 1 July 1900, 210.

⁴⁸ See discussion below on the use of the concertina in the Victorian middle-class parlour.

⁴⁹ Marc Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 240. He continues, 'Note, however, that in this trauma the enemy is not indigenous blacks, but the British'.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the seeds of Afrikaner nationalism predated the South African War and reached as far back as there had been clashes between British and Dutch settlers in southern Africa. As noted by Ross: 'Afrikaner ethnic and political consciousness emerged in the nineteenth century in response to the arrival of the British in the late 1700s'. Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*, 237. See also Volkan, 'Not Letting Go', 90–109, on how trauma can shape the political leanings of a community.

⁵¹ Wessels, *The Anglo-Boer War*, 137.

⁵² Hermann Gillomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (London: Hurst, 2011): 358. For further reading, see Glenn R. Wilkinson, "'To the Front': British Newspaper Advertising and

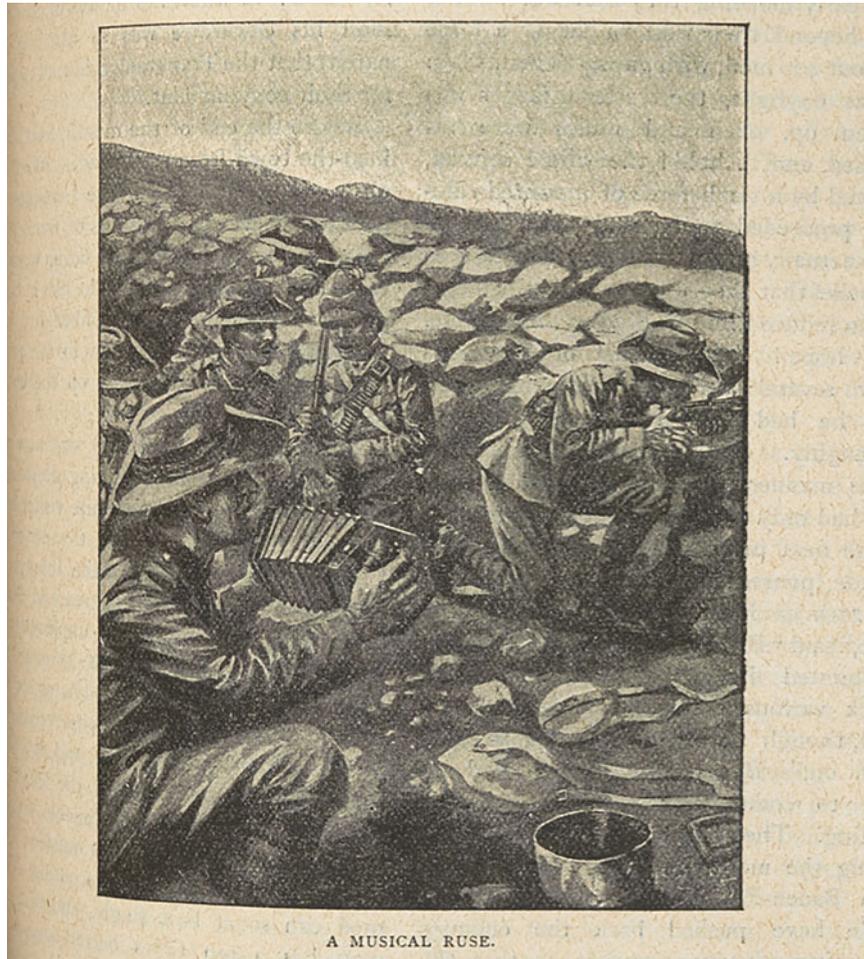


Fig. 1 'Musical Ruse' at Mafeking. Image from *Cassell's History of the Boer War, 1899–1902* (London: Cassell, 1902), p. 989. © British Library Board, General Reference Collection 09061.cc.21.

regard to the rise of poetry about the war that was published in British periodicals.⁵³ It was particularly important for the British press to perpetuate denigrating narratives about the enemy when the war was not going particularly well.⁵⁴

the Boer War', in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, 203–12; and Peter Harrington, 'Pictorial Journalism and the Boer War: The London Illustrated Weeklies', in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, 224–44.

⁵³ 'The Boer War marks a significant moment for the political impact of music hall in that it drew upon and coexisted with an interest in military spectacle and the technological impact of film; representations of the soldier then assume a new hybrid dimension at once intensely theatrical and quasi-documentary'; Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity*, 18.

⁵⁴ Indeed, the continual setbacks that the British encountered during the war gave rise to a large number of insecurities about the strength of the army and the empire; this added even

The anecdote about the 'musical ruse' at Mafeking eventually made it into official histories of the war written in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. As seen in [Figure 1](#), the concertina's 'deadly work in the trenches' was visually depicted in the 1902 volume of *Cassell's History of the Boer War*, where the concertina player is placed centrally in the image: the music appears to distract at least two of the other British soldiers, and only one figure on the far right crouches vigilantly, at the ready to strike.⁵⁵

While the concertina's 'deadly work' is presented in many of these accounts as simply an entertaining anecdote (as Paula Krebs notes, when the *Daily Mail* and the *Westminster Gazette* presented the story, it was listed as an 'example of the humorous side of the siege'),⁵⁶ these stories also contributed to a wider degenerative narrative that strategically constructed the Boer soldier as an inferior colonial rival. And while the *Musical News*, generally less conservative than the *Daily Mail* and *Westminster Gazette*, did admit that 'one is sorry to learn that the art of music should be pressed into service to lure persons to destruction', the article then concluded that 'on the other hand we must remember that the enemy is wantonly attacking a city in our own territory', and 'all's fair in war'.⁵⁷

In the following sections I consider the role of the concertina in the broader imperial cultures that constructed such degenerative narratives, considering how a framework of trauma studies can inform the sonic legacies of transgenerational suffering that are still associated with the concertina for Afrikaner communities.

Sounding Degenerative Narratives

As a material export of empire, the concertina became increasingly abundant in South Africa during the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ A small, highly portable instrument not dissimilar to the accordion, the concertina could be played very simply by stretching and contracting central bellows between the hands, with pitches rendered by the pressing of a button. It was a cheaply produced, compact and robust instrument that could more easily withstand international transportation and changes in climate and humidity than many other traveling instruments. By the late-Victorian era there were reports of concertina music being played on the streets in colonial cities such as Cape Town,⁵⁹ after which the instrument gradually moved out of the metropolis to rural areas, particularly Boer farms.⁶⁰

more pressure to wartime reporters to reassure British readers of national unity. As Attridge notes at the outset of his book, '[f]or England, the Boer War (1899–1902) was a pendulum that swung not only between centuries, but between national assurance and introspection, between Victorian certainties and the doubts and vicissitudes of modernity, between a national character that knew exactly who it was and one which was confused'. Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity*, 1.

⁵⁵ Richard Danes, *Cassell's History of the Boer War, 1899–1902* (London: Cassell, 1903): 987. This image has also been reproduced in Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, Vol. 2, 15.

⁵⁶ Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 22.

⁵⁷ 'Boers and Music', 320.

⁵⁸ This topic has been covered most recently by James Q. Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', in *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851*, ed. James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016): 145–74.

⁵⁹ See Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Black Ethnicities, Communities and Political Expression in Late Victorian Cape Town', *The Journal of African History* 36/3 (1995): 447.

⁶⁰ This fact is corroborated by the references to the omnipresence of the concertina on nineteenth-century Boer farms in Worrall, *Anglo-German Concertina*, Vol. 2, 12.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the potential of music as a force for not only aesthetic transformation but also social regulation had already been operative within Britain as a means of disciplining the lower classes.⁶¹ The seeds of what Tia DeNora has called the operation of music as a ‘technology of control’⁶² thus became embedded within a Victorian mindset by this time. By extension, music as a form of imperial control was not only linked to large-scale acts of military violence, but also to the growth of philanthropic work and civilizing missions.⁶³ In all cases, music used in British colonial contexts provided opportunities for social power, as long as it was regulated according to certain social codes. Thus, whether sounding on a mission station or in the trenches, the British use of music as a means of negotiating and governing a volatile colonial setting was linked to competing ideologies of order, as well as to emerging conceptions about the connections between music, degeneration and disease.⁶⁴

These colonial destinations and degenerative connotations might seem surprising for an instrument that had originally been invented as a popular Victorian scientific curiosity. In the early nineteenth century the concertina was initially seen more as a scientific experiment, having been invented in 1834 by the English physicist Sir Charles Wheatstone, who developed the complex button system that enabled a wide range and flexible intonation.⁶⁵ Wheatstone had originally intended the concertina to be a test in vocal communication: an instrument that could both ‘speak’ and play chromatic repertoires.⁶⁶ By mid-century the concertina

⁶¹ See, for example, Erin Johnson-Williams, ‘Musical Discipline and Victorian Liberal Reform’, in *Music and Victorian Liberalism: Composing the Liberal Subject*, ed. Sarah Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019): 15–36.

