

# Introduction

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The presumption that music is an invariably uplifting and ennobling art form is well established and dates back to antiquity. For the Pythagoreans and the Greek philosopher Aristoxenus of Tarentum, music carried healing powers: while medicine healed the body, music soothed the soul.<sup>1</sup> In the much older Ayurvedic tradition, music was (and is) recognised for its holistic influence on both physical and mental processes. Informing both elite and popular ideas as well as the discipline of musicology, this positive and therapeutic view of music has tended to obscure the darker side of the tune, as it were<sup>2</sup>: the implications of music's long and equally well-founded associations with war, punishment and humiliation across diverse historical periods and cultural and geographic regions.

Despite the tendency to focus on music's benign and positive role, we are confronted today with clear disclosures of its role in torture and human rights violations. Recent revelations of music's use in the detention and interrogation centres of the so-called 'War on Terror' have underlined music's potential to wound and cause suffering – to damage subjectivity by inflicting pain both physically and psychologically. Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib have attracted global media attention, but by no means are they unique cases. As perhaps the most publicized recent examples, they illuminate the problematic nature of the use of music in detention and have provoked much public discussion and debate. From the latter, some key questions

can be gleaned: Can music be considered as a form of torture? Is it music in itself or the high volume and repetition that transform it into torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment (hereafter CIDT)? Can the use of music in detention be beneficial for the prisoners, or is it always aligned with an intention to subdue, break, and often ridicule them?

These difficult and contentious questions have not gone unnoticed by musicologists, although it must be said that musicology as a discipline has mostly passed over them in silence. Over the last seven years, however, a painful opening up within the discipline has taken place, prompted by a small group of scholars and researchers who have refused the tendency towards avoidance. U.S. musicologist Suzanne Cusick's investigations into the use of music as a weapon of torture in recent conflicts has stimulated vigorous debates within U.S. musicology.<sup>3-6</sup> Her work and findings prompted the boards of the American Musicological Society, the Society for American Music and the Society for Ethnomusicology to pass a joint resolution in March 2008 condemning the use of music for physical and psychological torture. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Research Group 'Music, Conflict and the State', also established in 2008, has sought systematically to expose, investigate, document and theorize the use of music in connection with violence. One special focus of the group's research has been music in detention and in the context of human rights violations, with particular emphasis on music and torture.<sup>7-10</sup> Researchers in several countries have also been conducting investigations into music in

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Nazi concentration camps, highlighting the widespread and systematic use of music as torture as well as music's role in disciplining prisoners on an everyday basis in the camps.<sup>11-15</sup>

This volume consists of a selection of papers given at the March 2013 international conference 'Music in Detention', that took place at the University of Goettingen and was organized by the Research Group 'Music, Conflict and the State'. The conference explored the ways in which music has been used in detention camps, prison camps or prisons in diverse times and places. These case studies underscore music's damaging potential when used against people's will (and out of their control) as a means of punishment and/or humiliation. The use of music to harm has often been deployed within programmes and policies branded by the authorities as 're-education'; it has also been used in combination with other torture techniques such as isolation, stress positions, sleep, food and drink deprivation. Music's positive effect on detainees was also explored by a number of papers at the conference, including one in the present volume. The conference aimed, among other things, to bridge the existing gap between academic researchers in musicology and related disciplines, and clinical and legal experts working with torture survivors. Publishing a selection of essays in *Torture* is an important and timely step in this direction. In drawing the attention of experts to the geographical and historical continuities of music's use and abuse, we not only aim to forge collaborations and a fruitful exchange between groups of professionals, we also hope that this exchange will deepen our shared understanding of the extent to which music has been exploited to negative ends by regimes and make this knowledge more available in public discussions of and responses to contem-

porary incidents. More documentation of practices of music in detention, as well as its damaging effects and bodily and mental traces, will be crucial if the revised legal definitions of torture and relevant international law necessary to its prohibition are to be realized. We would therefore like to thank the Editor-in-Chief, Joost den Otter, and his editorial team for giving us the opportunity to reach out to those working in the field of rehabilitation and legal representation of survivors by publishing in *Torture*.

With one exception, all the papers presented here concentrate on the abuse of music in detention. M. J. Grant's opening article explores the question of which musical practices could constitute a violation of the right to freedom from torture and other forms of CID treatment, and reflects on attitudes to the use of music in torture, including in the human rights community. Drawing on illustrations by Dutch renaissance artists and legal sources, Marie Louise Herzfeld-Schild investigates different kinds of punishment that employed real or symbolic musical instruments in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. Inna Klause's article investigates cultural 're-education' programmes in the Soviet Gulag. Focusing on officially organised musical life in the Gulag from the 1920s to the 1930s, Klause shows that although music-making and listening encouraged prisoners to an extent, it was also perceived by many to be a form of physical and psychological torture. Anna Papaeti's article examines the policy of 're-education' for left-wing political prisoners in Greece during the military Junta (1967–1974) as well as the civil-war (1946–1949) and post-civil-war era. Drawing on interviews with former detainees, Papaeti underlines the damaging effect of music and the need to understand its potential to degrade but also torture individuals. Áine Mangaoang investigates human-

rights violations with regard to the Dance Programme practiced in Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (CPDRC) in the Philippines. She focuses on the dissemination on Youtube of the 'Philippine Prison Thriller' video, featuring the 1,500 unconvicted inmates dancing to Michael Jackson's song 'Thriller'. Mangaoang questions the programme's rehabilitation potential, and points out how it may distract the general public from the appalling conditions of the Filipino prison system.

Last but not least, Johann Buis' article discusses the positive effect that music held for detainees at South Africa's notorious prison Robben Island during Apartheid. Buis explores the use of song and dance by political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. (This is the only case study in this issue in which music was used freely by political prisoners and was not imposed from above by prison authorities.) He suggests that music and dance formed an internal cultural grounding for the political prisoners which not only enabled their survival in prison, but was also instrumental in shaping public policy later on when Mandela chose forgiveness instead of retribution during his term as President.

*This issue of Torture was at an advanced state of production when news of Mandela's death was announced on 5 December 2013, lending new resonance to this closing article. It thus serves as a tribute to one of the few world leaders who has placed human dignity and human rights at the very heart of their political agendas.*

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# The Illogical Logic of Music Torture

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## Abstract

This article draws on research into the use of music in the context of torture – both as a technique of torture and as a means of rehabilitation – to ask what types of musical activities and practices may constitute ill-treatment, up to and including torture. As well as providing information on the ways music is used in the context of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (hereafter: CIDT), the article discusses responses to this issue in the scholarly, legal and therapeutic communities. Pointing to a widespread link between musical practices and humiliation of the prisoner and celebration of the power of those in charge over those held in detention, the author argues that coerced musical practices of any sort in detention are a cause for grave concern. She draws on research into post-traumatic stress disorder (hereafter: PTSD) and the torture-CIDT distinction to argue for an approach to the use of music in detention that places primacy on the dignity of the detained person.

*Key words:* Music, torture, CIDT, forced listening, forced singing/playing

*“Du holde Kunst, in wieviel grauen Stunden,  
Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt,  
Hast du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb' entzunden,  
Hast mich in eine beßre Welt entrückt!”*

*[Thou fairest art, in how many grey hours  
Ensnared by the savage cycle of life  
Hast thou ignited warm love in my heart  
Hast borne me into a better world!]<sup>a</sup>*

*“Torture, an ugly word for an ugly act, evokes in most of us unpleasant, visceral reactions [...] Instinctively we turn away from the evil of torture lest it contaminate our beings (souls?) in some fundamental way.”<sup>1</sup>*

Musicians and music-lovers alike no doubt breathed a sigh of relief when President Barack Obama resolved to end the so-called ‘enhanced interrogation’ techniques used against detainees in the ‘War On Terror’.<sup>2</sup> These techniques famously (or infamously) included the use of constant loud music, with ex-detainees’ reports of this music’s impact upon them leaving no doubt that it amounted to torture. Responses to the use of music to torture were manifold in the community of musicians, music-lovers and others. The U.K. Musicians’ Union, for example, together with the NGO Reprive, initiated the Zero DB campaign to mobilise people against this form of torture. Another example is the Stone Flowers project implemented by Musicians Without Borders in conjunction with Freedom From Torture. Stone Flowers is a music group made up of survivors of torture which has gone on tours and released a CD, hoping in this way both to give voice to survivors of torture and to raise vital funds for rehabilitation services. According to those behind the project, however, the idea arose as a response to the use of music in torture.<sup>3</sup> This is in some ways typical of the way that people react when they hear that music has been used in

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<sup>a</sup> From Franz von Schober’s (1796-1882) poem *An die Musik*. Translation: M. J. Grant.

torture: they retreat into other forms of music and thus try to confirm to themselves and others that the use of music in torture is but an exception to a general rule that music is, first and foremost, a redemptive art. Such is often the case, for example, when it comes to reflections on how music was used in Nazi concentration camps: despite extensive evidence to the contrary, there is a tendency to latch on to the sense of hope and dignity and the promise of survival that music may have brought to victims of Nazi persecution and atrocities, as indeed in some cases it did. The only problem is that this reading of music's role in the camps conveniently pastes over the other aspects: its use to humiliate and psychologically and physically destroy people, sometimes in the form of daily routines and formalised procedures, sometimes in the form of sadistic practices that had not even a pretend function other than the amusement of those who commanded them.

Studies of music in Nazi concentration camps, and scholarly investigations into exposure to music in U.S. detention camps – as outlined in the introduction to this issue of *Torture* – form the backbone of an increasing number of investigations into the connection between music and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment. While work inspired by the recent U.S. cases has often situated the topic within the idea of 'sonic warfare', focusing on music as heard and sonic aspects of musical practices<sup>e.g. 4-5</sup>, work on the U.S. cases lays more focus on music as an activity and on ritual practice in the camps, and music as a means of resistance and survival. Recent and ongoing studies have begun to widen the historical and geographical remit of work on music and torture with research relating to Greece (including in the present volume) and Chile during periods of dictatorship and war, as well as historical

case studies on the British military.<sup>6-8</sup>

A further study in its initial stages, conducted by members of my research group, will look in depth at cases from the Middle East. Often, such investigations emerge from more general musicological investigations into the role of music in military strategy, or under certain political regimes, but in so doing they frequently draw on information gathered by legal advocates and campaigning organisations: Physicians for Human Rights, for example, was one of the first organisations to recognise the harm caused by musical practices used in Guantánamo.<sup>9</sup> There have been some considerations of music and torture from the standpoint of legal theory, with increasing recognition that different forms of music can constitute torture: such recognition comes, *inter alia*, in concluding observations from the United Nations Convention Against Torture (hereafter: UNCAT)<sup>10</sup>, and in an unequivocal statement from the President of the European Court of Human Rights, in a published essay, that 'Music can amount to torture, and lyrics can be the vehicle of human rights abuses'.<sup>11</sup> (p. 371) Even the increased willingness to submit as evidence testimony relating to the use of musical practices against prisoners, as for example demonstrated in documentation from the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, points to a change in perceptions of the role of musical practices in the maltreatment and torture of prisoners when compared, for example, to how such evidence was treated during the *Torturers' Trials* in Greece in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>6</sup> In part, such changes can be attributed to improved understanding of the impact of psychological torture, though the boundary between psychological and physical torture is arguably nowhere more grey than in the case of practices involving music.

Despite this progress in recognising and

responding to the use of music in the context of torture, the sheer scope and historical longevity of these phenomena have only rarely been reflected in scholarly discourse. As a result, the importance of this topic for work to prevent torture has not always been given due consideration. The articles in this issue of *Torture Journal* provide further case studies on just some of the ways music has been and is used in contexts of punishment and detention, for both positive and negative ends. My aim in this article is to focus on a central question that arises from them, namely, when the use of music in detention can be considered a form of CIDT up to and including torture. Given the widespread therapeutic use of music during and after periods of detention, but also a significant body of evidence pointing to the frequent conjunction of music with forms of ill-treatment and torture of detainees, answering this question must be seen as a matter of some priority.

### **Music as Therapy and as Torture**

Discussions of music and torture tend to focus on exposure to constant loud music, something which is more widespread than is often assumed. However, the use of music in the context of torture and CIDT also includes several practices involving actual or simulated singing/playing, and/or activities conducted to music created by oneself or others. Such practices include, but are not limited to: forced singing/playing either as a form of degradation and humiliation, or as an act of physical violence where the activity of singing is prolonged or carried out in such a way as to cause exhaustion and/or damage to the body; forcing prisoners to dance or to carry out extensive physical exercises to music; forcing people to sing while they are exposed to physical beatings.<sup>12-13</sup> Like exposure to loud music, these practices are

generally used in conjunction with others, and their impact can thus only be understood by looking at the whole context, a point to which I will return later. The physical and psychological damage caused might vary significantly in each case (the lack of studies looking specifically at musical forms of torture and ill-treatment make it difficult to establish this with any degree of reliability at the present time). In the case of forced singing/playing/movement to music, damage may be caused by the physical effort involved; the damage in the case of being forced to listen does not stop at the ears but may inflict further physical damage either directly or indirectly, for example through loss of sleep. The psychological damage is dependent on a number of factors and therefore difficult to predict; what we do know is that for some survivors, forms of torture involving music were viewed by them as amongst the worst they had experienced, while for others, it offered them a way to cope.

Though the ways that music has been used, and the contexts in which such uses arise, is varied, there is one common denominator aside from the fact that all these practices have to do with music at one level or another. In all these cases, participation in a musical activity is not entered into voluntarily: one is forced to listen, or one is forced to play or sing or dance. This also differentiates from the outset these practices from others which ostensibly may take the same form, but do not involve coercion. This distinction is of prime importance not only for developing safeguards, but also if we want to understand how music can, in the most extreme cases, function as an instrument of torture.