⁶² Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 119.

⁶³ It is important to note that the large-scale philanthropic mission movements that took many Britons to nineteenth-century South Africa were related to a much less militaristic or governmental notion of imperialism, and instead reflected Victorian liberal ideas about civilization through conversion, through which colonial converts were seen to potentially transcend racial degeneracy. Music, within this framework, was therefore appropriate so long as it was presented in ‘respectable’ frameworks, such as mission station hymn singing or brass band playing (as long as the band director was white). See Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996); Giordano Nanni, ‘Lovedale: Missionary Schools and the Reform of “African Time”’, in *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012): 185–216; and Grant Olwage, ‘Singing in the Victorian World: Tonic Sol-fa and Discourses of Religion, Science and Empire in the Cape Colony’, *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa* 7/2 (2010): 192–215.

⁶⁴ On this last point, see James Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). While Kennaway’s book focuses primarily on western musical cultures, it is a useful framework for approaching the study of how an instrument like the concertina during the long nineteenth century might have easily been linked to idea of decay and pathological degeneration.

⁶⁵ Allan W. Atlas, ‘Concertina’, in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, www.oxford-music.com (accessed 10 April 2018).

⁶⁶ On the physics and music theory behind the invention of Wheatstone’s concertina, see Anna Gawboy, ‘The Wheatstone Concertina and Symmetrical Arrangements of Tonal Space’, *Journal of Music Theory* 53/2 (2009): 163–90. On the elaborate and rich chromatic possibilities of the English concertina, and the context of social respectability that the instrument enjoyed in the mid-Victorian period, see Allan W. Atlas, *The Wheatstone English Concertina in*

was, briefly, a popular Victorian parlour instrument. In its easily mass-produced forms, however, the instrument gradually became more widely used by street musicians, gathering a received narrative of mobility, diaspora and degeneracy.⁶⁷ As part of an upsurge in different mass-produced instruments, analogies between the 'breathing' sound of the concertina and the 'nasal' and 'naturally embodied' diverse human voice abounded. The notion that each individual concertina could effectively represent a separate – if unrefined – human voice was further complicated by the fact that, instead of being standardized, the variations on the size and range of the instrument continued to increase over the course of the nineteenth century; for example, London publisher J. J. Ewer alone listed c450 versions of the concertina available for sale by 1860.⁶⁸ Even Charles Dickens noted in his periodical *Household Words* in 1853 that the pervasive street instrument 'could speak in any vocal register: treble concertina, baritone concertina, tenor concertina'.⁶⁹ Here, the concertina encompassed the social diversity of a Dickensian human voice: in its various accents it spoke across gendered and classed boundaries, and therefore communicated on an all-too-human (and potentially all-too-physical) level.

Dickens was not alone in making an analogy between the concertina and the 'accented' human voice. James Q. Davies has noted that 'in the early days, Wheatstone experimented with ways to make his concertina speak in vowels, using resonators, though these efforts apparently failed'.⁷⁰ Anna Gawboy has also noted that Wheatstone initially conceived of the concertina as an instrument that was in line with contemporary developments in telegraphs and typewriters,⁷¹ placing it more in the category of a scientific tool for global communication than as an instrument that would have been classified as appropriate for sophisticated art music. As Davies claims, the concertina was more of a communicative, mobile, 'voice in a box'.⁷²

The concertina was, likewise, easily transportable and exportable as an object of colonial travel, further separating those who played it from the middle-class Victorian parlour. By the 1870s reports of concertinas spanned coastal towns across South Africa, Nigeria, Benin, Angola and the Cape Verde Islands.⁷³ As Dan Worrall notes, 'many of the very earliest observations of concertina use in Africa involve both British explorers and Dutch settlers in South Africa, but Indigenous

Victorian England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Idem, 'The "Respectable" Concertina', *Music & Letters* 80/2 (1999): 241–53; and Idem, 'Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers'.

⁶⁷ A notable parallel here would be the swift erasure of the banjo – also an instrument with a 'nasal' timbre and associations of empire and Blackness – from the Victorian parlour by the end of the nineteenth century, despite an initial bourgeois popularity. See Laura Vorachek, 'Whitewashing Blackface Minstrelsy in Nineteenth-Century England: Female Banjo Players in "Punch"', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 123 (2013): 31–51. It is also worth noting that both the banjo and the concertina became used in Irish traditional music around the same time that they were othered from English parlour culture. Thank you to Jillian C. Rogers for drawing this connection.

⁶⁸ Atlas, 'Concertina'.

⁶⁹ Charles Dickens, 'The Harmonious Blacksmith', *Household Words*, 24 December 1853, 402.

⁷⁰ Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', 161.

⁷¹ Gawboy, 'The Wheatstone Concertina', 164.

⁷² Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', 162.

⁷³ Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, Vol. 2, 1.

Africans [also] began to play the instrument at the same time'.⁷⁴ Therefore, the instrument gathered further associations not only with Dutch imperial competitors to Britain, but also with Black colonial subjects. In colonial contexts, moreover, the fact that the simple pressing of buttons produced tones in 'just intonation' rather than 'equal intonation'⁷⁵ further renders the concertina a particularly apt instrument of empire because it had the potential to be inherently communicative. In the context of communicating with – or, in the context of the trenches, 'luring' – the enemy, the concertina thus became a veritable 'speaking machine' that could sound the 'othered' tones of working-class and/or colonial scales.⁷⁶

Over the course of the nineteenth century the traveling concertina thus transformed from a British travel accessory to an instrument that became ubiquitous in many colonial communities. Over time, as Davies has argued, the concertina was increasingly subject to colonial transformations that took the instrument far from its origins as a Victorian curiosity. He claims that 'in South Africa at least ... concertinas were misused, fiddled with, indigenized, altered, and mutilated in ways that messed with the utopian fantasies of such globalist liberals as Wheatstone'.⁷⁷ As Davies continues, 'later versions of Wheatstone's multi-tongued' reed instrument would be advertized as the sound of "British dominions and Colonies"', would be 'taken to the Antarctic by Shackleton, Central Asia by Livingstone', and would be 'instruments of choice for colonial missionaries'.⁷⁸ In this way, the concertina inhabited a shifting space where it was simultaneously a marker of British imperialism, while at the same time it was an appropriate instrument to bestow upon colonial subjects who were not given access to more elite British musical practices. The concertina could therefore function successfully as an instrument of colonial diplomacy: an article in the *Times* from April 1881, for example, noted that William Noble of the Blue Band and Army Gospel Temperance Society had travelled to South Africa in order to 'present a "handsome concertina" to the King of the Zulus, Cetshwayo kaMpande, who was being held as a prisoner of war near Cape Town'.⁷⁹

The increasingly derogatory associations of the concertina with the voices and bodies of rival settler communities and colonial subjects can therefore help to explain the rhetoric that emerged around the instrument during the South African War. The professional classes in Britain – those who would have published and read journals such as the *Musical News* – may well have strongly associated the concertina with contemporaneous ideas about racial degeneracy. Equally, none of the 'deadly work in the trenches' reports questioned the racial evolutionary framework of *why* the Boer soldiers would be specifically receptive to the danger of this particular type of musical seduction. Such neglect can be tied to persistent, and widely accepted, British propaganda supporting the idea that the Boers were a devolved white race, implying that they as a people would thus have little or no control over their own bodies once they heard the wheezing strains of the

⁷⁴ Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, Vol. 2, 1.

⁷⁵ See Gawboy, 'The Wheatstone Concertina', 163–90.

⁷⁶ See Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', 163–6.

⁷⁷ Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', 163–6.

⁷⁸ Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', 162–3.

⁷⁹ 'Cetywayo and Temperance', *The Times*, 17 October 1881, 4; as quoted in Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', 163.

instrument. For example, in 1900 the *Musical News* gave the following account of the state of music in white South Africa:

Except at Johannesburg, where the people are almost all English, music, as we recognise it, seems to be hardly known. The Boers apparently confine themselves mainly to the droning of hymns, accompanied by a harmonium ... It may be that, besides the blessings of equal justice and good government which must result from war, music will bear her fair share through the softening influence the divine art will exercise on the people of this portion of our South African empire.⁸⁰

In this construction, the Boers knew nothing of musical development, and so the concertina became attached to a form of degeneracy that could only be 'helped' by the civilizing influence of British military success. The *Hampshire Telegraph and Naval Chronicle* reflected a similar depiction of Boer society (and the predominance of the concertina within it) in an article that came out in the same year:

Every Boer believes himself to be a born musician ... and every Boer homestead possesses some musical instrument, as a rule a concertina ... The concertina is in use every day, and at all hours of the day. When the Boer goes away on a transport journey he takes his concertina with him. From every waggon trekking slowly along the dusty road you will hear strains of this instrument breaking out in the quiet air, and if you give a backward glance, you will see the boss stretched out on his mattress in the tent of the waggon, pipe in mouth, grinding out some world-forgotten tune ... On the farm, too, the concertina is never idle, for the boys take it with them, as they go out in the early morning to watch the cattle feed, and again in the evening, when they count the stock as they are driven in.⁸¹

Here, the Afrikaner subject 'believes' him or herself to be a musician by virtue of the constant prevalence of the concertina. In this framework, then, the Boer soldier cannot help but surrender to its vocalic sounds, because the concertina has become a central figure in the soundscape of Boer life. Notably, the British newspaper reports based this soundscape on a notion of backwards laziness: the 'boss stretched out on his mattress ... pipe in mouth, grinding out some world-forgotten tune'. His musical act is thus out of place and time with the imputed progress of empire, and, by extension, the ability to be physically fit for battle. Rather, it is the concertina itself, not the Boer, who is never idle; *its* body is more frequently exercised.

The idea of the racially 'other', unhygienic concertina player who struggles to rise out of poverty was of course not new in nineteenth-century Britain. As far back as Henry Mayhew's influential publication *London Labour and the London Poor*, published serially in the 1840s, the unwashed subject on the city street had been effectively constructed as Black, not just because of physical dirtiness but also due to a perceived evolutionary degeneracy – ideas that were blatantly extended to the Irish at the time. As Kavita Philip has noted, 'it is remarkable ... how similar the rhetoric of racialization of the Irish, a white population, was to the language used to characterize non-white colonial subjects in Africa and

⁸⁰ 'Boers and Music', 272.

⁸¹ Quoted in Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, Vol. 2, 65.

Asia'.⁸² For example, the category 'Africanoid' described each of these groups, its validity being quantifiable by the 'index of nigrescence'.⁸³

Likewise, when the concertina is referenced in war reporting, it is often placed in the hands of someone who is Black, Afrikaner or Irish.⁸⁴ Given this context, the British soldier holding the concertina at the 'Ruse at Mafeking' is unusual, except to say that there is still an impression of only really using it to lure a 'degenerate' enemy.⁸⁵ Moreover, the Irish played an important anti-British role in the war. As Donald P. McCracken has explored, the Irish involvement in the South African War reveals the strength of pro-Boer sentiment in Ireland at the time.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the Irish support for the Boer cause incentivized the British to redouble their efforts in South Africa; as McCracken claims, 'the Irish pro-Boer movement was the most influential of the European pro-Boer movements, not only because of its influence on Ireland's relations with Britain, but also because it tempered British attitudes towards South Africa'.⁸⁷ Indeed, 'The prospect of "another Ireland"', writes McCracken, 'was a spectre that might only be exorcized by a unanimous peace in South Africa'.⁸⁸

The use of the concertina by both the Irish and Afrikaners at the time also provides another link to British ideas of cultural (and musical) degeneration that were applied to colonial subjects and imperial rivals alike. At the same time, as James Kennaway has noted, discourse had long since emerged in western medical writings about how overstimulation of the nerves through music could also lead to physical degeneration.⁸⁹ For the British wartime media, Irish soldiers then fell, like the concertina, into a degenerative framework of musical disturbance, suffering, and inherent racial otherness that rendered them, like the British working classes, as a less-white race. Effectively this amounted to large-scale ethnic othering of

⁸² Kavita Philip, 'Race, Class and the Imperial Politics of Ethnography in India, Ireland and London, 1850–1910', *Irish Studies Review* 10/3 (2002): 295. See also Thiven Reddy, *South Africa, Settler Colonialism and the Failures of Liberal Democracy* (London: Zed Books, 2015); and on Victorian racial categorizations and degeneration, Trevor Turner and Susan Collinson, 'From Enlightenment to Eugenics: Empire, Race, and Medicine 1780–c.1950', in *Main Issues in Mental Health and Race*, ed. David Ndegwa and Dele Olagide (London: Routledge, 2017): 1–29.

⁸³ Philip, 'Race, Class and the Imperial Politics of Ethnography', 295.

⁸⁴ On the migration of the nineteenth-century concertina from an English parlour curiosity to an Irish folk instrument, see Stuart Eydmann, 'The Concertina as an Emblem of the Folk Music Revival in the British Isles', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 4/1 (1995): 41–59.

⁸⁵ Worrall's two volumes of *The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History* are rich with images of the concertina from the nineteenth century, including South Africa.

⁸⁶ Donald P. McCracken, *Forgotten Protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2003). For further reading, see Mark Suzman, *Ethnic Nationalism and State Power: The Rise of Irish Nationalism, Afrikaner Nationalism and Zionism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); and Keith Jeffrey, 'The Irish Soldier in the Boer War', in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, 152–65.

⁸⁷ McCracken, *Forgotten Protest*, xiv. The Irish critique of the South African War was not entirely unusual for the increasingly controversial war. As Krebs notes, '[a]lthough few British statesmen came out fully against the war, by the war's end the rest of Europe vehemently denounced the British cause and fighting methods, and conflict about the methods employed by the British army resulted in a split in the already divided Liberal party and in public opinion throughout Britain'. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 5.

⁸⁸ McCracken, *Forgotten Protest*, xiv.

⁸⁹ Kennaway, *Bad Vibrations*, 4, 94–5.

Afrikaners and Irish people alike, and extended to British political ideas about race that linked degeneracy to laziness, lack of physical control, and social decay.⁹⁰ Forth has applied this racial othering to parallels in the racialization of Ireland and India as British colonies:

In the language of social-scientific racism, the famished of both colonies were suspect ethnic 'others'. Lazy, improvident, and adherents of a 'superstitious' religion, the Irish, like their Indian counterparts, [a *Times* article of 1847 had maintained] were 'born and bred ... from time immemorial in inveterate indolence ... disorder and consequent destitution'.⁹¹

Such constructions of racial degeneracy can be extended to discourses about ill health and poor sanitation for communities who used the concertina by the end of the nineteenth century. While first-hand accounts of concertina music in the concentration camps are scarce, published inspections by those who visited them – particularly medical staff – present chilling analogies between the physical body of the concertina and degenerative starvation. For example, one eyewitness likened the visual appearance of poor-quality meat served to prisoners to the instrument:

Very scarce and dear, and awfully nasty; either 'trek Ox' which is so near the verge of starvation before it is killed that the carcase looks like a concertina drawn out fully with all the wind knocked out, just rib-bones with their flabby skin drawn over them, and no flesh at all.⁹²

Compared here to a starving, rotting carcass that would render few nutrients to keep the emaciated body of a dying camp inmate alive, the concertina appears as a body effectively 'drawn out', or zoomorphized into a skeletal frame that has been described even more recently with regard to the soundscapes of Afrikaner folk music as 'gasping, wheezing, asthmatic'.⁹³ In other words, the presence of the concertina heralded ill health.

⁹⁰ With regard to political ideas about social decay in Britain, Robert F. Haggard has noted that 'As Victorian poverty was largely associated with the least respectable class of laborers – manual, unorganized, unskilled, casual, and, often, female workers ... it was commonly believed to be the result of their own improvidence, laziness or intemperance'; Robert F. Haggard, *The Persistence of Victorian Liberalism: The Politics of Social Reform in Britain, 1870–1900* (Westport: Greenwood Press): 11.

⁹¹ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 47. The quote that Forth draws upon here is from the *Times*, 26 March 1847, 4. This *Times* quote has also been referenced in Ben Kiernan, 'From Irish Feminine to Congo Reform: Nineteenth-Century Roots of International Human Rights Law and Activism', in *Confronting Genocide*, ed. René Provost and Payam Akhavan (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011): 20.

⁹² Quoted in Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'A Tool for Modernisation? The Boer Concentration Camps of the South African War, 1900–1902', *South African Journal of Science* 106/5–6 (2010): 8.