Ironic though it may seem, case study reports from music therapists who have worked with survivors of torture and ill-treat-

ment or other traumatic experiences present us with a useful way-in to understanding the logic that operates when music is used for the polar opposite reason: not to rebuild, but to destroy. A common characteristic of such case study reports is that they trace a journey from initial sessions in which the patient's improvisations are marked by repetition, lack of development, and lack of response to the therapist's attempts to accompany, to musical responses that are not only more inventive and varied but, crucially, demonstrate an ability to interact musically with the therapist.<sup>14-16</sup> In the context of a discussion which used one such case study to explore larger questions of the relationship between music and violence, Matthew Dixon suggested the following:

"Music expresses the whole range of human feelings and relationships, including those that are violent [...] As far as possible, the therapist must ensure that the music proceeds from the expressive needs of the client, and never loses touch with those needs. However, the primary agent of change in music therapy is a process of creative interaction, inherent in the act of making music, whose nature is the polar opposite of violence. Thus music can encompass a range of violent feelings, urges and instincts, but as a process it will naturally tend towards intimate and creative personal engagement. This explains its particular relevance and usefulness as a treatment for the traumatic effects of political violence, and also suggests its limitations."<sup>14</sup> (pp 128,129)

I would not agree with Dixon's conclusion that music implicitly tends towards intimacy and creativity, at least to the extent that these are viewed as being situated at the opposite end of the spectrum of human emotions from violence; I know too many examples of people being very creative in their destructive use of music, including

using it in ways that very effectively breach the intimate sphere of the subject. Nevertheless, Dixon's explanation of what happens in the therapeutic setting underlines again the crucial difference to the ways music is used against prisoners and not with or for them. He also highlights an important fact often overlooked in many scholarly discussions of music, but increasingly explored in more recent scholarship into what has been called communicative musicality. This newer scholarship underlines that many of the most significant aspects of musical communication cannot be understood solely via the idea of music as a form of expression (with its underlying implication of one voice transmitting in one direction) but by understanding human musicality as involving particular processes of interaction, response, and coordination of movements, sounds and gestures.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, it does us no harm at all to consider what is being expressed when music is forced on detainees, regardless of what the music is, what type of practice is involved, or what the larger context is. It has often been recognised that terror generally, and torture specifically, has a communicative function – that torture, for example, is not about gaining information or establishing guilt, but sending a message. The use of music in such contexts is no exception to this. Fundamentally, and whatever else may be implied by the exact repertoire of music used coercive practices, what is always being expressed through music is the nature of the relationship between the torturer and the victim. This is a relationship characterised by the complete power of one over the other – an unequal relationship which obviously always exists between the jailer and the jailed. But there are ways to conduct this relationship which do not call into question the basic humanity of the detainee, and which do not

celebrate the dominance of one over the other. Such a celebration of power, which not infrequently has sadistic elements, is rarely far away when people deprived of their liberty are forced to make music, and in many cases it is a key element of the way such musical practices are designed. This is what makes all forms of forced musical activity worthy of our utmost vigilance.

### **Forced Participation in Music: Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading**

Recent years have seen a growing tendency to critiquing the distinction often drawn between torture and other forms of CIDT. Attempts such as that undertaken by the Bush administration to classify certain methods of torture as constituting ‘only’ CIDT have led several human rights advocates to reiterate that the distinction between the two must not be read as, in any way, condoning or allowing the latter. As Manfred Nowak and Elizabeth McArthur described in this journal in 2006:

“The distinction between torture and less serious forms of ill-treatment, all of which are absolutely prohibited under Article 7 CCPR, other international and regional treaty provisions as well as customary international law, was introduced because some of the specific State obligations laid down in CAT were meant to apply to torture only (above all, the obligation to criminalize acts of torture and to apply the principle of universal jurisdiction in this regard). Other obligations aimed at prevention, in particular by means of education and training, by systematically reviewing interrogation rules and practices, by ensuring a prompt and impartial *ex officio* investigation, and by ensuring an effective complaints mechanism, as laid down in Articles 10 to 13, must be equally applied to other forms of ill-treatment as well.”<sup>18</sup> (p 148)

In other words, those governments who revel too much in their good track record in the case of torture nevertheless have continuous responsibilities in monitoring and taking proactive steps to prevent all other forms of ill-treatment as well, and generally have no grounds for complacency in this regard.<sup>19</sup>

This issue comes into particularly sharp focus when we consider that some of the distinctions drawn between torture and apparently less harmful practices very often transpire to be ill-founded. Research undertaken over almost twenty years by Metin Başoğlu and colleagues into the connection between different forms of torture and CIDT and incidences of PTSD has provided strong evidence for looking again at the distinctions often drawn between different practices generally regarded as more or less severe. Başoğlu’s research has consistently shown that distress levels experienced during torture, and levels of PTSD after detention, are often linked not to physical methods of torture but to particular forms of psychological ill-treatment, with the most important factor in contributing to stress during detention being the subject’s perception of helplessness and loss of control in the face of extreme fear.<sup>20-22</sup> (This finding is corroborated by and helps explain the impact of exposure to music among some of the U.S. detainees, who talked specifically about the horror of not knowing when the music would start again, or if and when it would stop).<sup>23</sup> Başoğlu’s research, which involved analysis and comparison of testimony from almost five hundred survivors of torture from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia, is interesting for the present topic not only for providing further evidence for the widespread use of exposure to loud music (about one half of survivors of torture in the case of Turkey, and around a third in the case

of the former Yugoslavia, reported being exposed to loud music), but for the conclusions he draws about the connections between different forms of ill-treatment in contributing to severe trauma.<sup>b</sup> He argues that firstly, there is compelling evidence that some types of practices in detention which themselves are not normally classified as torture may in fact exacerbate the stress and pain felt by the detainee to the point at which such a distinction is academic at best; and secondly, and in consequence, that more attention needs to be paid to the interaction between certain types of treatment (or, in his discussion, certain types of stressor), and the context of captivity itself. For the traumatic impact of particular stressors, he argues:

“... is also dependent on contextual processes. Thus, contextual factors need primary attention in any consideration of what constitutes torture. A focus solely on particular methods not only detracts scientific, legal, and public attention from this important issue, but also misleads many people into thinking that it is possible to single out a particular captivity event and decide on whether or not it constitutes torture simply by imagining its impact or extrapolating from own life experiences with ostensibly similar events. Indeed, even experimental evidence, to the extent that it exists, might be misleading in this respect, as controlled experimental conditions do not wholly reflect far more complex real life situations.”<sup>22</sup> (p 142)

The type of disaggregation of practices that Başoğlu is criticising here, principally referring to general debates and also jurisprudence on what does and does not constitute torture, bears an uncanny resemblance to the way that music is often approached when the subject of music in detention and captivity is raised. As Suzanne Cusick also noted at the conference “Music

in Detention” in Göttingen in March 2013, those of us researching this topic are well used to being asked (or provoked) to explain what it is about music ‘itself’ that can be used to torture, and what kinds of music are used – a question that often presupposes that the suitability of music for torture is based on structural characteristics of the music used, whereas most evidence from actual cases currently points instead to the choice of music being politically motivated. We are also used to the kinds of excuses raised that, since musical forms of torture and ill-treatment are never used on their own, it is not the music, but something else, which is doing the real damage. Another excuse often heard is that any type of sound could be used, ergo, it is not the specifically musical qualities of music that are important in torture, but other things, such as the volume at which it is played. But taking the music out of the music torture simply does not explain its impact, or why it is used at all. On the contrary, as I have explored in more detail elsewhere, understanding the history and

<sup>b</sup> Exposure to loud music is the only type of musical ill-treatment specifically listed in the categories used by Başoğlu; there is, however, evidence from other sources relating to both contexts of extensive use of forced singing (in the case of former Yugoslavia) and of forced singing and the use of extensive periods of military-style drill to music in the case of Turkey. To understand the contexts and impact of music in these cases, it would be necessary to further differentiate the data on some of the other types of torture and ill-treatment discussed, and possibly to specifically include forced singing and other types of coerced musical activities in future studies. For information on former Yugoslavia see Annex VIII of the Final report of the United Nations Commission of Experts established pursuant to security council resolution 780 (1992), currently available from: <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/anx/VIII-01.htm> [19 August, 2013]. For information on Turkey see e.g. Amnesty International. Turkey: Testimony on Torture. London: Amnesty International; 1985.

uses of music in military discipline and in political communication, not to mention the plurality of practices that link musical communication with shaming, mockery and humiliation, is essential to understanding why musical practices so often arise in the context of torture and CIDT.<sup>12</sup>

It is here, too, that the seemingly illogical use of music in connection with torture starts to become very logical indeed. If we understand musical activities from the point of view of the type of relationships they express or help emerge, we are also led to very different conclusions about the use of music in detention and, specifically, the use of any form of enforced musical practice in a situation where people are deprived of their liberty. While there are some forms of enforced participation in music that constitute torture, and some that do not constitute torture, I am increasingly convinced that all forms of enforced musical practice in conditions of detention need to be treated seriously. As celebrations of power over the detained person, as attempts to 're-educate' her or him, and, as is so frequent, as practices that are often humiliating by design, they point to an underlying disregard for the detainee's dignity which is a symptom of a much larger evil indeed, and which in turn is practically a prerequisite for tolerating or inflicting more serious forms of ill-treatment, whether or not such do in fact transpire.

### **The Way Forward**

If I were to draw conclusions from the analysis above, they would be two-fold. Firstly, attention to the ways music can be used against prisoners in detention is important not least because of significant evidence from some survivors of the distress and damage this caused them. The evidence supplied by Başoğlu's studies suggests that, approached statistically, exposure to loud

music may not evince such bad average responses as a number of other methods of torture: his published data does not however allow for differentiation between different types of exposure to loud music, nor does it explicitly name other types of maltreatment where music is known to have been a factor, including forced singing and playing. Secondly, however, even if the number of the severest cases of music torture were found to be limited, or the negative impact of music to be less on the majority of survivors than other forms, the very fact of resorting to the use of forced participation in musical acts, and the use of music to humiliate prisoners, is a sufficiently serious sign to warrant our attention to, and our condemnation of these practices, for the very reason of what they reveal about the attitude towards the detainees on the part of those responsible.

These remain preliminary analyses and preliminary conclusions, but they do point the way forward for more research on these issues, and indicate how this research could be of use in improving safeguards for all people in situations of detention, up to and including the prevention of torture. We will never prevent torture solely by stopping exports of weapons used, be they batons, electric shock devices, or loudspeakers, no matter how important such steps may be. We will however make torture increasingly difficult if we validate, time and again, the basic and inviolable principle of the dignity of every single human being. If this inherent dignity of all people is accepted as the single most important benchmark for the treatment of others, it quickly becomes clear that all uses of music to humiliate or poke fun at people held in institutions and other contexts of shorter- or longer-term detention are not to be tolerated. All musical activities, whether listening or performing or moving in time with music, which are not entered into

on a voluntary basis and do not incorporate basic safeguards for the physical and psychological health of the detainees, must be seen as an issue of great concern.

Preventing the worst abuses of physical and mental integrity that can be inflicted through music begins with the much more simple act of removing the sheen from musical activities as in some way intrinsically beneficial and morally good. We need to face up to both the possible negative health effects of different musical practices and the long-standing conjunction between music and processes of humiliation and shaming. As a minimum standard, it may be useful to promote a general guideline that any musical activities and practices in a context of detention must be non-coercive, temporally limited, and must not constitute an attack at any level on the detainee's dignity. Setting out and ensuring the application of such principles should not occur at arms' length from other initiatives to promote the human rights of detainees and in particular to protect them from all forms of CIDT. Indeed, it is my personal conviction, not least on the basis of several years' research on music and torture, that human rights advocates would do well to place greater emphasis on the primacy of human dignity not only as a convincing moral and legal argument against torture, but as a value which is under attack in many other forms of punishment and treatment in detention as well.

Such an approach to prevention does not absolve us from the responsibility of recognising that music can be and is used as an instrument of torture in the stricter sense as well. Given that torture is recognised as a particularly brutal attack on human dignity, and thus as a category of great importance with regard to legal redress, prosecution of the perpetrators, asylum procedures and the

right to rehabilitation, to name just a few areas, demonstrating that the damage wrought by music can be at least as great as other methods of torture is essential if we are to promote the rights of survivors and to prevent future abuses. The media attention given to this issue through the techniques used in U.S. detention camps and prisons in the 'War on Terror' has highlighted a practice established as a contravention of the absolute ban on torture no later than the 1990s, in the UN CAT's concluding observations on the periodic report submitted by Israel.<sup>10</sup> By the same token, this media attention is also in danger of overseeing the much more widespread and long-standing use of music in this and in many other ways in the context of torture. This is most critical where organisations and musicians who initially spearheaded the public outcry against music torture have increasingly laid down their banners in the period since Obama came to power. At best we can blame this on a lack of knowledge and understanding about the general scale of the problem. The more cynical view would be that for many who were so outraged, it was the perceived attack on music rather than on the tortured individual which was the real motivation for their actions. But cynicism does not get us far in the fight against torture, and we can only hope, instead, that a re-energised fight against music torture will emerge that will help disseminate knowledge on the nature and impact of torture and CIDT as a whole, and, not least through this, will attract more and more constituencies into this fight.

And it is sadly not that case that music no longer features in the punishment of those men still illegally detained in Guántanamo Bay, four years after Obama made his commitment to justice and an end to torture there. Papers released between work on the first and second drafts of the present article

reveal a number of practices used against those Guántanamo captives who commenced a hunger strike earlier this year to protest at their continued incarceration although they had been cleared for release. Testimony presented in the form of an animation developed by British newspaper *The Guardian* in conjunction with the organisation *Reprieve*, which represents many current and former inmates of Guantánamo, details practices including but not limited to forced feeding intended to break the will of those on hunger strike. One prisoner refers to the concerted use of noise to harass the hunger strikers in Camp V: 'They are stumbling up and down the tiers, talking, singing. They have brought in a big fan to make noise'.<sup>24</sup> Given the public outcry surrounding exposure to loud recorded music as a method of torture, such recourse to other methods of sonic terror against prisoners is highly cynical as well as demonstrably illegal.

One final point needs to be stressed. Başoğlu's research underlines the importance of looking at torture and CIDT in context, focusing less on the supposed impact of individual methods as such and more on the combination of conditions and practices. By this analysis, it might seem that focusing on what has been called music torture is problematic since here, too, we are focusing on one method (or group of methods) alone. This would be true if the research were to stop at the issue of music and if musical scholars were to do what they have too often done in the past, namely, conduct their affairs in such a way that interaction with scholars from other disciplines is neither possible nor truly desirable. But musicologists, or at least musicologists of a particular kind, do have one great advantage. We see the world musically; musical activities and practices stick out at us and draw our

attention in a way that they don't for many other people, with the exception of musicians and some other music professionals. Moreover, by virtue of our professional background, we have access to resources that can help us understand and contextualise what is happening in different musical situations.

By extension, however, this is not research we can conduct on our own. What we know about how music affects people in the context of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, is wholly dependent on survivor testimony. If we are to build a convincing case for taking this issue seriously we need to gather more information and we need to make public the scale of the problem. This is where we are so dependent on readers of this journal and the wider community of all engaged in the fight against torture and ill-treatment. Post-Bush, there is a real danger that the issue of music torture could disappear from the radar, simply because of the misplaced idea that this method is more or less unique to the case of the 'War on Terror'. The essays in this volume, and others already published or in print by these authors and some others besides, are just one indication that almost the opposite is true. I would not want to overstate the incidence of music used in the context of torture, or to generalise, but my experience to date has been that once we scratch the surface all manner of examples emerge. From the point of view of musicologists, we have opened a Pandora's Box. There are too many people eager to close that box and all that it reveals. But as in the myth, what we would leave inside if we did so, would be hope: the hope of finally recognising this form of ill-treatment and torture for what it is, and taking action accordingly. This is a duty we bear to all those who have experienced it.

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# 'He Plays on the Pillory'. The Use of Musical Instruments for Punishment in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era

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## Abstract

Illustrations by the Dutch renaissance artists Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Jan Wierix both show a man imprisoned on a pillory, a former place of enforcement of judicial sentences, and playing a musical instrument. Taken as legal iconographic sources, these illustrations of the old saying 'He plays on the pillory' can be understood as references to a specific kind of punishment used in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era. Specifically, delinquents had to wear wooden or iron 'neck violins' or 'neck flutes' while being pilloried or chased through the streets in order to be humiliated in public. As well as this historical fact, there also exists an interpretation that takes the illustrations by Bruegel and Wierix literally. It suggests that these punishment practices originally date back to a more ancient use of real instruments in a penal system that was applied and understood as a 'healing punishment' (*poena medicinalis*) to banish the ill and re-establish the good in the delinquent, the community and the world as a whole due to musical sounds. By means of legal iconographical and historical methods, this article explores the different nuances of punishment that

employed real or symbolic musical instruments. Thus, it examines a historical aspect of 'music in detention' where the (symbolic) sounds do not emanate from the punisher but from the punished themselves.

*Key words:* Medieval punishments, torture, pillory, public humiliation, musical instruments, *poena medicinalis*, legal history

In 1559, Pieter Bruegel the Elder created a famous painting called *Netherlandish Proverbs*. It shows over 100 different visualisations of proverbs, folk metaphors or 'proverbial phrases'<sup>1</sup> (p. 11) used at that time. Regarding the context of 'music in detention', one of the proverbs illustrated in the Bruegel painting is of particular interest. In the centre of the upper part a man with an open mouth can be seen playing a stringed instrument—which appears to be a violin or its medieval parent, the fiddle, while kneeling in a kind of cage built on a pole. It is clear that this is a place for the enforcement of judicial sentences, since the painting shows hacked-off hands (a punishment for perjurers) as well as hacked-off ears (a punishment for thieves) nailed to the framework of the cage (fig. 1). A similar illustration can be found in an etching by Jan Wierix that was created about ten years later, using one of Bruegel's paintings as a model. In the background of this etching, a man can be seen standing in exactly the same type of

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**Fig. 1:** Bruegel (1559), painting detail  
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Preußischer Kulturbesitz; Foto: Jörg P. Anders

pillory, this time playing a wind instrument that may be a shawm (a predecessor of the oboe) or a flute (fig. 2). These picture details arouse our interest because, in these portrayals, the artists combined an instrument of law enforcement and ‘detention’ (a pillory) with instruments of music, the latter being played not by the punishers but by the punished themselves.



**Fig. 2:** Wierix (around 1569), etching detail  
©The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1946 (46.137.6);  
Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The illustrations raise questions about their historical background. Which proverb did Bruegel, and with him Wierix, intend to depict here? What is the relationship between the visualisations, the underlying proverb and the penal system in the Holy Roman Empire which in Bruegel’s and Wierix’s lifetimes encompassed areas which currently include the Netherlands and Germany as well as parts of Poland, Austria, Italy and France? In this regard, what relevance did the pillory have, and what was the significance of the musical instruments? The present article aims to provide answers to these questions. By combining artistic, legal, cultural and historical considerations, it examines the legal concepts on which ‘music in detention’ might have been based during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era. In this context it is important to remember that in the Netherlands of Bruegel’s time, no unified body of law was yet in force (as for example the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* of 1530). Instead, there were four different legal sources: Roman law, princely edicts, and a large number of local and customary laws. The type of punishment this article deals

with belongs to customary law, which was operational in the Netherlands as well as throughout the entire Holy Roman Empire<sup>2</sup> (for these types of punishments in England see e.g. Ingram<sup>3</sup>).

The presumption is that Bruegel reflected the legal practices of the 16th century in his paintings, just as the poet Dante Alighieri included the legal practices of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century in his *Divine Comedy*. Still, Bruegel and Dante used their work to express themselves artistically; therefore their artworks have an artistic surplus of meaning compared to reality.

On this basis, this article will first connect the details of Bruegel's painting and its potentially related proverb to legal practices that were common in his time, namely public humiliation and mirror punishments. For example, these practices were enforced through public 'wearing' of symbolic violins or flutes made of wood or iron. Second, I will refer to a speculative but interesting interpretation by Herbert Fischer, who took seriously the pictorial details of Bruegel's painting and the corresponding proverb respectively as an indication of laws that have long been forgotten. Fischer assumed that long before the Middle Ages, musical instruments similar to those shown in the painting and etching were used in law enforcement, for the purpose of 'healing'. This article intends to modify Fischer's interpretation based on the assumption that any kind of music within a legal act, no matter if it be decorative, declarative or constitutive in character<sup>4,5</sup>, was seen as analogous to the harmonious and balanced condition that the legal system necessarily imposed on the world. So, every indictable offence was a violation of that harmony. Re-establishing this harmony was the primary aim of jurisdiction. My aim is to show that the medieval and early modern punishment of

wearing symbolic musical instruments can be linked with Fischer's cultural and historical ideas that both sides of 'music in detention' are apparent in these kinds of punishments. Although music often has a pleasant, supportive and healing effect, it can also be tormenting, in this case through its use for public shaming. In this context, music becomes an instrument of torture.

Bruegel's painting is part of a multiplicity of artworks that include representations of common proverbs. In many of these works, the chosen proverbs are identical. Collecting proverbs was very much in vogue in Europe in the late 15th and 16th centuries<sup>6 (p 22)</sup> and found expression in encyclopaedias as well as the arts. For example, Erasmus of Rotterdam's 'Collectanea Adagiorum', one of the many proverb collections of that time, increased from 800 proverbs in its first edition of 1,500 to over 4,000 in the last edition of 1560.<sup>6 (p 22)</sup> Because Bruegel did not name his painting or the proverbs represented in it, one cannot be absolutely sure of their exact meaning. While in many cases the corresponding proverbs are easy to find, for the pillory scene that is the starting point of my investigation there is apparently no common proverb that matches the shown scene exactly. Numerous attempts have been made to explain these particular picture details and to find the correct proverb. One of these attempts has been to connect them with the saying 'De speelman is op het dak' ['The gleeman is on the roof']<sup>7 (p 54)</sup>, meaning that someone sees things through rose-coloured spectacles. This saying obviously does not match the pictures that explicitly show a pillory and not a roof, and therefore a punishment usage, not matching a situation where one might see things through rose-coloured spectacles. Also, the old saying 'Iemand aan de kaak stellen' ['To pillory someone']<sup>6 (p 110)</sup> that has been

proposed time and again in relevant secondary literature does not match this picture since it does not reference the playing of music. So neither saying fits the distinctive features of this picture. In most of the accompanying commentaries, however, these picture details are known as 'Hij speelt op de kaak'<sup>8</sup> (p 332) ['He plays on the pillory']. There are different interpretations of this saying. One approach presumes that it means 'Someone acquires something unlawfully'<sup>9</sup>; it is also understood as an admonishment, meaning 'If you stand on the pillory, do not also angle for someone's attention'.<sup>9</sup> (p 57)

Obviously, an unambiguous assignment of a particular proverb to the illustrations is difficult. Instead, it seems easier to connect the details of Bruegel's and Wierix's work to the legal practices that must have been familiar to them and their contemporaries. Within the penal system (not only) of the Holy Roman Empire, as well as common practice, pillories of different forms were widely used to dishonour criminals responsible for all kinds of offences. Records of pillory punishments can be found beginning in circa 1200 AD.<sup>10</sup> (col. 1881) Pillorying was done with the purpose of humiliating someone in public. Punishments for discreditable actions were conducted in front of the community and therefore commonly observed. These were public performances, in which the observing crowd played the parts both of a receiving audience and an active executor, and which were therefore in their character absolutely comparable with theatre performances.<sup>11</sup> (p185ff),<sup>12,13</sup> The close relationship between theatre and law enforcement also becomes apparent in the pillories, often built at a higher level similar to a stage. For example, the form of pillory painted by Bruegel was known as a 'stage pillory'. Pillories could, and sometimes still can, be found in public places or next to public

buildings (such as a town hall), where everyone could gather and watch the convict. Because of the public character of this punishment, it was thought of as a deterrent as well as retribution. Another aspect of pillorying was to uphold the law for the future because it was assumed that, through witnessing pillorying, members of the community would be more likely to keep track of the activities of the delinquent and thereby prevent more wrongdoing.<sup>10</sup> (col. 1881) Because the public played an important role in the effectiveness of the punishment by first taunting the delinquent and then monitoring them, pillorying someone was not only a legal sentence, but was also an act of popular justice.

Together with the iron collar, the pillory is counted among the stationary instruments of punishment. There was also a category of portable equipment that lawbreakers were forced to wear, either while being pilloried or while walking through the streets. People of the Middle Ages were very imaginative in the invention of a whole range of these portable tools, tools which in some way revealed, characterised or mirrored the misdemeanour: straw crowns resembling bridal bouquets for fallen women, oversized rosaries for those who missed church without an excuse or fell asleep during service, chains made from huge dice and playing cards for people who had cheated at cards.<sup>14</sup> (col. 1351) Shame masks were also used. These were styled to fit the particular offence, e.g. big ears for gossiping women (they heard everything), eyeglasses (they saw everything) and big mouths and long tongues (they spread vicious rumours).<sup>15</sup> (pp338-341) This idea of punishments that mirror the misdemeanour can also be found in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where the souls in hell and purgatory were punished according to the principle of retributive justice, called *contrappasso*.<sup>16</sup>

To come one step closer to Bruegel's (and Wierix's) illustration: There were at least two other particular kinds of equipment in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era used for punishment along with the pillory, namely wooden or iron items attached to the prisoner and called neck (or shame) violins and neck (or shame) flutes (figs. 3.1 and 3.2). These names were based on the tool's visual similarity to real musical instruments. Neck violins were used for delinquents that indulged in verbal offences, for example, blasphemy, fortune-telling, defamation or gossiping in church.<sup>4</sup> (p 110) It seems that this form of punishment was more often imposed on women, notably on those who were perceived to be loud and shrewish. Derived from this latter type of punishment, neck violins are also called 'shrew's fiddles' in English. Neck flutes were for the main part used for bad musicians<sup>17</sup> (p 227) to mirror their misdemeanour (namely making bad music).

Neck violins or neck flutes functioned as mirror punishments and restraint due to the hands being fastened, thus leaving the delinquent defenceless to attacks from the 'audience'. These instruments were also used in the enforcement of sentences of public humiliation, by means of which the delinquent lost his or her social position within the



**Fig. 3.1** Shame violin made from spruce with iron rings, which slim form clearly leans towards the violin, not the fiddle, ©Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum



**Fig 3.2** Stylised wooden neck violin ©Medieval Crime Museum, Rothenburg ob der Tauber

community because he or she lost his or her honour. In the Middle Ages and especially in the Early Modern Era, one's honour meant a good deal more than in many societies today: it was directly relevant to one's legal position within the estates of the realm. The often-used term *fama*, covering individual honour as well as rumour and gossip, shows how much one's honour depended on public reputation and talk in the community.<sup>18</sup> Dishonour due to public humiliation had far-reaching consequences, not only for the delinquent but also for his or her family and descendants.<sup>19</sup> (col. 1232) It could lead to expulsion from professional guilds, as well as the loss of position within the feudal system, whether as the lowest vassal, or as judge or advocate. The social consequences of public dishonour and the guild expulsions reached their climax in the Early Modern Era, when such disreputable persons were not only not allowed to hold an honourable or municipal office, but were also not allowed to participate in court proceedings, either as a witness or claimant. Even his or her private testimony was sometimes challenged.<sup>20</sup> (col. 1241) Public perception of dishonourableness could lead an individual to the condition of social outcast, which was commonly applied to travelling people such as musicians. These people were not directly 'affected' by the dishonouring aspect of public punishments, but were nevertheless humiliated, laughed at and damaged by the *fama*. In the worst cases, after public disgrace that damaged his or her *publica fama*, the delinquent no longer wanted to remain a part of his or her community, and decided to drift away to start again somewhere new.<sup>17</sup> (p 212)

Against this legal historical background, Bruegel and Wierix seem to reflect the common legal practices of their time. Yet, based on today's knowledge about the use of neck instruments, their illustrations cannot

be considered as legal iconographic sources, for several reasons. Legal iconography distinguishes between pictures that 1) visualise the legal content of the text<sup>21</sup> (pp 86-88), in other words illustrate the meaning of the sentence (e.g. punishment through excommunication which relinquished the excommunicated soul to the devil; Bruegel's and Wierix's illustrations surely do not belong to this category) and that 2) convert the legal text directly into a figurative depiction<sup>21</sup> (p 88) (e.g. several illustrations of the bearing of the judge as demanded by the Soester Gerichtsordnung (Soest Court Regulations, circa 1500), in which he was instructed to sit on his bench like a 'grumpy lion' [griesgrimmiger Löwe]<sup>21</sup> (p 88), crossing his right foot over his left. The picture details do not fall under this point either); and that 3) depict the legal act that is mentioned in the text; this being possible because the legal act per se was picture-like (i.e. performative or theatrical<sup>11</sup> (p 185ff)) and thus its graphic representation was not an imaginative construct but an image of reality<sup>21</sup> (p 88). Bruegel's and Wierix's pictures would have fallen into the third category of legal iconography, if the violins or flutes used in the prevailing law had been real instruments that the delinquent had to play while being pilloried, which was, as far as we know, not the case. Therefore, showing as they do real instruments in action, their virtual illustrations are nothing less than artworks, based on an artistic transcendence of meaning compared to reality.

This could be due to the fact that these artworks are pictorial realisations and visual interpretations of a proverb. In their illustrations, Bruegel and Wierix used the real contemporary context of pillorying and wearing neck violins or neck flutes, i.e. public humiliation, while changing the external forms of the duplicated instruments to those of real ones. The reason for this was almost

certainly the proverb that underlay the picture details. The artists took legal items and symbols from their daily context and modified their appearance to illustrate something else, a proverb with a meaning that we are no longer able to reconstruct. Looked at in this way, the picture details are not pictures of reality, but an artistic means of expression, connected with the lived experiences of the artist and his contemporary recipients.

However, this use of meaning in Bruegel's and Wierix's illustrations could also lead us back to ancient, forgotten laws that actually used real musical instruments for the purpose of punishment, laws that had survived through the corresponding proverb and underwent a pictorial materialisation. Because people did not always adhere to the terms of legislative texts, these texts may not fully reflect the actual legal practices of the time.<sup>17 (p 52)</sup> One can instead extract a lot of information from the sources of applied and customary law as documented in chronicles, town descriptions, travel reports, autobiographies, comic tales, poems (such as *The Divine Comedy*, already mentioned) or town bills, and also in legends, fairy tales, children's games<sup>17 (p 52)</sup> or proverbs. The latter were of particular importance for everyday life because they enabled their legal content to be remembered and internalised. When Bruegel included, in his *Netherlandish Proverbs* painting, a picture of a man kneeling and holding a violin in a construction that is clearly designed as a pillory, he may have resorted to exactly such a proverb that carried within itself indications of long-forgotten law.