⁹³ Froneman, 'Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty', 45. The anthropomorphic qualities of the concertina within Afrikaner folk music, and the connection of the instrument to South Africa's natural landscape, have also been explored in Froneman, 'Music and Landscape: Two Tales of Borehole Drilling in the Karoo', *Cultural Geographies* 22/4 (2015): 713–22. Davies describes the concertina as effectively working 'against' the 'European drive to equal temperament' and to 'demonstrate the truth, not only of the global diversification of languages, but also of the global diversification of scales'. Davies, 'Instruments of Empire', 166.

As John Boke argues, an emphasis on physical decay within the concentration camps was at the heart of much of the wartime reporting, where health problems were related to a lack of 'water, meat, clothing, being overworked, and the lack of freedom'.⁹⁴ Moreover, since the Afrikaner inmates had largely come to the camps from isolated rural areas, they often lacked immunities to the more urban diseases spread by the war.⁹⁵ Boke argues, moreover, that 'the trauma of experiences such as seeing their homes destroyed and their animals slaughtered added to their debilitation'.⁹⁶

It is worth remembering that the early British justifications for the concentration camps were that they were a form of humanitarian liberal reform: thus, any ill health and death in the camps was presented as the fault of the ('lazy') inmates, not the 'benevolent' camp administrators. As Forth notes, '[a]t first glance, camps fit awkwardly within concurrent developments in British liberalism'.⁹⁷ However, at the time, the camps were justified as 'products of a putatively, even quintessentially, "liberal" power – one dedicated, in theory if not in practice, to free movement, laissez-faire politics, and the rule of law'.⁹⁸ Therefore,

while free movement emerged as a fundamental right for model citizens in metropolitan Britain – respectable, industrious, and white – mobility augured danger and criminality for racial or social 'inferiors'. Camps ... remind us that securing liberal freedom in Britain depended on creating and ruling through self-acting individuals – a status categorically denied to the suspect collectivities of empire.⁹⁹

If the birth of the concentration camp evolved out of a mindset of 'humanitarian' imperialism, then wartime accounts of the concertina, as a metaphor for all that was 'wrong' with Afrikaner culture, can be understood within the same Victorian biopolitics of 'health reform' that conceived of the concentration camp as a location of so-called humanitarianism in the first place. As such, the concertina was an instrument inherently associated with the idleness and physical decay of the inmates (conditions that the British were, ostensibly, there to address) rather than with a musical opportunity for recovery (Victorian hymns would take on this role). By extension, it followed that the 'diseased' instrument could be used to lure men to death or imprisonment if they themselves could be framed by the British as being part of a degenerate white race. In reality, however, the camps created an environment where thriving physically was effectively impossible. And so, the reality of disease and death was echoed by the sound and image of an instrument that came to resemble – in both sound and image – physical deterioration itself.

As a metaphor for the trauma of disease and starvation, then, the presence of the concertina in the South African War came to be indelibly linked to the biopolitical

⁹⁴ John Boke, *An Imperfect Occupation: Enduring the South African War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015): 111.

⁹⁵ Boke, *An Imperfect Occupation*.

⁹⁶ Boke, *An Imperfect Occupation*. Boke also argues that in the camps men were better fed than women, a reality that further exacerbated the large numbers of starving women and children. *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁷ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 10.

⁹⁸ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 10.

⁹⁹ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 10. On liberal justifications for the camps also see Dan Stone, *Concentration Camps: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 17–18.

history of decaying, incarcerated bodies. Like the scant food served to the concentration camp inmates, the concertina's gasping and wailing strains provided an audible metaphor for the failure of the camps to carry through their humanitarian claims in practice.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the ostensible humanitarian goals of the camps had been to 'preserve health and well-being, while addressing imperial security concerns raised by destitute and displaced populations considered socially, racially, or politically suspect'.¹⁰¹ Thus, British discourses about the treatment of inmates during the war emerged from a late-Victorian liberal concept of the kinds of 'administrative machinery oriented around welfare and social control' that had originated in nineteenth-century Britain.¹⁰² Likewise, according to Forth,

The same forces that generated prisons, factories, and the work-houses in nineteenth-century Britain created colonial camps (along with mining compounds, convict settlements, and other imperial enclosures). Like their metropolitan correlatives, famine, plague and wartime concentration camps were disciplinary institutions that operated according to putatively humane principles of 'poor relief' and 'protective custody'. Britain encamped populations 'for their own good' and in the name of relief and humanity. Yet camps also responded to metaphors of social danger and contagion, which dehumanized those detained.¹⁰³

Late-Victorian appropriations of humanitarianism also reinforced the idea that liberal rule at this time was, as Forth concludes, 'premised on the construction of a certain type of subject: trustworthy, self-governing and hygienic'.¹⁰⁴ A subject that had degenerated from this construction was by implication left outside of the humanitarian paradigm by virtue of their racial deterioration from a British self-governing standard.

Since the achievement of liberal agency in nineteenth-century Britain depended on the success of self-governing individuals,¹⁰⁵ the inmates in the concentration camps who did not thrive could therefore be blamed for not embracing the 'protection' that they were offered, despite the reality of lack of food, overcrowding and contagious disease. Many accounts of Afrikaner music-making within the camps reflected this ideology: if, as noted in the diary of one of the concentration camp teachers, the child inmates were indeed openly resistant to learning how to sing 'God Save the King',¹⁰⁶ then the broader allegiance to what was perceived to be the degenerate musical forms of 'dreary' Dutch psalm tunes and the wailing of

¹⁰⁰ Forth has related the concept of Foucault's disciplinary 'biopolitics' in the *History of Sexuality* and *The Birth of Biopolitics* to the British establishment of the concentration camps during the South African War. Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 5.

¹⁰² Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 7.

¹⁰³ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ For more on this concept, see Daniel S. Malachuk, *Perfection, the State, and Victorian Liberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ The Afrikaner resistance to learning British hymns and patriotic songs even permeated the efforts to educate the children in the camps. See Nicole Anae, "'Among the Boer Children': Australian Women Teachers in South African Concentration Camp Schools, 1901–1904', *History of Education Review* 45/1 (2016): 38.

concertina music could be seen as a symptom of their inability to adequately self-regulate, rendering the Boer prisoners stuck within patterns that replicated illiberal musical acts.¹⁰⁷ The concertina in this context had effectively become the sonic symbol of traumatic sickness and death; the instrument of those who had devolved into an ethnic status of starvation and suffering.

By the same token, British imperialist discourse also linked physical health to their own national character. Those who had the capacity for moral judgment, above and beyond their race or class, were able to achieve physical strength and good health. As Elizabeth van Heyningen argues, however, the Boers were not regarded as a race that had the ability to self-regulate, physically or morally: neither the blue book medical reports that came out of the camps nor the British newspapers attempted to 'hide the scale of the deaths but they sought to justify British administration by [instead] pointing a finger at the insanitary behaviour of the Boers, their superstitious practice[s] of medicine and the failings of the mothers in caring for their children'.¹⁰⁸ This attitude offered a way to exonerate the camp administrators for the extraordinary levels of infectious disease in the camps, where typhoid, pneumonia and measles (which counted for around 43 per cent of all concentration camp deaths) proliferated, as did death by malnutrition.¹⁰⁹ Yet camp authorities resisted taking responsibility for these atrocities and were quick to point to the culturally determined sanitation practices of the inmates as the problem. As Boke notes, 'the camp authorities made something of a fetish of ventilation and were vociferous in their complaints about the inmates' poor hygiene'.¹¹⁰ Of course, the notion that only Black and Afrikaner South Africans suffered from poor hygiene is erroneous, when considering that, in reality, 'more British soldiers died of disease than as a result of enemy action'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ The associations of racial degeneracy discussed above also extended to British missionary identifications of hymn singing in the camps. For example, the Boer tradition of singing Dutch reformed psalm tunes as a collective force at irregular camp intervals that often intimidated and challenged camp guards. As recalled in the joint eyewitness accounts written by General P.H. Kritzinger and Mr R. D. McDonald, singing infused the concentration camp soundscapes, bookending the experience of incarcerated time: 'Early in the morning and late at night ... their camps would resound with hymns'. P.H. Kritzinger and R.D. McDonald, *In the Shadow of Death* (London: Printed for private circulation, 1904): 59. See also Anne-Marie Gray, 'Vocal Music of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), Insights into the Processes of Affect and Meanings in Music', (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2004): 3–22. Effectively, Dutch psalm singing became, like the concertina, deeply evocative of war-time trauma for Afrikaner communities, and falls into the characterization of psalms that Elsabé Kloppers has identified as 'part of the collective cultural memory of the Afrikaans-speaking people'. Kloppers, 'Hymnic Identities', 186. More broadly, in the prisoner of war camps that the British set up during this conflict across India, Sri Lanka, St Helena, Bermuda and Portugal for housing transported Boer soldiers, hymn singing became a means of rationalizing a form of displaced Afrikaner identity: on the prisoner of war camps, see Isabel Hoymeyer, 'South Africa's Indian Ocean: Boer Prisoners of War in India', *Social Dynamics* 38 (2012): 363–80; and Floris J.G. Van Der Merwe, 'Sport and Games in Boer Prisoner-of-War Camps During the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 9/3 (1992): 439–54.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'The Concentration Camps of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, 1900–1902', *History Compass* 71/1 (2009): 23.