This was the conclusion drawn by Herbert Fischer, an Austrian historian of law, who in 1971 stated that the reason for the use of neck violins and flutes as punishment in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern

Era could be found in anterior legal and cultural history. He provided an interpretation of Bruegel's and Wierix's pictorial details, treating the artworks as a reliable legal source that proved the former existence of the legal proverb 'he speelt op de kaak'<sup>22 (p 326)</sup> and understanding their transcendence of content as evidence of a legal reality that began long before Bruegel's lifetime. Taking this as the initial point, he first of all presumed that the pictured instruments, being real ones, not wooden or iron reproductions, refer to a kind of punishment from even older times when the jurisdiction actually used genuine instruments<sup>22 (p 325f)</sup> and which dates back to times before the wearing of neck violins or neck flutes became common. Fischer also presumed that these very old punishments, due to playing on real instruments, can be understood as demonstrations of punishment from older legal doctrine that he referred to as 'poena medicinalis' ('healing punishment').<sup>22 (p 321)</sup> In his opinion, the people of these old times believed that not only the harmony of the community (and, thereby, of the whole world) was disordered by the done deed, but so was the delinquent's soul as well. To regain harmony, the delinquent was required to play harmonious music to undergo a 'retuning' of the soul, as well as to eradicate the disharmony in both the community and the world; harmony thus being restored on every level. So Fischer awarded to music the power to clean, to 'harmonise',<sup>22 (p 323)</sup> and to effect a unitary 'tuning' of delinquent, community and world. With this concept of a kind of 'magical' musical power within a 'poena medicinalis', Fischer referred to a theory that dates back to antiquity at least, where music was seen as a sensual manifestation of the celestial harmony in the Pythagorean tradition. This comprehensive concept also included mental medical purposes, as we can

learn from Aristoxenus of Tarentum, who reported that the Pythagoreans used music to heal the soul just as they used medicine to heal the body.<sup>23</sup> (p 15) In this context of ‘poena medicinalis’, Fischer also referred to the role of violins and flutes in old cultural history, holding that the use of a violin or fiddle was said to have healing effects on the heart (i.e. sentiment) while the flute was said to have effects on the bowels (i.e. desires).<sup>22</sup> (p 329) He assumed that these old cultural beliefs had survived in the medieval and early modern neck instruments. Additionally, the ‘magical’ sounds of music, real or feigned, would have had the task of positively influencing the misapplied voice (misapplied, because used in committing an offence) located in the neck of the delinquent where the ‘instrument’ was fixed.

In alluding to the ‘double magic of tones’<sup>22</sup> (p 324; my translation) by quoting the old idea ‘Sanat, quod sauciat ipse’<sup>22</sup> (p 324) [‘What heals does also wound and what wounds does heal again’], however, Fisher himself modified his highly speculative interpretation. Therefore, it seems appropriate in this article to do the same and also modify his somewhat mystic interpretation of and legal historical conclusion from the picture details of Bruegel and Wierix. Fischer used the double action of music to make clear that the healing approach could also have been used to humiliate and dishonour the delinquent: ‘What pleases, strengthens, raises the high-minded, makes the ignoble uneasy, debilitates and torments him’<sup>22</sup> (p 324; my translation). So if the person who, in the very old era Fischer talked about, was condemned to playing real music was not actually a musician, which was surely the usual situation, he or she would have produced ugly sounds that would have revealed his or her inability to play the instrument. Consequently the noises produced would have

sounded similar to the cacophonous music of the long tradition of the so-called ‘Katzenmusik’, ‘Charivari’, or, in Anglo-American tradition, ‘rough music’ or ‘skimmington ride’, that was performed by enraged fellow citizens, not by the delinquents themselves, to admonish those who had behaved improperly and thereby disturbed the harmony of the community. The purpose of this tradition was typically not only to mock a culprit (mostly one who had committed some kind of sexual offence<sup>24</sup>), but also to show him or her quite plainly what foul deed he or she had perpetrated. The disharmonic, ugly sounding and disturbing music was designed to reflect his or her action as well as his or her character.

Fischer’s idea of the use of real instruments as ‘poena medicinalis’ in former times cannot be proved as a legal source, either by referring to Bruegel’s painting or the proverb that is pictured in it or in any other known ways. But if we consider the practice of the medieval ‘Katzenmusik’, ‘Charivari’, ‘rough music’ etc., wherein the concept of ‘poena medicinalis’ has been reversed, also the ‘disharmonic’ music ‘played’ by the person on the pillory, the punishment of wearing neck violins or neck flutes in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era becomes more coherent. These delinquents were not just mocked by their fellow citizens; they were forced to mock themselves. They had to make themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the public, through playing sounds that mirrored their deeds and character. In other words, they had to ‘play’ (or ‘perform’) their own Charivari to themselves. Furthermore, the wrong deed (through the disturbance of the community – mostly, as already mentioned, by ways of misusing the voice) was ‘repeated’ in public by the delinquent, as enforced self-mockery and punishment. In the case of the musicians, who had to wear shame flutes

after making bad music, this punishment was not designed to dishonour them, because as travelling people, they were already classified as dishonest and therefore had no honour to lose. Instead it was designed to reflect their social delinquency, and to mock <sup>20 (col. 1241)</sup> and injure them in their professional practice. As a result of this public exposure of and fama on their poor ability to play the instrument they would have very little chance of getting new jobs to earn money.

The use of humiliating and mirroring punishment did not aim to achieve healing (as the interpretation by Fischer suggests) but retaliation. Yet the result was the same; through self-mockery, the done deed was exposed and emphasised as a disturbing wrong by the wrongdoers themselves. Not least because of the public nature of the punishment, the committed offence and the self-mocking of it cancelled each other out. The same can be said of the retributive justice of the mirroring or, with Dante's words, *contrapasso*. Through these adjustments, the harmony of the world was reinstated, which, however, happened at the expense of the honour of the delinquent (or the financial situation of the musicians). So, not the cure of the individual, but the intactness of the community was the highest goal. However, this is not to say that the theory of the healing power of music was not alive in the background, for in Fischer's theory, only beautiful, harmonic sounds could have magical healing power. The enforced playing, real or symbolic, of the untrained, that necessarily 'sounded' disharmonic and ugly, fell short of the nature of music and proved to be a destruction of harmony itself. To come full circle, this kind of ugly 'music' was not able to heal as, with its disharmony, it destroyed the harmony of music in the same way as the offence of the delinquent destroyed the harmony of the

world. The offence was thereby symbolised and reflected in its disturbing and wrongful character. Perhaps this is what Fischer meant by referring to the 'double magic' of music.

In any case, here we have arrived at a very crucial point in his understanding of supposed historical uses of punishment, as the idea of understanding the playing of music as mockery (in contrast to music being a healing power) was what made it possible in the first place to be carried out without real music playing on real instruments. Instead, a kind of symbolic 're-enactment performance' without sound was sufficient. Thus the use of imitated musical instruments made it equally clear to the 'audience' that the person 'playing on the pillory' had to be disgraced.

Many questions remain about the meaning of Bruegel's and Wierix's picture details, and knowledge about the exact historical and cultural background of the punishment of 'playing on the pillory' remains incomplete. What we know, however, may be interesting for the purpose of investigation of the use of music in detention. In the European Middle Ages and Early Modern Era, there certainly existed a type of humiliating punishment that included the enforced wearing of symbolic musical instruments. This possibly referred back to the use of real instruments as a means of mental healing, to be achieved by harmonising the soul of the delinquent, of the community and of the world as a whole through music. Just as the historical punishments discussed here, which mainly can be subsumed under the categories of public humiliation and mirror punishments, make very clear the two sides of a tort (the injustice that had happened and the retaliation derived from it), the two sides of music, real or only symbolic, used within these punishments also become apparent. While

music can establish ‘omnipresent harmony’, it also can be used to torture. This double-edged nature of music is not only reflected in the painting of Bruegel and subsequently in the etching of Wierix, but was and still is one of the most crucial aspects of ‘music in detention’.

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# Music and 'Re-Education' in the Soviet Gulag

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## Abstract

After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks announced a new human dimension of penal policy whose goal should be the so-called 're-education' of prisoners. The desired 're-education' was to be realised using two kinds of measures: the physical work of the prisoners, and 'cultural education work'. A varied musical life in groups, 'agitation brigades', ensembles, orchestras and choirs developed within the framework of the 'cultural education work'. Two camps responsible for building canals in the 1930s particularly adopted this musical life: Belbaltlag and Dmitlag. In the latter, a composition competition took place in 1936 in which, among others, the arrested composer Sergey Protopopov took part. Since the 1930s, the Gulag administration had publicised that the measures taken for 're-education' concerned primarily criminal prisoners, as opposed to 'political prisoners', who were labelled as foreign to socialist society. Although the 'cultural education work' would not have functioned as well as it did without the cooperation of 'political prisoners', since their participation did not fit into the prescribed ideology, they were often underappreciated or even completely concealed. The following is a depiction of the officially organised musical life in the Gulag in the 1920s and 1930s as a grey zone. Music making and listening represented not

only a source of strength for the prisoners, but also brought about situations that meant physical and psychological torture for them.

*Key words:* Gulag, torture, music, cultural education, agitation brigades

The concept of 're-education' ['vospitaniye or perevospitaniye' in Russian] played a key role in Soviet penal policy since its beginnings. Penitentiaries were proclaimed educational in nature, as stated in the decree of the People's Commissariat for Justice (Narodnyi komissariat yustitsii or NKYu), dated 23 July 1918, entitled 'O lishenii svobodi, kak o mere nakazaniya, i o poryadke otbivaniya takovogo' [Of detention as a penal measure and how to serve it].<sup>1</sup> This early edict defined the 'total re-education' of inmates as a fundamental principle of penal policy, and stipulated that every penitentiary had to establish one 'educational post' and hire so-called 'educationalists'. The 1919 programme of the Communist Party declared its intent to replace the existing catalogue of penalties with a number of educational measures in future detention. By doing so, the Bolsheviks wanted to distinguish themselves from the tsarist detention system and from that of 'capitalist countries' where, according to their critics, any attempt to influence the morale of the inmates was left to the representatives of the clergy.<sup>2</sup> (PP 175-7), 3 (p 15) The Bolsheviks, in their own words, wanted to bring a humane dimension to penal policy, something that had not been known before. They overlooked, or wilfully

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ignored, the fact that the attempt to educate and improve personal character had already been a key aspect of detention in the reform of criminal law in 18th century France.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the idea of 're-educating' inmates was not even new in Russia. Intellectuals had discussed this as early as the 1860s, and those discussions had led to the Russian prison reforms. This caused an easing of living conditions in the prisons and camps. For example, in 1863 the branding of prisoners was abolished.<sup>5</sup> What was new in Bolshevik detention, compared to tsarist detention, was the idea of 'cultural education work'. This idea had also been discussed in Russia in the 19th century,<sup>6</sup> but had not been incorporated into official penal policy.

In the decree 'O lageryakh prinuditel'nikh rabot' ['On forced labour camps'], dated 17 May 1919, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee required the physical labour of every inmate.<sup>7</sup> This labour was meant as an educational measure, but in reality it often involved torture, since the inmates were forced to work at gruelling labour under difficult conditions from which they could not escape. In fact, it had a bearing on their very existence, because their food rations were directly dependent upon the results of their work. No later than 1920, physical labour was accompanied by a second way of influencing the inmates, the so-called 'work of cultural enlightenment' ['kul'turno-prosvetitel'naya rabota'] or 'cultural education' ['kul'turno-vospitatel'naya rabota']. Circular no. 28 of the Central Administration of the Penitentiaries GUMZ [Glavnoye upravleniye mest zaklyucheniya], dated 29 June 1922, stipulated 'cultural education' in the prisons to be a key foundation of detention, alongside education by labour;<sup>2</sup> (p 178),<sup>8</sup> thus, both pillars became concepts of equal weight.

In 1924, the first Corrective Labour

Code [Ispravitel'no-trudovoy kodeks] of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was passed. This Code defined the key role 'cultural education' was to play in the 're-education' of inmates. The Code stated that work on 'cultural education and enlightenment' was to be done in every 'facility of improvement through labour' [ispravitel'no-trudovoye uchrezhdeniye]. The purpose of this work was to 'enhance the intellectual level and the developmental status of the inmates as citizens'. These measures were mainly aimed at imprisoned people of the working class, supposedly because they represented the proletariat, the very people on whom the Bolsheviks relied to support their power. Basically, however, no group of inmates was excluded.<sup>3</sup> (p 28)

The focus of the 'cultural education work' was to provide school lessons and vocational training, and to convey knowledge about the structure of the Soviet society, including the rights and duties of a Soviet citizen. 'Cultural education' was to be done in places and facilities such as libraries and clubhouses, in the form of lectures or circles. In those circles, the inmates were to experience literature, music, sports, chess and so on. They would share these experiences with their fellow inmates through concerts, theatre performances, readings, physical exercise, book discussions and reviews, acted-out news presentations [zhivaya gazeta – literally, 'living newspaper'], and 'other cultural pleasures'.<sup>9</sup>

Musical theatres were founded in numerous camps between the 1920s and 1950s. However, an average of only about two percent of the inmates took part in the music and theatre circles, as research conducted for the present author's doctoral dissertation demonstrates. For example, in 1943 the Deputy People's Commissar for Inner Affairs, Vasily Chernishyov, found that

there were 22 'amateur arts circles' in the Bogoslovlag, in the Sverdlovsk area, in which 242 prisoners were involved. The number of prisoners in this camp amounted to 10,864 on January 1, 1943, according to official data, so that ca. two percent of them were active in the 'amateur arts'. According to the report of the Sevvostlag, in the Kolyma region, for the year 1951, 3,578 prisoners were involved in a total of 121 'amateur arts circles', which represents ca. two percent of all the Sevvostlag prisoners.<sup>10, 11</sup>

The various aspects of the 'cultural education work' in the Gulag have been unevenly researched. Although there have been several studies concerning journalism, literary treatises, and theatres of the prisoners,<sup>12-14</sup> musical practices outside theatre and painting have so far received only minimal consideration. This article will examine the forms the 'cultural education work' through music took in the 1920s and 1930s, and the role it played in the lives of the prisoners.

According to a report by the central administration, in 1926 there were 820 theatre circles as well as 520 circles of music and song inside the penitentiaries. At the same time, the number of circles of politics and sports were 438 and 177 respectively.<sup>3 (pp 29, 30)</sup> Obviously, the 're-education' of the inmates was not just a propaganda slogan, since serious attempts were taken to achieve it.