¹⁰⁹ Boke, *An Imperfect Occupation*, 117–118.

¹¹⁰ Boke, *An Imperfect Occupation*, 119.

¹¹¹ Boke, *An Imperfect Occupation*, 121.

That said, the idea of Boer despondency and laziness as an explanation for the concentration camp deaths was necessary for British propaganda. The racially charged idea of an innate despondency is perhaps outwardly in tension with the idea of the Boers' 'natural curiosity' for music as reported in the *Daily Mail* article, but, on the other hand, both a despondent approach to health and a susceptibility to 'natural' strains of music point to an inability to control one's body in the face of armed conflict, which rendered the British as having ultimate biopolitical control. The January 1902 medical report by the British doctor Thomas Hime, for example, noted that:

All the Medical Officers of the Camps have noticed the want of resisting power, the despondency and a tendency to take a gloomy view of the most trifling ailment, which prevails among the Refugees. On feeling in the least unwell it is no uncommon thing to see a Boer take to bed, and declare that he feels his end has come ... I have been informed by Medical men who have been practicing many years in the country, this morbid condition was no less wide-spread among the Boers when resident on their own farms.¹¹²

By extension, British Army propaganda routinely emphasized the health of the British soldiers, even though medical reports indicated that good physical health was far from common among the troops. However, a narrative of robust British militaristic health was vital to cultivating an imperial counterpart to Boer degeneracy. It is no coincidence that the war hero of the Siege of Mafeking, General Baden-Powell, was also the founder of the Boy Scouts,¹¹³ itself an initiative to increase the physical health of the next generation of British soldiers, and an organization that was born largely as a reaction to the many working-class men in Britain (around one-third of those who should have been eligible) who could not qualify for the army due to physical conditions such as rickets.¹¹⁴

This growing focus on 'British health', which, by implication, could distinguish 'healthy' British soldiers from 'unhealthy' imperial rivals and subjects, was also the start of Britain's welfare state.¹¹⁵ Undoubtedly, the British press emphasized a liberal 'humanitarian' focus in order to quell concerns about the war's progress,

¹¹² Boke, *An Imperfect Occupation*.

¹¹³ See Robert S.S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, ed. Kevin Y.L. Tan (Singapore: Brownsea, 2004).

¹¹⁴ As Attridge notes, 'There had been little recruitment until "Black Week" (10–15 December [1899]) when the British suffered unprecedented casualties. On a wave of patriotism, a rush of recruits, upon examination, provided a shock for the authorities who were forced to acknowledge the physical degeneration which the working classes had experienced during the late nineteenth century'. Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity*, 68–9. For more on the medical awareness around the British Army at the time of the South African War, see Emanoel C.G. Lee, 'Medicine and the Boer War: Social and Political Consequences', in *The Prism of Science: The Israel Colloquium: Studies in History, Philosophy and Sociology of Science*, Vol. 2, ed. Edna Ullmann-Margalit (Dordrecht; Lancaster: Reidel, 1986): 113–39.

¹¹⁵ See Richard M. Titmuss, *Essays on the Welfare State (Reissue)* (Bristol: Policy Press; Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 44–53. It is noteworthy that British soldiers were trained through physical exercises by military band music, however, and not by instruments such as concertinas. On music and British military training, see Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow, *Music and the British Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

despite growing criticisms within Britain about camp living conditions.¹¹⁶ Yet an overarching narrative of British ethnic paternalism in relation to a 'degenerate' enemy enabled the cultural justification for the camps on so-called humanitarian grounds. The sonic legacies accompanying such degenerative frameworks, ultimately, are therefore a way to 'sound' the modes of cultural trauma that accompany this conflict.

Reframing 'Deadly Work': Cultural Trauma and the South African Concertina

As demonstrated above, the presence of the concertina in the South African War was constructed by the British as musically degenerative, an attitude that was perhaps only reinforced in racial attitudes to the significant role the instrument has since played in the development of Black and Afrikaner folk music in South Africa.¹¹⁷ I argue, however, that in Afrikaner cultural memory the instrument also came to act as what Alexander has referred to as a 'script' of trauma that was 'performed in the theatres of everyday collective life'.¹¹⁸ Notably, the associations of the instrument in these stories with the Boer soldiers being physically 'weak' and therefore 'susceptible' to being lured out of their hiding places are particularly at odds with the threads of Afrikaner nationalism that takes as a point of pride the idea that Afrikaners *never* surrender. In fact, 'Die Stem', the anthem of Apartheid South Africa, ended with the lines: '*Ons sal leve, ons sal sterwe, ons vir jou Suid Afrika*', which in the English version translates as 'We will live, we will die, we for thee, South Africa'.¹¹⁹ For a culture in which surrendering was a last resort, then, the strains of the concertina have the potential to reinforce an unwavering allegiance to continually re-sounding the pain of the past.

Entrenched connotations of musical degeneracy have, indeed, continued to permeate constructions of the concertina in Afrikaner culture. As Willemien Froneman has explored, concertinas for twenty-first century Afrikaner communities still hold associations of wilderness and displacement, as well as being interwoven into histories of blackface minstrelsy not only in South Africa but also in Britain and across North America.¹²⁰ This comes from the instrument's associations with creating volatile wheezing, rasping sounds around the rural campfire; of the prevalence of the instrument in Black South African ensembles; and of the 'savage' possibilities of racial mixture within the varieties of hybrid ensembles that have permeated the concertina's history in South Africa, from its nineteenth-

¹¹⁶ Philip D. Curtin, *Disease and Empire: The Health of the European Troops in the Conquest of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 219.

¹¹⁷ The widespread extension of the concertina in Black South African music – and the degree to which it is in tension with the ubiquity of the concertina in Afrikaner folk music – merits further study in this regard. For example, the concertina comes up regularly in references to both Afrikaner and Black South African musics in several of the essays in Christine Lucia, ed., *The World of South African Music: A Reader* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005).

¹¹⁸ Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory*, 4.

¹¹⁹ As Nasson claims, '[i]n terms of the conventional nationalist content and discourse of Afrikaner history, the very term "surrender" has long been peculiarly pregnant in partisan meaning'; Bill Nasson, 'The South African War / Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902 and Political Memory in South Africa', in *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2004): 123.

¹²⁰ See Froneman, 'Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty', 49–76.

century colonial origins until today. The concertina, in Froneman's construction, also carries associations with 'loss of composure and wild abandon'.¹²¹ Moreover, because the concertina's colonial connotations verged on ideas of the 'savage', the "screeching" and "wailing" tones of the concertina therefore 'held the potential of activating a white musicality that was associated with, described, desired and derided as Black experience'.¹²² The parallels here with Victorian ideas of musical degeneracy – that playing the concertina renders one racially 'less-white' – are stark.

Such legacies suggest that from the late nineteenth century the concertina gained strong associations of suffering and oppression for Afrikaner communities. Froneman has affectingly described the Afrikaner concertina as an instrument that struggled to transcend these associations:

The concertina carries with it all the pain of a personal cultural heritage fundamentally tainted by political transgression. It points to the initial success and inevitable demise of whiteness in Africa. It speaks of vulnerability, of frustration at unrealised potential, of work that has been in vain. It carries the burden of history, the attempts of people trying to live authentically despite this burden, the becoming unwanted on a continent one has called one's home. The concertina echoes the melancholy of the loss of power, of a way of life, of innocence, of freedom – a nostalgia that cannot hide one's own cultural complicity in this sorry state of affairs. *Boeremusiek* cannot exist in contemporary South Africa: it can only exist in the subjunctive.¹²³

This multifaceted network of memory aroused by the Afrikaner concertina raises questions about where further studies might go in exploring the soundscapes of degeneration, suffering and trauma associated with the instrument. Indeed, as noted by several historians of the South African War, the memory of the concentration camps at large, like the mass migration of the *Voortrek*, has become an enduring 'emblem of Afrikaner suffering',¹²⁴ with strong parallels drawn as early as the nineteenth century between the plight of the Afrikaner peoples and the Israelites being predestined to wander, dispossessed, in the desert.¹²⁵

An ideology of oppression and predestined suffering that is directly related to the trauma of the concentration camps has, furthermore, helped to reinforce Afrikaner nationalist ideology since the war. According to van Heyningen,

¹²¹ Willemien Froneman, 'Blackface', unpublished paper, pre-circulated for a research seminar at King's College London, 'Blackface Minstrelsy in Nineteenth-Century London and South Africa', as part of the ERC-Funded Project, *Music in London 1800–1851* (20–21 January 2017): 80. Sincere thanks to Froneman for kindly agreeing for this unpublished paper to be cited here.