The concept of 're-educating' the prisoners should be considered in a broad context. The creation of a new human being, a 'new human species', was also of great significance for people not held in detention in the Soviet Union. The catchphrase 're-education' was omnipresent in the 1920s and 1930s. It was an idea propagated daily that all Soviet citizens should be reformed into new human beings. In this sense, the Gulag must be seen as a part of this aspect of the

Soviet state, meant to contribute to the formation of a new human being.<sup>13 (p 38), 15-17</sup>

Also, the phenomenon of 'cultural education' was in no way limited to forced labour camps. It also played an important role in the civil life of the Soviet Union over the entire period of its existence. According to the 'Bol'shaya sovetskaya ntsiklopediya' [Great Soviet Encyclopedia], the 'communist education' and 'political enlightenment' of the workers should be supported through 'cultural enlightenment work', their cultural level raised, creative faculties developed, and their free time configured.<sup>18</sup> The model of 'cultural education work' that was developed in civil society was transferred to camp society.

Most prisoners who left written memories, and above all those who themselves made music in the camps, testify to the positive effects music had on their physical and psychiatric health. Boris Shiryayev asserts, for example, that in the 1920s music played an important role in the theatre on Solovetskiy Island, in the White Sea. For Shiryayev, music represented the restoration to the prisoners of their right to see themselves as human beings, and to feel inwardly free.<sup>19</sup> But there are also known cases in which music was used as an integral component of the torture and ill-treatment that the prisoners had to endure as a part of their existence in the Gulag. In contrast to the National Socialist concentration camps, from which numerous cases of the perversion of music into an 'instrument of torture'<sup>20-22</sup> have been recorded, the misuse of music as an accompaniment to sadistic treatment in the Gulag was apparently much less widespread. Nevertheless, music was implicated in the oppression and humiliation of the inmates here as well.

One example from 1921 comes from the Arkhgb forced labour camp of the village

Kholmogorī in Arkhangel'sk, which was under the control of the secret police Ob'yedinyonnoye Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravleniye (OGPU) [Unified State Political Administration]. In an undated letter, E. Filipchenko, who was imprisoned in Kholmogorī from August to November, wrote to the Moscow political Red Cross: '[...] the roll call ended with the singing of the Internationale. The overseers made sure that everyone sang and hit the right notes to some extent; otherwise, they threatened us with detention. The roll call lasted over thirty minutes, and in cold autumn evenings this caused many people to become sick'.<sup>23</sup> It is worthy of note that here the Internationale, which at that time functioned as the Soviet national anthem and simultaneously as a hymn of imprisoned social revolutionaries, whom the Bolsheviks treated as their enemies, was deployed for the humiliation of the prisoners.

A further example was recorded on the Solovetskiy Islands, where there was a brass band that not only used to give concerts in the second half of the 1920s, but was said to have performed 'brilliant' pieces on some occasion, such as when other prisoners had to saw down old crosses in the graveyard.<sup>24</sup> Here the musicians were forced to take up the task of cynically accompanying a blasphemous treatment with inappropriate music. Since they could not refuse such orders without suffering the consequences, music was perverted to an instrument of cruel and degrading treatment.

In 1930, a parliamentary control commission of the OGPU travelled to the Solovetskiy Islands for an inspection triggered by reports in the foreign press about the inhumane living conditions of the camp inmates. The goal of the inspection was to establish that individual people on the site were responsible for these conditions, rather

than the OGPU.<sup>25</sup> (pp 378–89) One passage in the concluding report states: 'The accused [the leader of a camp unit and sentry] kicked the prisoners with felt boots to which metal weights had been attached, to the sounds of an accordion [...]'. This is another example of the perversion of music and its misuse as an instrument of torture.

On 15 August 1930, the poet and author Sergey Alimov (1892–1948) described in his notebook how he had heard an English radio broadcast during the night in the barracks in Kem' on the shore of the White Sea. A waltz with which he was familiar was broadcast, with the text:

*I want [to] say good morning,  
I don't want [to] say good-by[e].*

He had danced to this waltz many times when he was free. Everyone else in the barracks was asleep, but he could not sleep all night. Even the next day, he inwardly heard the waltz: 'The waltz melody was painfully screwed into my heart as though with a dentist's drill. The suffering still remains. [...] I wanted to flee from the violins, would not have heard them for anything in the world. That is probably the most horrible torture'.<sup>26</sup> This statement demonstrates that music could cause pain in camp inmates by evoking memories.

In March 1930, the All-Russian Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissioners stated that the 'cultural education work' in the camps was successful, and they decided to raise its budget.<sup>27</sup> In the 1930s, it became obvious that the idea of 're-education' gained momentum and was enforced. Now 're-education' was generally referred to as perekovka ['re-forging'], and it played a pivotal role in the propaganda of the 1930s. The aim of the perekovka was to create a new type of human being, and is

apparent in the history of two camps whose inmates were mainly employed in the construction of waterways: Belbaltlag, a camp mainly responsible for building the canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea between 1931 and 1933, and Dmitlag, in charge of building the Moscow-Volga-Canal between 1932 and 1938. The attempt to 're-educate' the inmates through music was implemented by founding several music groups such as brass and wind bands, for example, and by conducting a composition competition in 1936 during the construction of the Moscow-Volga-Canal.

These two camps were chosen for closer inspection out of the countless camps in the 1930s, because the proclamation of the idea of *perekovka* experienced its zenith in Belbaltlag, and because Dmitlag represented, in various ways, a continuation of the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Sea-Canal. A section of the prisoners and some of the work equipment from Belbaltlag were used again in Dmitlag, and the management was identical at the onset of the Moscow-Volga-project. The last meeting of the shock workers, prisoners who exceeded the production plan quotas, of Belbaltlag took place in Dmitrov, in the administration centre of Dmitlag, where the building of the clubhouse from Belbaltlag was also installed.<sup>28, 29</sup> (pp 580, 581, 596)

Belbaltlag was promoted as the 'first large school of *perekovka*'. In 1932, according to official reports, an 'educationalist', often an inmate released from all other duties, worked in each camp unit. The famous photographer Aleksandr Rodchenko left visual testimonies of the musical work in Belbaltlag. He was commissioned by the State Publishing House for Performing Arts, Izogiz, and travelled on business to the White Sea-Baltic Sea-Canal in February, March, and summer of 1933. He gained permission from the Belbaltlag

camp administration to take pictures of the inmates at work and also during their 'leisure time', and took around 4,000 pictures in all that, to my knowledge, have still not been subject to academic analysis.

However, in preparing the present study it was possible to trace four photos taken by Rodchenko that show musicians in Belbaltlag. One of the pictures is titled 'Rabota s orkestrom' [Working with the orchestra] and was shown in the exhibition 'Mastera sovet'skogo iskusstva' [Masters of Soviet Photography] in Moscow in 1935. Aleksandr Lavrent'yev, Rodchenko's grandson and specialist on his work, calls this photo one of the central pictures of Rodchenko's cycle on the canal works. Lavrent'yev reviewed it as a 'revealing document' which showed that even art was imprisoned during the canal construction.<sup>30</sup> And although music-making certainly presented easier work than building a canal, and helped prisoners to survive, what was happening was a type of mental torture, for the musicians thus commanded could not escape the music-making, and were forced to watch the gruelling and dangerous work of their fellow prisoners.

Three of Rodchenko's other pictures, which show musicians in Belbaltlag, were published in the special edition of the magazine 'SSSR na stroyke' [The USSR under construction], dedicated to the canal construction and co-designed by Rodchenko. One of the photographs shows inmates in a theatre performance, with a grinning accordion player in the foreground. His appearance obviously implies that he is from a lower social class. This was to give readers of this magazine, available for subscription both in the Soviet Union and abroad, the impression that people of a simple background, who had ended up in a criminal life due to unfortunate circumstances, could be 're-educated' during the canal construction.

This is reinforced by the picture's caption: 'These people were people from the underworld, people who had been dragged from the underworld. When they landed here, they thought: my life is over. But their real lives had only just begun. Here, not only Nature was being reshaped: human nature was being re-shaped, too. People of a dubious past turned into real workers.'<sup>31</sup>

Here 're-education' particularly focused on inmates labelled 'close to society' [sotsial'no-blizkiye], which included both professional and occasional criminals. This was in contrast to people sentenced according to section 58 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, who were deemed to be 'dangerous to society' [sotsial'no-opasnīye] and 'enemies of the working class'.<sup>25</sup> (p 375),<sup>32,33</sup> Section 58 provided sentences for so-called 'counterrevolutionary crimes'. Prisoners sentenced on the basis of this paragraph were often designated 'political prisoners', but in reality most were innocent.

The historian Natal'ya Kuzyakina noted that there were a huge number of 'agitation brigades' in Belbaltlag. Information on the 'agitation brigade' Povenetskaya, named after the village Povenets, has been officially documented: initially, it consisted of 18 members, mostly inmates 'close to society', and included an ensemble consisting of two guitars, two accordions and one mandolin. Eventually, the brigade grew to 57 people, and was employed where work progress was slow, playing during the morning roll call or taking on some of the labour themselves. Supposedly, they played at night to motivate the inmates to continue working even after 42 hours of work. The descriptions of the brigade were intended to make clear that the criminal inmates particularly excelled. One project described as very courageous had been to integrate inmates from solitary isolation into the brigade and to 're-educate'

them by appealing to their conscience<sup>14</sup> (pp 112-114),<sup>29</sup> (p 475). This represents an idealisation of the lives the criminal inmates led and, in addition, a marginalisation of their criminal record which was very much in line with the official dogma of the inmates 'close to society'.

The name of one song's writer is given under its lyrics, but only in brackets; after a few pages this person is casually referred to as the head of the brigade. The person in question was Igor Terent'yev (1892–1941), a poet, painter, actor and theatre director, who had founded the Futuristic group 41°, together with Aleksey Kruchyonikh and the brothers Il'ya and Kirill Zdanevich, on the eve of the October Revolution. In the 1920s, he had managed his own experimental theatre in Leningrad. He was arrested in 1931 and sentenced to five years of labour camp according to section 58.<sup>34,35</sup>

Terent'yev's 'agitation brigade' was promoted as the 'first true camp agitation brigade', and as a role model for entire Belbaltlag. Their lyrics fully complied with what the perekovka propagandists expected: they sang about the quality of the work and work improvement; they taunted foreign countries and praised the shock workers; they called bad workers by name and castigated them; they criticised the conditions in the camps in which less high-ranking personnel were in charge, e.g. in the kitchens.<sup>29</sup> (pp 473–6)

This 'agitation brigade' serves as an excellent example of the crucial contribution 'political inmates' made to the success of 'cultural education work' in the Gulag, as Igor Terent'yev did here. Their efforts were often exploited by the camp administration, but, compared with the criminal inmates, not acknowledged accordingly or even ignored.

The official internal records of Dmitlag on the construction of the Moscow-Volga-

Canal state that in January 1934 there were six brass and wind bands with a total of 145 musicians in this camp. In May 1934, their number had grown to 204 musicians. In 1934, an average of 156,319 inmates were imprisoned in Dmitlag.<sup>36, 37</sup> The task of these brass and wind bands was to play during the roll calls, when the best workers brigades left for work, when they returned, and even to accompany their work. The task of the conductors was to organise and lead circles for plucked string instruments and choirs at every work section. Moreover, they had to hold evenings of mass singing, mass games and dancing.

According to an order issued by the chief camp administrator dating May 31, 1934, a musician of the brass and wind band had to do the following on any given day: play for one hour during roll call; accompany the work of other inmates for three hours; practise for two hours; play another three hours in the club, the barracks of the best workers or outside; and practise for one hour together with the singers or the players of the plucked string instrument circles. In total, this added up to a ten-hour working day, an ordeal for any brass or wind musician and a further example of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in the Gulag. The brass and wind bands were to be organised like a military brass band using 'strictest discipline'.

The musicians were provided with good uniforms that were supposed to be supplemented by warm clothes in the winter, a privilege not granted to the other inmates. Moreover, they were supposed to get better food. Remarkably, a huge distinction was made between the musicians of brass and wind bands and those of symphony orchestras. At the end of May 1934, a decree was issued in which every job or activity in the camp was assigned to a catering category.<sup>38</sup>

According to this decree, only conductors and brass and wind band musicians were assigned to the highest 'enforced supply category' of all the inmates engaged in 'cultural work'. Directors, actors, members of 'agitation brigades', 'educationalists' etc. were classified in the middle category whereas pianists, musicians of symphony orchestras and librarians were allocated to the lowest category together with the majority of the inmates. Obviously, brass and wind band musicians were the most appreciated.

In March 1936, the department of cultural education [kul'turno-vospitatel'niy otdel (KVO)] of Dmitlag called for submissions to a composition competition. This initiative can possibly be ascribed to the fact that the party newspaper *Pravda* organised competitions for the best popular song for the masses 'in freedom' (i.e. not in a camp) in 1936, with the Union of Soviet Writers and the Union of Soviet Composers.<sup>39, 40</sup> On 12 June 1936, the camp manager Semyon Firin, who was very satisfied with how the competition had been conducted, announced the results. 112 works, composed by 73 inmates, had been submitted and evaluated by a jury of 'highly important Soviet composers such as Ivan Dzerzhinsky, Viktor Bely, Dmitry Kabalevsky, Boris Shekhter, Nikolay Chemberdzhii and Mikhail Starokadomsky'. They had selected twenty pieces, prizes for which were now to be awarded.

The song "Marsh betonshchikov" [March of the Concrete Workers] was awarded first place, and Firin decided to present 500 roubles each to its composer, Nikolay Tsedrik, and lyricist, Veniamin Kalent'yev, who had written the lyrics to most of the songs submitted for the competition. The second prize, 250 roubles, and the third prize, 150 roubles, were awarded twice. Eight inmates were given a certificate of

honour; another such certificate was given to the brass and wind band of the Khlebnikovskiy district for recording the tunes of inmates who could not notate music. The imprisoned composer Sergey Protopopov (1893–1954) was supposed to receive the badge of the shock worker and a sum of 100 roubles for the recording of songs and for his ‘good musical work’.

As the ‘music inspector’ of Dmitlag, Mikhail Chernyak, writes in his preface to the publication of selected songs from the competition, the first prize winner, Nikolay Tsedrik, played the trumpet in the brass and wind band of the central camp district. ‘The tune of this piece’, writes Chernyak, ‘will be easily learned by every circle, every brigade of concrete workers. There can be no doubt that Tsedrik’s march [...] will become the most popular song of every section’.<sup>41</sup>

The rhythm of the first two lines of the march’s melody strongly corresponds with that of the Internationale. The lyrics deal with the construction of a dam and appeal to the joy of work using expressions such as ‘we are marching on towards a cheerful life’. The last stanza translates as follows:

*As we say goodbye to our bleak existence  
Now we can look cheerfully at the world,  
A world in which a firm and free path of concrete  
Will lead us into a great life.*

In an in-camp newspaper from Dmitlag, the composer Dmitry Kabalevsky praised the tune of the march, but complained about the harmonic complexity of the accompaniment, and that the accompaniments of the songs submitted for the contest were not written by the song composers themselves. In his catalogue of works, compiled in 1953, the composer Sergey Protopopov mentioned that he had revised the March of the Concrete Workers and written an accompaniment for it.<sup>42</sup>

This shows that the competition was not fair. It was supposed to demonstrate the successful ‘re-education’ of inmates without higher musical education. Professional musicians such as Sergey Protopopov were necessary for the contest, because they could arrange accompaniments for the simple tunes of the other inmates and also rework those tunes to bring them into a more meaningful shape. Those musicians, however, were only marginally rewarded. In conclusion, this example reveals that the whole competition was staged, and that the concept of ‘cultural education’ had failed in this case.

For Protopopov, participation in musical work in the Gulag meant hopes of survival, because through this work he was better accommodated and better cared for than the other prisoners, and could avoid hard work. However, it should not be overlooked that his involvement in the contest represented a form of coercion. He was forced to arrange songs extolling life in the camp in which he was imprisoned and thereby robbed of his freedom. Moreover, he was not appreciated as the author of the accompaniment, nor recognised for his contribution to the winning piece, which was an attack on his rights to copyright.

It may be deduced that official musical activity in the Gulag in the 1920s and 1930s represented a grey zone, and also contributed to the character of the Gulag as a grey zone in general, being messy and disorganised.<sup>13 (p 32)</sup> On the one hand, musical practice was a grey zone for the inmates because it simultaneously represented a source of strength and a chance for survival, but was also a means of torture, and many stages in between. On the other hand, it was a grey zone for the camp officials, as could be shown in the treatment of Protopopov or Terent’yev. Musical practices officially were intended to show the humane side of the

Gulag, but their function there was complex and ambivalent.

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# Music and 'Re-education' in Greek Prison Camps: From Makronisos (1947–1955) to Giaros (1967–1968)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the policy of 're-education' for left-wing political prisoners in Greece during the military Junta (1967–1974) at the prison camp on the island of Giaros from 1967 to November 1968. Taking as its starting point the ways folk culture was used to substantiate the Colonels' ideological discourse and to give their rule aesthetic roots as a strategy of legitimization, the paper investigates how this kind of music was instrumentalized as a way of breaking political prisoners in exile. Music from loudspeakers was part of an attempt to make detainees sign Declarations of Loyalty, renouncing their values and their comrades. The 're-education' programme of Giaros is examined here as a remainder of the Greek Civil-War legacy (1946–1949), and particularly of the institutionalized 're-education' and 'rehabilitation' programme of the infamous prison camps on the island of Makronisos (1947–1955). Interviews with former detainees from both historical periods underline the damaging effects of the use of music, highlighting the need to understand music's capacity to degrade, but also torture, individuals instead of uplift and ennoble the soul.

*Key words:* Music, detention, re-education, torture, greek military junta, greek civil war

## Introduction

The first half of the twentieth century is marked by the extensive use of mass detention camps in many countries of Europe, such as Germany, Italy, Hungary, Finland and Greece. These reflect the intensification of political conflict and growing numbers of political prisoners.<sup>1</sup> During the interwar period and World War II (hereafter WWII), authoritarian and fascist regimes hunted down left-wing political opponents, detaining them in concentration camps; some of these camps introduced forced labour (for example, in Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain).<sup>1</sup> (pp 22-32) Other camps functioned as indoctrination stations (for example, post-WWII British camps for German prisoners), while several combined the two (for example, the prison camps of Makronisos and Giaros in Greece during the Civil War, 1946–1949). Music was invariably present in those camps that attempted to 're-educate' prisoners; typically it took the forms of forced singing, music from loudspeakers, and camp choirs and orchestras. Greece was no exception. The first prison camps were established during the Metaxas dictatorship (1936–1941), primarily on barren Greek islands. These reappeared in a far more brutal form in the aftermath of WWII. In contrast to other European countries, where Nazi collaborators were detained in internment camps (for example, France), in Greece it was left-wing resistance fighters who were detained, abused and

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tortured in internment camps during the Civil War. Left-wing individuals continued to be imprisoned in camps and other facilities long after the Civil War ended, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, and again during the Colonels' military Junta (1967–1974).

This paper examines the use of music played from loudspeakers in the prison camp on Giaros, the so-called 'Greek Gulag', from 1967 to 1968, during the military Junta. Music, especially folk music and so-called 'patriotic' songs, was one among other means employed to 'cure' these 'fallen' Greeks from the disease of Communism, and to return them to the national path of Hellenism. The use of music in Giaros prison camp is read here in light of the legacy of Makronisos (1947–1955), a model indoctrination camp of the Civil-War and post-Civil-War period in Greece. As I show, in many respects the operation of Giaros prison camp under the Junta continued the practices of the Civil-War past. The article draws on interviews with former detainees from both camps and historical periods. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity and privacy of interviewees. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions allowing survivors to tell their stories at their own pace and control how much information is shared.<sup>2,3</sup>

### **The Colonels' Military Junta (1967–1974)**

On April 21, 1967 a military Junta led by a group of Colonels seized power in Greece, suspending the Constitution, imposing censorship, restricting personal liberties and perpetrating widespread violations of human rights. Like all repressive political regimes, the Colonels appropriated culture in general, and music in particular, for ideological purposes. During the dictatorship, music was closely linked to the regime's nexus of power, its ideology and policies. The Junta's ideology

combined anti-communism and the assertion of cultural and national continuity with a purportedly heroic Greek past. Folk music especially was used by the Colonels to substantiate their ideological discourse of national continuity. This attempt to give their rule aesthetic roots, so to speak, in folk culture was a strategy of legitimization. The Colonels positioned and projected themselves as the true heirs of the nation's authentic culture and heroic traditions, who would now restore Greece to its rightful path. Official representations of the coup claimed and stressed a very selective historical continuity. Greeks were encouraged to see the military takeover as a renewal of the glories of classical Greece, Alexander the Great, and the 1821 Greek Revolution against the Ottomans, the latter leading to independence and the formation of a Greek state. This narrative of national self-celebration would inspire and guide the nation back to progress and glory. The idea of Greece and Greekness as a cultural and historical continuity, a unified and unbroken experience reaching from classical Greece to modern times, emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. According to this notion, tradition was transmitted organically and in a linear manner from antiquity to modern times.<sup>4</sup> Such assumptions problematically play down contradictions, for example the antagonistic relation between Byzantium and ancient Greece. As Stathis Gourgouris has argued, the nation in this view becomes an imaginary institution that shares the timeless quality of a dream.<sup>5</sup> This nineteenth-century ideological construct remained prominent and influential in the twentieth century. It was central to the Metaxas dictatorship, on whose rhetoric the Colonels drew heavily, and featured in the Civil War that followed WWII. Greek folk music was one of the resources by means of which this historical

continuity was constructed and propagated. An available link to the nation's heroic past, folk music was also, according to Colonel Ioannis Ladas, General Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, a moral art form extolling love, friendship, heroism, and all noble emotions important to man and society.<sup>6</sup> Along with marches, folk music became a main acoustic marker of the Colonels' regime and cultural politics.

### **Music as 'Healing':**

#### **Giaros Prison Camp (1967–1974)**

Probably the most damaging use of folk music under the Junta took place on the barren, uninhabited island of Giaros. Eighteen-square kilometres, Giaros belongs to the Cyclades island chain. Since Roman and Byzantine times, it had been a place of exile and imprisonment.<sup>7</sup> (p 195) Its facilities were constructed by the hard labour of the 6,000 (approximately) political prisoners exiled there in the late 1940s during the Civil War. The camp operated from 1947 to 1952, and again from 1955 to 1962. When the Colonels seized power in 1967, one of their first moves was to reopen Giaros, imprisoning and displacing thousands of their political opponents. According to a 1977 report by Amnesty International, already in the first few months, 6,000 people were held in prison camps on Greek islands. Even though this number had decreased by January 1968, the report notes that there were still 2,777 people held without trial on Giaros and Leros.<sup>8</sup> (p 10) Left out of the Amnesty report, however, were several other places of exile, as well as the prison facilities and detention centres of the Greek Military Police (Elliniki Stratiotiki Astinomia) and Security Forces (Asfalia). My research so far indicates that Civil-War-camp 're-education' practices, including the use of music, reappeared mainly on Giaros, during its first

phase of operation: that is, from 1967 to 1968. The Giaros camp was closed in November 1968, following international pressure from the Red Cross and worldwide condemnation for its appalling conditions.<sup>9</sup> It reopened in February 1974 and held 44 detainees until the fall of the dictatorship in July 1974. There is no evidence that music played from loudspeakers was used at that time.

During the first phase of the Giaros prison camp under the Junta, music and speeches heard over loudspeakers throughout the day were part of the offered 'cure' for the illness of Communism. In the nationalist discourse of the Junta, communists were 'Slavs' who lost or forfeited their Greekness; 're-education' was needed to restore them to Greekness. This designation was not something new but went back a long way, pointing to the alleged separatist agenda of the Greek Communist Party (Kommounistiko Komma Elladas or KKE). According to historian Polymeris Voglis, this denigrating label appeared following the KKE's 1925 call for an autonomous Macedonian state in the context of a Balkan confederation.<sup>1</sup> (p 65) Although this position was abandoned by 1935, the accusatory term remained and was used repeatedly by anti-Communist governments from Metaxas to the Colonels.

On Giaros the prisoners were bombarded with folksongs, so-called 'patriotic' songs, marches and speeches. An article in the U.K. newspaper *The Guardian*, dated March 29, 1974, reports on the 'Terrors of the Greek Gulag', noting that after the coup, 'seven thousand Communists were shipped to Giaros', where 'loudspeakers were used throughout the day to turn these beasts, as the then Deputy Brigadier Patakos described them, into "good Greeks"'.<sup>9</sup> According to interviewee A, music was the worst torture she had faced during her one-year exile

there. When most of the exiles were moved to Leros and other locations, A was among those who remained on the island. It is this group of people, rather than those who left early, who vividly recall the use of music. The women who stayed behind had a particularly difficult time, as they were locked in a space intended for 60 people and suffered most from exposure to the loudspeakers. As A recalled:

*Music was played non-stop for 12 hours at a time. It was something terrible. We were down on the ground, on mattresses made of hay. Locked in one room all 150 women [...]. We would sleep head across legs like sardines [...]. A room five-metre-high, no windows. Up at the top there were openings and on the outside a parapet from where the guards would pass and look inside. No privacy, no nothing. Life there was tragically difficult. [...] We did not sleep or wake up like normal people. In our sleep we heard screams, women having nightmares, ... that kind of thing. But what was terrible was the morning wake-up call with loud, blasting music: folksongs and national-liberation songs. 'The Enemies' Troops Have Passed' [march] and 'Famous Macedonia, Country of Alexander' [folksong]. And from then on, the 'Gerakines' [folk dances] and all that would start. Essentially they played what we loved. I can still dance 'Famous Macedonia'. I come from Macedonia. We had learned the dance at school and I loved it. But when this was taken by them... they appropriated it as if they were the Greeks and we the non-Greeks. [...]*

*The music... It started in the morning as a wake-up call and continued... It did not stop... it did not stop. Throughout slogans would also be heard. A song would be interrupted by 'this country will be saved because of the patriots who were sent by God' and so forth. And 'Don't forget that you are under the protection of Greek officers who will transform you into real Greeks'. In other words, there were slogans and then again*

*the music. Then the announcement of names. Who was leaving [having denounced their beliefs and signed a statement]. 'Follow them. It's not hard. It's only a signature...' And all this unravelling with a music that began to make us physically sick. When we would hear the loudspeakers, we did this [interviewee covers her ears].*

The folksong 'Gerakina' and the march 'Greece never dies' mentioned here were used heavily by the regime. This pairing of marches with folk music, broadcast on the radio from the very first day of the coup and recalled by several resistance fighters, was the abiding acoustic marker of the regime. The aim of music in 're-education' was to break the prisoners, to make them so demoralized, confused, shattered and desperate that they would sign declarations of loyalty to the government. The KKE denounced members who, unable to withstand torture and other pressures, broke down and signed declarations. Thus, the aim of 're-education' was to attack and destroy an established political identity and subjectivity, cutting it off from its basis in the solidarity of a political party.

Remarkably, we find the moral, pedagogical and healing role of music discussed at length in a talk given by Colonel Ioannis Ladas, the General Secretary of the Ministry of Interior and one of the regime's most important ideologues. During the inauguration ceremony of a Music Centre in Kalamata, in February 1970, Ladas spoke extensively about music and its Greek origins. An account of his talk was published in *The New York Times* on February 4, 1970, under the title 'Greek Official Urges Penalties for Music Aping Hippie Tunes'. Stressing the idea of continuity from antiquity until the present day, Ladas exalted the 'patriotic folksong' which 'sprang from pure and

authentic emotions' and 'was not composed by drug-addict hippies'.<sup>6</sup> He rebuked 'certain artistic circles whose works harm art and pollute society'. Most importantly in the context considered here is his emphasis on the purported 'healing' properties of music, and hence its ability to reform society:

*Our forefathers, and first and foremost Aristotle, believed that music ennobles the soul. For this, in the third century BC Aristoxenos wrote a treaty which explains how music influences one's character morally. At that time, music was recommended as a medium of psychotherapy. Theophrastos held that through music one can forget the pains of arthritis and sciatica. All these theories by Greeks have been confirmed in the medically advanced countries, using the so-called music-therapy in their hospitals.  
[...]*

*And I ask: Does art serve society when it gives rise to immoral ideas, reactionary situations? Does art serve society when it praises pessimism and obscenity, when it brings lewd thoughts to the mind, or when it extols the deniers of values such as the Communists? [...] All these harm the arts. [...] Today the state also intervenes. If some people do not want to consider the education of society as the aim of the arts, then the state cannot allow them to set as its aim the corruption of society. It will stop them and stamp them out to protect both society and the arts, because arts are there to bring benefit and not to harm.*<sup>10</sup> (My translation)

Indeed the regime did its best to 'stamp out' its opponents through imprisonment, exile and torture, aiming both at the prisoner's body and psyche. In Ladas' words, 'art is for man, and by inference art is for society. It is art's destiny to educate society'. In this sense the choice of songs, whether folk music that underlined the Junta's rhetoric of usurping

tradition or love songs aiming to remind them of life beyond the camp walls, was not accidental, nor was it perceived as such by prisoners.