¹²² Froneman, 'Blackface'.

¹²³ Willemien Froneman, 'Subjunctive Pleasure: The Odd Hour in the Boeremusiek Museum', *Popular Music* 33/1 (2014): 14.

¹²⁴ Van Heyningen, 'Concentration Camps', 22. See also Ross, *Cultural Contestation*, 237; and Nasson, 'The South African War', 116–17, who argues that the 'Afrikaner story became one of seamless ethnic suffering; in the nineteenth century, the migrant Boer *voortrekkers* had been bloodied by black African savages, while in the early twentieth century, the "Boer" (to use the derogatory English sense) had been done in at the hands of the British'.

¹²⁵ As Kloppers notes, '[t]he *Voortrekkers*/Boers saw a parallel between themselves and the Israelites of the Bible. They viewed themselves as "an Israel" – a small and humble people among the (Black "heathen") nations, protected by God and whom God would even assist in war'; see Kloppers, 'Hymnic Identities', 188.

Afrikaner nationalists who draw upon a 'repetition of unending suffering' to 'justif[y] their demands for an independent political nation', take direct inspiration from the pacifist writers who campaigned for better conditions in the concentration camps, such as Emily Hobhouse.¹²⁶ Legacies of societal mourning have thus been deeply embedded into historiographies of Afrikaner suffering and nationalist identity. Liz Stanley's extensive study of mourning, memory and the South African War has likewise claimed that the construction of the concentration camps in Afrikaner memory has enabled Afrikaner nationalists to avoid taking 'responsibility for institutionalized racism and apartheid', with the result that 'what many people not think of as "the facts" and "the history" of the South African War concentration camps were constructed within nationalist political mythology, and are not supported by the historical record'.¹²⁷ In this way, if the ideas of a degenerate musical instrument were inflicted, consciously or unconsciously, on an oppressed community within a framework of communal suffering, then the traces of sonic trauma that were perpetuated in the decades to come can be linked back to a British imperial ideology of degeneracy, whether or not the 'historical record' of the Mafeking ruse was entirely accurate.

In modern-day South Africa, the concertina has often been seen to represent the perpetual nostalgia and grief about the ongoing soundscapes of Afrikaner music.¹²⁸ Froneman, for example, points to a pervasive rhetoric of 'embarrassment' over prevailing presumptions about Afrikaner nationalist music as unevolved, cringeworthy and unappreciated by mainstream South African musical discourses.¹²⁹ Further, studies of the cultures surrounding Afrikaner popular music more recently have suggested that *boeremusiek* has struggled to grasp a confident sense of its own identity throughout the twentieth century and continuing to the present day.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Van Heyningen, 'Concentration Camps', 27. On the significance of the anti-camp campaigns of Emily Hobhouse, see Wessels, *The Anglo-Boer War*, 150; Marouf Hasian, 'The "Hysterical" Emily Hobhouse and Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy', *Western Journal of Communication* 67/2 (2003): 138–63; Michael Godby, 'Confronting Horror: Emily Hobhouse and the Concentration Camp Photographs of the South African War', *Kronos* 32 (2006): 34–48; Liz Stanley, "'A Strange Thing is Memory": Emily Hobhouse, Memory Work, Moral Life and the "Concentration System"', *South African Historical Journal* 52/1 (2005): 60–81; and Paula M. Krebs, "'The Last of the Gentlemen's Wars": Women in the Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy', *History Workshop Journal* 33 (1992): 38–56.

¹²⁷ Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, 4.

¹²⁸ See Froneman, 'Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty', 1: 'The concertina is often used in popular Afrikaans vocal music as a marker of nostalgia'.

¹²⁹ See Froneman's compelling discussion of *boeremusiek* as a framework of 'embarrassment' for the white South African researcher in 'The Riches of Embarrassment', *Critical Arts* 25/2 (2011): 309–15.

¹³⁰ On general trends in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, see Christi van der Westhuizen, 'Afrikaners in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Inward Migration and Enclave Nationalism', *HTS Teologiese Studies* 72/1 (2016): 1–9; and Danelle van Zyl-Hermann, 'Make Afrikaners Great Again! National Populism, Democracy and the New White Minority Politics in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41/15 (2018): 2673–92. On the relationship of these themes to music, see Willemien Froneman, 'She Danced Alone: Jo Fourie, Songcatcher of the Groot Marico', *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21/1 (2012): 53–76; and Schalk D. Van Der Merwe, "'Radio Apartheid": Investigating a History of Compliance and Resistance in Popular Afrikaans Music, 1956–1979', *South African Historical Journal* 66/2 (2014): 349–70.

Drawing upon and expanding this previous work for a trauma studies framework, I contend that Volkan's psychological framework of 'societal mourning', an extension of Freud's concept of melancholia,¹³¹ can be read as a way to understand how entire communities have been able to articulate and express themselves in relation to wartime trauma, not least through music. As Volkan maintains:

A massive trauma at the hands of the enemy can never remain a regional trauma. The feeling of humiliation and helplessness of the people of the affected sector is automatically felt by almost all those who belong to the same large-group identity, such as one defined by ethnicity or nationality. The society then starts behaving like an individual who suffers from perennial mourning.¹³²

As a culture of people who have often aligned themselves with a rhetoric of unending and predestined suffering,¹³³ Afrikaner communities from the time of the South African War to the present have also fixated, in musically defining themselves, on the mournful Dutch psalm tunes sung in the camps and the wheezing timbre of the concertina (however 'embarrassing' this may be),¹³⁴ rather than moving past these associations towards more positive presentations of their cultural musicality. Helpful here is Stanley's articulation of the complexity of Afrikaner mourning about the South African War, which, she claims, 'raises fundamental ontological and epistemological questions about the nature of life and its boundaries with death, about memory, about emotions and their power in people's lives'.¹³⁵ Afrikaner mourning can thus have a myriad of results: '[t]urn the kaleidoscope one way', claims Stanley, 'and behold the suffering mourning Boer mother. Turn it another, and behold the vengeful Afrikaner nationalist. *Both* have to be seen and at one and the same time, for the Boer mother did indeed suffer and more than 22,000 of her children certainly died'.¹³⁶ Linking this context of a 'double vision' of Afrikaner identity to Derrida's notion that 'mourning is interminable ... right up until death',¹³⁷ Stanley thus describes a 'dynamis', or 'economy of exchanges' through which the relationship of mourning and remembrance occurs. Through the process of "'tracing the name", the past continues to reverberate in the present,

¹³¹ Volkan, 'Not Letting Go', 90.

¹³² Volkan, 'Not Letting Go', 104.

¹³³ For further reading on Afrikaner nationalism, see André Du Toit, 'No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology', *The American Historical Review* 88/4 (1983): 920–52; 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904–1929', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29/1 (2003): 155–76; Saul Dubow, 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of "Race"', *The Journal of African History* 33/2 (1992): 209–37; Hermann Giliomee, 'The Growth of Afrikaner Identity', in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, ed. William Beinart and Saul Dubow (London: Routledge, 2003): 189–205; and Thomas M. Blaser and Christi van der Westhuizen, 'Introduction: The Paradox of Post-Apartheid "Afrikaner" Identity: Deployments of Ethnicity and Neo-Liberalism', *African Studies* 71/3 (2012): 380–90.

¹³⁴ The word 'embarrassing' is used here in reference to Froneman, 'The Riches of Embarrassment', 309–315.

¹³⁵ Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, 26.

¹³⁶ Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, 26, emphasis original.

¹³⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'By Force of Mourning', *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996), 172, as cited in Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, 36.

with the borders between memory and forgetting shifting unpredictably as a consequence'.¹³⁸

Another recent perspective on trauma in the South African context is Chris N. van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working through Trauma*.¹³⁹ With reference to Apartheid, they trace the 'unacknowledged trauma' between 'silence and disclosure', in which 'traumatic events that produce traumatic effects' can sometimes 'create a void'.¹⁴⁰ In trying to fill this void, they claim, '[t]he struggle with trauma is a struggle with memory'; 'Trauma is not remembered in the same way as normal events ... The repetitive intrusion of traumatic memory into the lives of survivors renders victims and survivors powerless, without any internal resources to control the intrusive traumatic memories'.¹⁴¹

Returning to the idea of the sonic legacies of colonial degeneration, Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela's concept of a traumatic 'void' in South Africa provides a potentially productive space for strains of sonic trauma to be sounded. In this formulation, the idea of a traumatic Afrikaner concertina not only reinforces nineteenth-century British imperial acts of musical othering, but it also renders Afrikaner communities 'stuck' in the imagined, mournful musical soundscapes of a shared traumatic past. This is the kind of process that Volkan has described as 'perennial mourning'.¹⁴² A 'perennial mourner', for Volkan,

cannot identify with the enriching aspects of the mental representation of the lost object and the adaptive ego functions associated with this mental representation. This kind of mourner cannot find 'suitable reservoirs' for externalizing the representation of the lost person or thing. On the other hand, the mourner does not end up identifying totally with the lost object representation and does not, in other words go through a 'normal' mourning process or develop depression. Instead, these mourners keep the object representation of the lost person or thing within their self-representation as a specific and unassimilated 'foreign body'. In the psychoanalytic literature such an unassimilated object representation or object image is known as an 'introject'.¹⁴³

Volkan's description of perennial mourning may aptly apply to the metaphor of the concertina as an 'introject' in wartime discourses about traumatic soundscapes. Because Afrikaner communities suffered extensive losses, particularly through lack of food, ill health and death in the concentration camps, they were not, as a community, able to go through 'normal' processes of mourning.¹⁴⁴ As a result,

¹³⁸ Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, 36.

¹³⁹ Chris N. van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working through Trauma* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

¹⁴⁰ Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, *Narrating Our Healing*, 24.

¹⁴¹ Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, *Narrating Our Healing*, vii.

¹⁴² See Volkan, 'Not Letting Go', 90.

¹⁴³ Volkan defines an 'introject' as 'an object representation or a special object image with which the individual who has it wishes to identify. But the identification does not take place, and the object representation or the special object image, with its own "boundaries", remains in the individual's self-representation as an unassimilated mental construct'. Volkan, 'Not Letting Go', 98–9.

¹⁴⁴ As Nasson notes, '[h]orrendously high mortality rates in British concentration camps, and the loss of perhaps as much as 20 per cent of the tiny Boer republican populations, meant that it represented a form of historical trauma for Afrikaner society, the depth of which

at least in musical terms, the concertina may also be framed as an 'object representation' of trauma – what psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas describes as a 'mnemonic object'.¹⁴⁵ In applying this notion to the lexicon of objects, Bollas writes that:

Objects can be said to have a lexical function when we employ them to 'speak' our idiom through the 'syntax of self experience'. The mnemonic object is a particular form of subject object that contains a projectively identified self experience, and when we use it, something of that self state stored in it will arise.¹⁴⁶

Bollas's idea of an object such as a musical instrument gaining a 'syntax of self experience' can be further applied to Wessels's notion that '[t]oo many South Africans suffer from historical amnesia; for this reason, they do not know who they are, where they come from, why their current situation obtains, or where they are heading'.¹⁴⁷ One way out of this, as Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela maintain, is to recognize that since we 'inherit a communal past from our families, cities, countries; it is never possible to make a completely "new beginning"' without a lot of individual reworking of one's positionality in relation to the narratives constructed by history.¹⁴⁸ Hence, as Froneman has noted, the concertina in the twenty-first century is 'the lead instrument in *boeremusiek* and occup[ies an] iconic status in white Afrikaans culture'.¹⁴⁹ However, the instrument still retains seemingly permanent and inexorable connotations of groundlessness and displacement in Afrikaner communities, themes which have only been exacerbated by the rise of Afrikaner national music under and since Apartheid. As noted by Giliomee,

During the 1950s the Afrikaners in growing numbers saw themselves as part of a *volksbeweging*, a people on the move, putting their imprint on the state, defining its symbols, making bilingualism a reality, adapting to an urban environment and giving their schools and universities a pronounced Afrikaans character. Teachers made conscious efforts to increase the sense of distinctiveness through encouraging the singing of folk songs at schools and organizing *volkspele* or folk dances as extra-curricular activity. The Afrikaans radio service played seven hours of *boeremusiek* or Afrikaans folk music every week.¹⁵⁰

Afrikaner folk music, then, became a central component of constructing communal identity at a time when Afrikaner communities were recovering from the political conflicts of the twentieth century. And yet, as Froneman suggests, the role of the

imperial and other English-speaking historians have perhaps rarely fully recognized'. Nasson, 'South African War', 111.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 1993): 19–21.

¹⁴⁶ Bollas, *Being a Character*, 21. For further reading see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996); Jeffrey Alexander, ed., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Nigel Hunt, *Memory, War, and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁴⁷ Wessels, *The Anglo-Boer War*, 162.

¹⁴⁸ Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, *Narrating Our Healing*, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Froneman, 'Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty', 64.

¹⁵⁰ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 491.

concertina within *boeremusiek* did not represent progress – rather, it symbolized being even more stuck in the past, despite – or perhaps because of – its ongoing presence as a nostalgic genre. As Van der Waal and Robins have explored, twentieth-century nationalist nostalgia for the war permeated Afrikaner music even through the post-Apartheid era, when the popular song ‘De la Rey’ ‘helped to reassert the imagined boundaries of white Afrikanerdom’, while also reinscribing ‘nostalgic feelings among a middle-class Afrikaans-speaking white population that experienced itself as besieged’.¹⁵¹

Volkan’s notion that ‘[m]any perennial mourners spontaneously use the term “frozen” when they speak of their dreams’,¹⁵² could be a useful framework for approaching musical associations of Afrikaner ethnic suffering that can permeate a society’s musical identity for generations despite other societal and musical changes. This becomes additionally problematic when a community does not feel that they have musical agency in relation to an oppressor. As DeNora has argued in *Music in Everyday Life*, ‘[a]t the level of daily life, music has power ... To be in control, then, of the soundtrack of social action is to provide a framework for the organization of social agency, a framework for how people perceive (consciously or subconsciously) potential avenues of conduct’.¹⁵³ When applied to communal identification, in Volkan’s framework, the discordant soundscapes of the concertina become a ‘shared linking object’, functioning in the same way as a physical memorial.¹⁵⁴ The prospects for overcoming generational trauma for Afrikaner communities were therefore extraordinarily difficult in light of the traumatic discourses of ethnic degeneration that were applied to them by the British. Accordingly, narratives of suffering were deeply engrained within Afrikaner historiographies of the South African War.

The Boer concertina, then, ‘sounded’ a legacy of suffering that was both imposed by the imperial enemy and reinforced by nostalgic narratives of generational suffering. The journalistic narratives of the concertina’s ‘deadly work in the trenches’ thus are historically significant not so much for their historical accuracy but for what they implied about an instrument’s visceral – and potentially deadly – effect on the bodies of its Boer listeners. Walter Benjamin memorably wrote that ‘[t]o articulate the past historically’ does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” ... It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’.¹⁵⁵ Benjamin’s historical comment can be usefully applied to Volkan’s process of perennial mourning, where, for an individual or a community, traumatic associations might be repeatedly triggered by the sound of an instrument or the flash of a visual symbol. Notably, the concertina has remained conspicuously separate from British South African musical practices.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the

¹⁵¹ Van der Waal and Robins, ‘De Lay Rey’, 779.

¹⁵² Volkan, ‘Not Letting Go’, 103.

¹⁵³ Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 17.

¹⁵⁴ Volkan, ‘Not Letting Go’, 104.

¹⁵⁵ Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 255, 262.