### **The Makronisos Legacy (1947–1955)**

In the Greek context, the use of music to break prisoners and shatter subjectivity precedes the Junta. This kind of instrumentalization was already deployed extensively in the Greek Civil War. Although there were several places of exile, what is of interest here are the camps on the barren island of Makronisos. It was in this island that 're-education' was institutionalized. Created in 1947, Makronisos was used as a rehabilitation station for Greeks 'infected' with the virus of communism. The Makronisos camps were initially conceived as barracks where tens of thousands of soldiers suspected of communist convictions were to be re-educated through hard labour, lectures, music and speeches played from a radio station, but most importantly through brutal torture. In its initial stage Makronisos consisted of three barracks: First Battalion for soldiers who had not repented, Second Battalion for those allegedly on the way to rehabilitation, and Third Battalion for soldiers who had signed declarations of repentance. Once 'rehabilitated', the soldiers would be used as torturers against their former comrades, and sent to the front to fight on the side of the National Army. Seen as an enormous success, the Makronisos camps were expanded in 1948, with the addition of camps for political prisoners, including women. By 1955, when it officially closed, about 100,000 people had been detained there.

The Makronisos camps were widely publicised both in Greece and internationally. High officials and international guests were given tours of the great rehabilitation

experiment of Makronisos. The brutal physical and psychological torture and inhumane living conditions were obscured by a full-blown propaganda campaign. Lieutenant Colonel Strangeways of the British Military Mission to Greece had no trouble seeing the reality behind the sales pitch. Visiting the camps in 1950, he noted that on Makronisos there is 'a state of affairs which is contrary to the British and American conception of humanity and justice'.<sup>1</sup> (p 105) For the most part, however, the national and international media were satisfied to reproduce the official line. American journalist Dorothy Thomson expressed her enthusiastic approval of the Makronisos experiment, seeing it as a rare model of rehabilitation. In an article in the Greek newspaper *Ta Nea* in May 1949, she notes that Greece's old love for music was reborn there.<sup>11</sup> The camp, she writes, had one of the best male choirs she had ever heard, as well as an orchestra with popular-music instruments such as mandolin and accordion; she goes on to extol the patriotic singing of reformed young communists. The male choir of the Second Battalion was also remarked in an article in *The Guardian* by Steven Runciman.<sup>12</sup> Runciman describes his wonderful experience visiting Makronisos, where 'the old Greek spirit is being reborn, vital, eager and full of faith and hope':

*Visitors are welcome... Their reception is marked by speeches and parades, then the playing of bands and the shouting of slogans [...]. No one who watches the men's faces can doubt that they are thoroughly and genuinely enjoying themselves. [...] The third [battalion] runs the radio station, which puts out a programme of music chiefly of local talent, and talks which are known to be heard by the rebels in the mountains. It also runs the press, producing a well-printed monthly magazine.*

The military radio station mentioned here went on air in November 1948, shortly after the establishment of the Central Radio Station of the Military Forces in May.<sup>13</sup> It was, in fact, built by the same people it targeted, the detainees themselves.<sup>1</sup> (p 104)

The Makronisos military radio station was one of the first to be established, preceding that of Athens (inaugurated in December 1948); played over loudspeakers in the camps, its importance in the development of 're-education' programs is clear. Interviewee B, now a left-wing historian, was detained there from 1948 to 1949. He explained to me how music was an integral part of the so-called 'national university', consisting of a steady syllabus of nationalist songs and speeches. For him, it became one of the worst experiences of exile. He recalls:

*In Makronisos the loudspeakers would begin in the morning with the wake-up call. In all the barracks they had put columns with loudspeakers. From a central station they played national songs, nationalist speeches and so-forth. In other words, from the moment you would wake up, from six in the morning you would hear all this music and the speeches. To escape you would have to go in the sea. In order to avoid this music [...] I enrolled to the rubbish collection service. Because... we were away from all this. Of course we had to chase mice, gather the trash and throw them in the sea. But this was better than listening to this music. It would be played until nine in the evening. Of course this was the general tactic of breaking prisoners, to make them sign declarations and so forth. They played songs like 'Paul the King', 'We will Crush you Bulgarians', 'You will Never See Again Thrace and Macedonia'. [...] A fellow detainee, who had been in Buchenwald during World War II, used to say that Makronisos was worse. [...] He would say that in Makronisos they try to take away your soul, which makes it worst. There [Buchenwald] they had*

*you for your labour. They did not mess with your psychological state.*

Autobiographical accounts in the form of testimonies, short stories, and novels written by former exiles testify to the repeated use of music, recalling a wide-range of repertory of songs. The different repertory here may reflect the different periods during which exiles were kept on the island. It may also be due to the fact that certain songs became anchored more firmly in the memory; for various reasons the use of music was more significant, damaging or altogether noteworthy for certain exiles. Drawing on autobiographical experience, Panagiotis Economopoulos' novel *The Exiles* gives a central role to music played from loudspeakers.<sup>14</sup>

Recollecting his first two days at the First Battalion (that is, the battalion of the unrepentant communists) in October 1948, the main character's narration is dominated by music references. Music was used as a wake-up call, beginning at 7 am with marches,<sup>14</sup> (p 278) but most importantly, music was used as an instrument of terror. Upon their arrival at the First Battalion's camp, the soldiers were chased by the 'Alfamites', that is, by repented soldiers turned torturers of their former comrades. Their attack was marked by the sudden playing of the march 'Greece Never Dies' from the loudspeakers.<sup>14</sup> (p 268) During a frightening chase, the loudspeakers continuously played songs ('now there was a little waltz, "For us the Birds Are Singing", and "Do me my Favour"', while their persecutors shouted: 'Commies you're going to die'. Economopoulos continues:

*We left from the road so as not to bump into them, and headed for the sea. It was downhill. The loudspeaker was now playing the march 'The Enemies Troops Have Past', so loud it*

*would break your eardrums, so you would not be able to focus your mind. I and the others were sliding down the hill without feeling my legs, my head was about to break from the heat, as if they had locked me in an iron-barrel fired by the sun. And then the loudspeaker, a heavy threatening voice 'attention, attention, the citizens running toward the sea to return immediately to the assembly point'. An eye that sees everything. [...] Now there were light-popular songs, one sung by ... Elias with Jimmy, 'Black Lustful Women', 'Give me the Most Expensive Drink to Drink'. But my fatigue and the volume of the sound were such that it was as if they were hammering the tune on sheet metal by my head.*<sup>14</sup> (p 271)

Cheerful tunes played continuously at certain times are also mentioned later in the narration. Such music is also recalled by Ourania Staveri who was transferred to Makronisos from Trikeri in autumn 1949. Staveri recalls the loudspeakers in top volume, starting off with the prayer, followed by anticommunist propaganda, urging them to save their souls from communist propaganda. This, she writes, was followed by old love songs, aiming to awaken in their 'hearts the nostalgia for life and love. You see "psychology" is needed everywhere'.<sup>15</sup> (pp 94-95) Indeed they seem to have been successful to the extent that she returns to the love songs time and time again in her narration. Last but not least, as Voglis has shown, music accompanied the hard labour endured by the prisoners in Makronisos: they had to work with the sound of nationalist songs such as 'Modest Makronisos, the embrace of the pioneers / a fatherland of heroes with great glory / a fatherland great and well-known, not one of slaves / the menace and the grave of the barbarian Slavs'.<sup>1</sup> (pp 102,103) Additionally, according to a letter to the Communist newspaper *Rizospastis* (25 June 1947) by

prisoners of the Second Battalion, hard labour was accompanied by the sound of clarinets and violins, played continuously.<sup>16</sup> This use of music, they write, was introduced after the authorities failed to make them yield, and reminded them of the practices of Hitler's Nazi regime.

Bridging these two historical periods is the testimony of C, a writer and left-wing fighter who spent three decades in and out of prison and exile on remote islands such as Makronisos and Ai Stratis. During the Junta, he was held in several prisons in Athens and Corfu from November 1967 until the general amnesty of 1973. He was also detained, interrogated and tortured at the Security Forces Headquarters of Piraeus infamous for its use of electric bells played continuously in the tiny isolation cells.<sup>17</sup> (pp 71–72) Discussing his experience of abuse and torture under the Junta, C told me: 'I am so fed up with the clarinet... had they put a clarinet player inside the isolation cell [...] I would have said everything. They would not have to torture me, I would surrender myself entirely, so much I can't take it.'

The reference to the clarinet here is no coincidence. Favoured by the Colonels along with the folk dance *tsamiko* to which the clarinet is central, folk music with clarinets became a common topos for the Junta in collective memory. In modern Greek history, *tsamikos* has been associated with the 1821 struggle for freedom from the Ottomans. According to *Dances and Costumes of our Country*, a series of documentaries aired on National Television in 1972 under the Junta, *tsamiko* is singled out as the best known and bravest of all Greek dances, 'passing through the heroic struggles of the race'. 'During the holy uprising for the Nation's liberation,' the narrator tells us, '[*tsamiko*] was danced by brave warriors before or after the intoxication of battle.'<sup>18</sup> The Junta dictators and particu-

larly their leader George Papadopoulos never missed an opportunity to lead the dance in public, during televised national celebrations. In this way, they actively and publicly performed their claimed role as carriers of tradition and the nation's brave redeemers.

C was detained in Makronisos in 1953. In order to ascertain whether his traumatic aversion to the clarinet went that far back, I asked him if the radio in Makronisos played folk music with clarinets. 'Oh my god, of course!', he said, 'All the time!', recalling the *tsamiko* 'Papalambraina' as a usual choice, but also military marches. Contrary to B, C remembers the radio playing during certain hours and not all day. This is not surprising, however, because by 1953 the 're-education' agenda of the island was not as strict as in the camps' early years. In fact, by 1953 the number of detainees in Makronisos had fallen greatly. After the 1950 elections, in which a striking majority of the Makronisos exiles voted for the Democratic Party supported by the Left, it was clearly evident that the experiment was not successful as previously supported by the Makronisos authorities. Given the national and international outcry, most of the exiles were sent to other destinations and the barracks were used solely for soldiers who were thought to have come under the influence of communist ideology.

C's testimony underlines how music torture can be as damaging as physical torture, or in this case even more. On death row at the age of 16, C had been brutally tortured on a regular basis over the more than two decades which he had spent in detention before the Colonels' coup. In fact, in a past interview in 2006 he noted that his pain tolerance and his indifference with regard to dying was known to the most notorious torturers of the Athens Security Forces, where he was kept for a month in

isolation under the Junta. Unlike the Security Forces of Piraeus, the infamous Athenian torturers chose not to interrogate C, but sent him straight to prison. This, he argued, was done precisely because they were aware of his tolerance to pain.<sup>19</sup> In this light C's description of music as his ultimate breaking point is very important, underscoring the damage caused by the exposure to music on a regular basis during conditions of detention.

The shattering effects of this practice seems to fall in line with the so-called 'brainwashing' that was so widespread in the aftermath of WWII and at which the Soviets were thought to have excelled. To counter this in the aftermath of WWII the U.S.A., Canada and Britain engaged in research funded by the CIA which aimed at developing similar 'brainwashing techniques' to break political opponents.<sup>20</sup> (pp 21–59) This research later gave way to a combination of techniques which included isolation, stress positions, noise/music, sensory deprivation for the breaking of prisoners' subjectivity. Although in the aftermath of WWII, it seems that internment camps used music primarily as a so-called 're-education' tool, music and sound were soon deployed within a more complex understanding of torture as an attack of all the senses. As I have shown elsewhere, these practices, including music, were also used by the Colonels' regime and in particular by the Special Interrogation Unit of the Military Police (Eidiko Anakritiko Tmima Ellinikis Stratiotikis Astinomias)<sup>17</sup>. The damaging effect of such strategies is highlighted in *Political Propaganda* (1968), used as a textbook in police and military police academies during the Junta, written by far-right lawyer Constantine Plevis.<sup>21</sup> (pp 228–229) In discussing 'brainwashing', the author explains that what he calls psychological torture can be far worse than physical

torture. Noting the danger of losing the subject beyond the point of no return, he emphasizes that it is important not to destroy the subject but rather to liquidate the personality and replace it with a radically different one. The process is similar, he offers revealingly, to what happens with soldiers during their initial training in boot camp.

To conclude, originating in the Greek Civil War, the 're-education' legacy continued in the early years of the Colonels' military dictatorship on the island of Giaros. Interviews with persons detained during the Junta and the (post) Civil-War period, as well as autobiographical accounts, testify to the damage inflicted on detainees by the means of music during detention. Both the choice of songs and their continuous playing from loudspeakers were deliberate. The practice has left its mark on former detainees who recall its traumatic nature even today, when some of them have reached 80 years of age. Such testimonies bring to the fore the need to re-examine our understanding of music's damaging potential when used as an instrument of terror, and to discuss the broadening of the definition torture. This discussion is both crucial and timely given the institutionalization of music in current forms of detention, interrogation and torture.

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# Dancing to Distraction: Mediating 'Docile Bodies' in 'Philippine Thriller Video'

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## Abstract

This essay examines the conditions behind the 'Philippine Prison Thriller' video, a YouTube spectacle featuring the 1,500 inmates of Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (CPDRC) dancing to Michael Jackson's hit song 'Thriller'. The video achieved viral status after it was uploaded onto the video-sharing platform in 2007, and sparked online debates as to whether this video, containing recorded moving images of allegedly forced dancing, was a form of cruel and inhumane punishment or a novel approach to rehabilitation. The immense popularity of the video inspired creative responses from viewers, and this international popularity caused the CPDRC to host a monthly live dance show held in the prison yard, now in its seventh year.

The essay explores how seemingly innocuous products of user-generated-content are imbued with ideologies that obscure or reduce relations of race, agency, power and control. By contextualising the video's origins, I highlight current Philippine prison conditions and introduce how video-maker/programme inventor/prison warden Byron Garcia sought to distance his facility from the Philippine prison majority. I then

investigate the 'mediation' of 'Thriller' through three main issues. One, I examine the commodification and transformation from viral video to a thana-tourist destination; two, the global appeal of 'Thriller' is founded on public penal intrigue and essentialist Filipino tropes, mixed with a certain novelty factor widely suffused in YouTube formats; three, how dance performance and its mediation here are conducive to creating Foucault's docile bodies, which operate as a tool of distraction for the masses and ultimately serve the interests of the state far more than it rehabilitates (unconvicted and therefore innocent) inmates.