¹⁵⁶ The concertina has been discussed by Denis Martin in relation to the musical ‘creolization’ of mixed-race communities in nineteenth-century South Africa; see Denis Martin, *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa* (Somerset West: African Minds, 2013): 78–80. The presence (or lack thereof) of the concertina within white-British South African communities is an area that is certainly open for discussion.

potentially traumatic connotations of the instrument have been reinforced by the fact that the rise of Afrikaner folk culture was bolstered by the perpetuation of cyclic suffering going back to the *Voortrekkers*, which only reinforces a sense of perennial mourning. As Farrell has argued, '[p]eople not only suffer trauma; they use it, and the idea of it, for all sorts of ends, good and ill. The trope can be ideologically manipulated, reinforced, and exploited'.¹⁵⁷ Thus – and Farrell's notion may be usefully applied to an aesthetics of Afrikaner folk music – '[m]any cultures have systematically induced trauma or near-trauma in an effort to reinforce the conviction of a ground of experience and to strengthen group bonding'.¹⁵⁸

With its wailing sonorities, the concertina as a 'suffering' instrument is thus a particularly apt sonic symbol of repeated physical suffering in Afrikaner culture. Froneman, likewise, locates the Afrikaner folk concertina today within a soundscape that is redolent of congenital respiratory pain:

In Afrikaans the concertina is sometimes called a *donkielong* – a donkey's lung. The term points to the braying sound of the instrument and to its mechanisms of respiration. The concertina 'screeches' and 'wails' when air is forced out of its lungs, or 'sighs' in a slow exhalation of breath. The commonplace metaphor of the concertina as a living, breathing thing holds no subtle poetry. Like a human voice it 'quivers' ... with emotion when shaken on held notes, effecting a vibrato of sorts. 'Gasping' for air, phrases end off belabouredly before the next 'wheezy' inhalation. For many commentators since the late nineteenth-century, beauty and gainliness were not what the concertina was about. Its charm lay precisely in its existential, yet mesmerizing unpleasantness.¹⁵⁹

That the timbre of the concertina may 'sound' a form of nationalistic identification that is simultaneously discomforting, connoting a wheezing rasp of a nineteenth-century invalid, colonial inmate, or even farm animal, reinforces a received, inherited association with cultural trauma and physical decay; it renders its listeners captive only in its 'mesmerizing unpleasantness'.

Conclusion: Hearing Sonic Trauma

Did the concertina really lack any 'subtle poetry'¹⁶⁰ when it was allegedly used in the South African trenches to lure Afrikaner soldiers to their death? Perhaps the aesthetic situation was indeed more complex, as there should be room for the Boer soldiers to have sounded their own musical subjectivities *against* the British Pied Piper. In closing I would like to draw upon Suzanne Cusick's comments on the musical subjectivities of prisoners who were tortured during the USA's War on Terror. As Cusick claims,

The destruction of prisoners' subjectivities partly depends on the acoustically and philosophically salient fact that manipulations of acoustical environment always produce the somatic effect of sympathetic vibration. Always compelled by the physical properties of sound to vibrate in their very bones with those sounds, the prisoners

¹⁵⁷ Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture*, 21.

¹⁵⁸ Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture*, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Froneman, 'Blackface', 75.

¹⁶⁰ The term 'subtle poetry' was used in the extract above: Froneman, 'Blackface', 75.

subjected to the music programme have no choice but to become, themselves, the characteristic sounds of their captors. This is, I argue, an ultimate violence that batters prisoners' bodies, shatters (however temporarily) the capacity to control the acoustical relationality that is the foundation of subjectivity and blasts away all sense of privacy, leaving in its place a feeling of paradoxically unprivate isolation.¹⁶¹

Music is an effective means of torture in Cusick's study because the prisoners (and guards) have no means of unhearing what is played to them. The same can be said of the British construction of the Boer soldiers in the trenches – being arrested by the strains of an instrument so closely associated with Boer farm life, the Boer soldiers are compelled to frame the music as welcoming rather than deadly. Only once the concertina had been established as a trope of Afrikaner cultural trauma did the sound of the instrument simultaneously bolster British constructions of racial degeneracy and establish the instrument as a symbol of recurrent Afrikaner suffering. If the structures of discipline in the context of the South African War were indeed what Forth has referred to as 'transformative technologies',¹⁶² then the negative transformation of the concertina from a degenerate folk instrument into an audible signifier of cultural trauma demonstrates how the concertina in the context of the South African War can itself reflect the power structures placed on those in captivity, and also embody an anthropomorphized emblem of physical decay.¹⁶³

Afrikaner trauma, 'transmitted across a number of generations',¹⁶⁴ has thus deeply influenced the collective psyches of ostracized societies long after the cultural atrocities have taken place.¹⁶⁵ As Boersma notes, this is further complicated for Afrikaner communities today because the legacy of victimhood from the

¹⁶¹ Cusick, 'Towards an Acoustemology', 276.

¹⁶² 'British camps were [intended to be] transformative technologies ... The goal was to make inmates loyal, sanitary, orderly, and, above all, governable'. Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism*, 10.

¹⁶³ The metaphor of the concertina both as a marker of geographical space and as a model for pedagogical flexibility has fascinatingly emerged in recent disparate publications on the future of South Africa, demonstrating that the instrument is not only present in contemporary South African consciousness, but that it also constitutes an opportunity for geographic metaphorization. For example, in a book on decolonial pedagogy, Pam Christie describes that when looking at how a South African school was administratively organized, '[t]he image of a concertina comes to mind – the movements of stretching out and pushing in are in fact different parts of the same instrument. If schooling is the instrument, its official script seems to operate with little or no regard for differences', and '[a]gain, in the concertina image, the system at its stretched-out parts bore little resemblance to its pushed-in parts in terms of quality and concentration of resources'; Pam Christie, *Decolonising Schools in South Africa: The Impossible Dream?* (New York: Routledge, 2020): 21. And in a completely different context, discussing the local vs state attitudes to South Africa's Kruger National Park, Dlamini has described those who treat the park's 'border like a concertina, contracting and expanding it at will', moving 'back and forth as they used their presence to take advantage of the weak and incomplete state's failure to be present in the park'; Jacob S.T. Dlamini, *Safari Nation: A Social History of the Kruger National Park* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2020), 30.

¹⁶⁴ Atkinson, *Trauma Trails*, xi.

¹⁶⁵ See Atkinson, *Trauma Trails*, 181, where Atkinson describes the transgenerational effects of the 'traumatic reinforcement of trauma as people in their relationships re-traumatize themselves and each other', and applies this notion to the transmission of Aboriginal song.

South African War is confronted by the trauma of being a perpetrator during Apartheid, which has left the state of 'being Afrikaans' in a 'troubled condition' that is difficult to resolve: 'Afrikaners must manage the emotions of loss, guilt, and shame. They have to confront their lost social status, and the burden of stigma on their ethnic identity'.¹⁶⁶ And as Abulof has claimed, '[j]ust as Zionists looked to history, not least the Holocaust, in envisioning existential threats, so Afrikaner collective memory was scarred by the Anglo-Boer War'.¹⁶⁷ Abulof concludes, moreover, that the 'British threat, however, went beyond the war, impairing the Afrikaners' quest for ontological security (forging a sound Afrikaner identity) and epistemic security (consolidating Afrikanerdom)'.¹⁶⁸ Jumping forward several decades, Abulof claims that Apartheid constituted a 're-deepening of the "Abyss Within"', where post-Apartheid Afrikaners confronted the double danger of struggling to secure a political future while also tending to the 'scars of the past'.¹⁶⁹ If such 'scars' might be reframed to also have sonic elements, then it is worth putting pressure on the question of whether the concertina, as a legacy of the South African War, can 'sound' a new ontological security, shaped by both oppression and resistance.

In today's international political climate, where spaces of racial incarceration are increasing globally – only for many reports of their atrocities to be undercut in some sectors as 'fake news' – it seems all the more incumbent upon our discipline to engage with the stark implications of possible transgenerational traumas upon marginalized communities, and to grapple with how these traumas might influence musical cultures in the future. Forth has recently made this connection in reference to the link between the 'humanitarianism' that justified the British imperial concentration camps, and the accusations of 'fake news' against Americans who have recently use the term 'concentration camp' as a means of describing the state of migrant detention centres under the Trump administration.¹⁷⁰ In other words, forms of wrongful incarceration that are justified by 'humanitarian' principles have not disappeared, and risk continual perpetuation without direct intervention.

As DeNora has proposed, the 'history of music in the West is punctuated with attempts to enlist and censure music's powers'.¹⁷¹ The concertina has certainly been enlisted, censored, and reimagined. Its potentially (dis)comforting voice in the soundscapes of Afrikaner music even today speaks to the legacies of trauma latent in its wheezing registers. If these timbral registers have been inscribed into Afrikaner identity as a mode of communal suffering, then the enduring presence of the concertina in the postcolonial world raises only more questions about the extent to which the aesthetics of an instrument once framed as a technology of war might eventually be raised out of a cycle of perennial mourning, and into a space of potential reconciliation.

¹⁶⁶ Boersma, 'Afrikaner Nevertheless', 243.

¹⁶⁷ Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*, 248.

¹⁶⁸ Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*, 248.

¹⁶⁹ Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*, 249.

¹⁷⁰ Aidan Forth, 'Concentration Camps have Deep Roots in Liberal Democracies', <https://theconversation.com/concentration-camps-have-deep-roots-in-liberal-democracies-124340> (accessed 23 October 2019).

¹⁷¹ DeNora, *After Adorno*, 1.