*'I wanted something to thrill the world. I just found it so hilarious, so melodious. What an irony. They're right here in this jail, considered the rejects of society, and yet these rejects are now making our province and our country proud.'*

Byron Garcia, ABC News Interview, 2007<sup>1</sup>

*Key words:* Internet media, Philippines, dance/movement therapy, music

## Introduction

On July 17, 2007, Byron F. Garcia uploaded a YouTube video of 1,500 orange jumpsuit-clad dancing inmates from the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (hereafter CPDRC) dancing the choreographic sequences from Michael Jackson's 1982 music video Thriller. The four minute-long video, known among YouTube

<sup>1</sup>) Institute of Popular Music, School of Music, University of Liverpool, UK; Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines.

audiences as the ‘Thriller viral video’ or ‘Philippine Prison Thriller’ (hereafter ‘Thriller’), amassed millions of views nationally and internationally. The video elicited a range of responses both positive and negative. As news reporters and documentary-makers visited the central Philippine island to learn more about the self-proclaimed ‘Dancing Inmates’,<sup>a</sup> most media outlets gave light-hearted reports while others indicated that forced dance rehearsals lasted for up to four hours daily.<sup>b</sup> Fans of the video continue to write supportive comments on YouTube celebrating the programme as a novel use of music and dance therapy, a model of holistic and therapeutic prison practice.<sup>c</sup> At the same time, national and international criticism of the dance programme surfaced. Allegations of inhumane treatment have been made against CPDRC by Philippine human rights group Karapatan, with primary blame resting on the inventor of the programme, Byron Garcia. In a BBC interview, Amnesty International Philippines stated that the dance videos appear to deny the individual inmates the basic right to respect.<sup>2</sup> Reports from 2007–10<sup>1–3</sup> indicate the implicit and explicit coercion that takes place in order for 1,500 inmates to partici-

pate in daily dance rehearsals; certain privileges are withdrawn for those who will not dance, with some inmates claiming they were denied food and conjugal visits for non-participation. Additional reports claim inmates who refused to dance were beaten<sup>3</sup> and one prisoner, a lead dancer, claims that his scheduled transfer from the facility was put on hold because of his ‘integral part in the public performances’.<sup>4</sup>

The video and its subsequent reception raise several complex issues, from prisoner agency and welfare to the reality of implementing a penal rehabilitation programme in a developing nation. Recent scholarship has noted the return to the ‘spectacle’ of punishment, and some have addressed the benefits of dance therapy as a mode of rehabilitation in prison environments and view CPDRC, overall, as a transformation from the punitive to the pleasurable.<sup>5,6</sup> Dance scholar J. Lorenzo Perillo discusses how the programme influences the social construction of Otherness, ‘discourages critical cultural engagement’ and ‘extends racial and colonial inequalities’.<sup>7</sup> The following article focuses on the commodification of the rehabilitation programme, and argues that YouTube broadcasting of the

<sup>a</sup> The title ‘Dancing Inmates’ was bestowed to them from Byron Garcia, and is reported in his video ‘CPDRC Song’ [Online] uploaded 9 October, 2008. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-hinTjCD64> [2 October, 2013].

<sup>b</sup> Journalist Nick Lazaredes states that inmates dance twice daily, at 6am and 4pm in Jailhouse Rock: Cebu’s Youtube celebrities, SBS Dateline [Online]; 10 October, 2007. Available from: <http://www.sbs.com.au/dateline/story/transcript/id/131759/n/Jailhouse-Rock-Cebu-s-Youtube-celebrities> [2 October, 2013].

<sup>c</sup> See user cesaryapril1’s comment: ‘If Id [sic] ever be put in jail this is where i want them to send me lovin it:):)’; Pinkelephantist’s comment: ‘DANCE IS POWERFUL and so is MUSIC...I’d rather see them do this then [sic] think about their next crime after they get out. Don’t hate.....ParticipatE!’; and dragonsorcerer’s comment: ‘I like the message you were trying to convey. Prisons are overall a mess, no matter what society you look at. They should be used to rehabilitate those that can be, and not as a way to cage those that can be saved with the fallen, thus promoting the breeding of evil.’ Available from: [http://www.youtube.com/all\\_comments?v=hMnk7lh9M3o&page=2](http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=hMnk7lh9M3o&page=2) [2 October, 2013]. Hugh Riminton reports that ‘Every able-bodied prisoner – about 1,500 of them – must dance... Sometimes, the dancing occupies up to five hours a day’. Riminton H. ‘Thriller’ Prisoners Prepare to Make ‘Electric Dreams’ Come True. CNN.com [Online]; 5 September, 2007. Available from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/09/04/dancing.prisoners/#cnnSTCText>. [2 October, 2013].

performances fall in contrast to rehabilitative Dance/Movement therapy conventions. I question whether the mediation of recorded videos of the dance programme and whether such digital circulation constitutes a violation of prisoners' humanity and inherent dignity as outlined in international standards governing the treatment of prisoners.<sup>8,9</sup> The tension between the positive benefits of this music and dance therapy programme against allegations of mistreatment through enforced participation is examined, taking into account the sociocultural and economic landscape of the Philippines, as well as the power of dance as a medium for constructing what French philosopher Michel Foucault called 'docile bodies'.

While Jonathan Sterne<sup>10</sup> argues that [audio-recording] formats help define meaning, critical assessment of sound, vision and format in light of current, post-digitisation, consumption practices, critical discourse remains limited. Thus, the mediation of prison 'Thriller' through the context of digital, audio-visual site YouTube is a matter of great significance. Using 'mediation' here in the context of new media studies, I argue that the Internet mediation of these pop-dance recordings through the video-sharing platform YouTube without proper, prior consent denies unconvicted individuals the right to privacy, as such videos and associated images enjoy an afterlife that far exceeds most jail sentences. Through an examination of essentialist racial tropes, I argue that the popularity of 'Thriller' serves hegemonic political institutions by distracting global audiences from the harsh realities of everyday Philippine prison life. By investigating the cultural context alongside media depiction and reception of the inmates, I argue that careful consideration must be given before rehabilitation programmes are disseminated online and become government

public policy. Before analysing the mediation of the events however, further details about the CPDRC's unusual approach to rehabilitation are required.

### **Contextualising Philippine Prisons: Byron F. Garcia and CPDRC**

CPDRC is a modern, purpose-built detention centre, in the hills high outside the city of Cebu and is the largest prison on Cebu island. Because the judicial system is notoriously slow and rife with corruption, all inmates at CPDRC are awaiting trial on an array of charges – many waiting for up to six years.<sup>11</sup> CPDRC was built to comfortably accommodate 1,400 inmates, with a population of 1,288 in January 2013. In contrast, neighbouring Cebu City Jail and Mandaue City Jail have increasingly housed over twice their capacity in recent years. CPDRC's desire to serve as a model of 'leadership and good governance'<sup>12</sup> and subsequent refusal to overcrowd their facility is in contrast to fellow Philippine prisons as they struggle with severe overcrowding in old, sub-standard facilities. Indeed, conditions in prisons across the Philippines are notoriously harsh; former Philippine president Gloria Arroyo Macapagal once said a life sentence in a Philippine prison was worse than death.<sup>13</sup> Recent human rights advocates report similar findings, observing widespread, consistent and credible reports of the use of torture against persons in detention, and harsh prison conditions characterised by overcrowding, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate nutrition and medical attention.<sup>14</sup> Philippine prison populations today show over-congestion by 300% plus, as well as a significant rise in recidivism.<sup>15,16</sup>

After a series of violent incidents unsettled the wardens at the previously overcrowded CPDRC, Cebu Governor

Gwen Garcia appointed her brother Byron as Security Consultant to the facility in 2006. The newcomer to prison employment was given free reign to restore discipline and control to the prison. Byron Garcia initiated a mandatory calisthenics regime that was only met with success when music was added – initially a compilation of his favourite 1980s and '90s pop songs. Played over six loudspeakers across the prison yard, the sounds of Queen and the Village People enticed inmates to clap and move together in time to the beat. Delighted with the results, Garcia recorded the rehearsing waves of orange dancers with a view to share his experiments with other prison officials. Using his personal channel and username 'byronfgarcia', he uploaded a record-setting performance of 967 inmates dancing 'The Algorithm March' to YouTube in October 2006. Official choreographers from outside the prison were hired thereafter, and several homemade videos followed including routines to songs from the musical-film *Sister Act*, and Pink Floyd, so that by the time 'Thriller' was uploaded, Garcia had a firm understanding of the communicative potential that this new media platform, YouTube, held. More than the physical movement of dance, Garcia attributes power to music as the platform to reach the inmates 'inner-psyche'. Using his YouTube channel as a platform to explain his philosophy, he describes his belief that 'therapeutic music and dance is meant to help prisoners cope with their depression and anxiety, improve their wellbeing as they go through a transition phase and reintegrate to society'. His manifesto continues:

*Music is a protocol to heal them of emotional and psychological disorders and trauma as a result of the offense or incarceration. Because penology practices make living hell in jails, the tendency is we breed next generation demons when they are discharged. If prisoners are healed while in prison, then we make them better persons when they are released and stay away from crime.*

Here Garcia affirms his belief that his programme 'heals' inmates through the therapeutic power of pop music, a statement he reaffirms in countless media interviews. Yet to date no official reports confirm exactly how the programme has healed inmates, how and if it actually reduces recidivism rates.

### **The Dancing Inmates: Viral Video and Tourist Destination**

YouTube's amateur-video origins have been countered by the sites' increasing commercialisation. Yet despite this, YouTube remains primarily associated with user-generated and amateur content. A short history of CPDRC's dance-as-rehabilitation programme echoes YouTube's evolution from personal to public to commercial.<sup>d</sup> 'Thriller', posted on YouTube on July 17, 2007, was one of the earlier amateur videos in YouTube history to go truly 'viral' since the website went live mid-2005. Within the first week of being uploaded the video had been viewed some two million times, accruing in excess of 52 million hits at the time of writing. International press and YouTube viewer comments generally express surprise, followed by amusement, ridicule and racial aspersion watching the Dancing Inmates videos – a cursory glance at any of the 90,000+

<sup>d</sup> The phrasing here echoes Kim J. The Institutionalization of YouTube: From User-Generated Content to Professionally Generated Content. *Media Culture Society* 2012; 34(53):65.

comments garnered to date will reveal such crude categories.

Capitalising on the popularity of their YouTube presence, Garcia initiated a live, monthly public musical showcase by August 2007. Held in the prison yard, locals and foreign tourists alike are openly invited to view two-hour pop music performances by the inmates from the panoptic towers above. Although tickets to these shows are free, donations are accepted and this unique convergence of 'leisure and imprisonment'<sup>17</sup> has generated extra revenue for the facility from the sale of official CPDRC merchandise and refreshments. These performances are advertised locally and sometimes, online, with posters announcing their updated repertoire. CPDRC's growing reputation as a tourist attraction for the island of Cebu (and the Philippines) follows several other detention facilities that have opened their doors to the public including sites that continue to operate as fully functioning prisons (most notably, Angola Prison Rodeo show at Louisiana State Penitentiary, USA). After the shows and in contrast to any maximum-security prison protocol, audience members are invited down into the prison yard to have their photographs taken with the inmates. Requests for dances are also taken, from Governor Garcia's birthday requests (songs by Vanilla Ice and the Human League) to YouTube fans demands for 'Gangnam Style' and 'The Harlem Shake'. The combination of regular YouTube postings, live performances and additional tourist spectacles appear to commodify the inmates for the purpose of financial revenue and mass entertainment.

Extraordinary levels of control are involved in creating a YouTube video like this – and prisons are first and foremost spaces of control. Many early videos uploaded onto YouTube feature extended introductions

preceding the dance routines. Garcia seizes the opportunity to introduce live and imagined audiences to the most prominent inmates. Using a microphone amplified by the prison speakers, inmates must state their name, and the offence with which they have been charged. Prisoners are presented as human, but permanently inscribed with their (alleged) crime. A 2008 documentary by Journeyman Pictures reveals the extent of the surveillance and control enacted in CPDRC. Interviews with the inmates highlight their lack of consent in Garcia's YouTube broadcasts, most pointedly displayed in an interview with prominent dancer Wienjiel Resane who states that they didn't know Garcia had broadcast videos of their dances on the Internet until reporters arrived at the facility requesting interviews with the lead dancers. Permission was not sought nor required for Garcia to disseminate videos of the CPDRC inmates' rehabilitation programme over YouTube.

### **Problematizing Musical Stereotypes**

The choice of primarily Western pop music soundtracks for the dance programme is not surprising given the centuries of Western influence upon the Philippines since the 1500s. Colloquially, and academically, the Philippines is regularly cited as a nation filled with 'inherently' musical people. As Filipino historian and playwright Horacio de la Costa<sup>18</sup> romantically eulogised, music is regarded as one of the 'jewels' of the Filipino, providing a bond that binds across a nation of over one hundred languages and dialects. Tracing the history of this so-called musicality highlights the explicit role of colonisation in music training, from Spanish friars teaching Filipino natives Catholic hymns in four-part harmony, to American enculturation during the World War II through the medium of radio and popular song.

CPDRC, nestled in the Visayas region of the Philippines, provides a particularly rich history of music traditions that extends pre-Spanish acquisition. Visayans are frequently stereotyped among Filipinos as the most musical people in the country, due to their bustling calendar of fiestas. The Visayans, legend tells us, 'were said to be always singing except when they were sick or asleep'.<sup>19</sup> With the exception of funerals, historian William H. Scott explains that

*[A]ll Visayan feasts... were accompanied by dancing and gong playing – weddings, birth of children, planting and harvesting of crops, preparations for war, and victory celebrations afterwards.*<sup>19</sup>

In Cebu, as indeed in many other cultures, music rituals also include movement and dance. The Sinulog fiesta, an annual festival commemorating the Filipino conversion to Roman Catholicism, is celebrated throughout Cebu (and many other parts of the Philippines), and its main feature is the collective performance of the Sinulog dance. To dance the Sinulog dance is to worship the Santo Niño, providing liminal spaces of celebration and bonding.<sup>20</sup> From early childhood, Cebuanos perform the Sinulog steps to the clear beat of the gongs and trumpets. Dance, particularly collective and collaborative dance in unison, occurs regularly in the lives of many Cebuanos and symbolises how music and dance are embedded in collective memory, national identity and power relationships. Scholars have noted that centuries of contact with traders and missionaries followed by combined periods of Spanish colonialism (1521-1898), American imperialism (1898-1946) and the Marcos dictatorship (1966-1986) 'immersed Filipinos in complex sociocultural situations that left deep

imprints of the West as superior and advantageous'.<sup>21</sup>

Today, music certainly continues to play an important role in everyday life for millions of Filipinos. Clearly, Garcia built his rehabilitation programme on an existing musical-Philippine stereotype, or what Perillo<sup>7</sup> designates the 'Filipino-mimicry stereotype'. Perillo fluently argues that the musical-mimicry stereotype normalises the dancing inmates as essentially Filipino, while simultaneously creating an 'elated sense of collective identity for a multicultural archipelago that has survived centuries of psychologically fragmenting and violent colonialism'.<sup>7</sup> This stereotype, in combination with its presentation on YouTube, discourages critical engagement with 'Thriller' and, as I go on to argue, are in contrast to traditional conventions of Dance/Movement therapy, instead revealing underlying ideologies of punitive punishment, discipline, and control.

### Dance and Docile Bodies

*'The inmates relate to me. I relate to them. You know? We have a good relationship now. Whatever I tell them to do, they do.'*

Byron Garcia, ABC News Interview, 2007

Such observations on using music and dance as a form of benign discipline follow Michel Foucault's analysis of modern penology, as explained in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.<sup>22</sup> Foucault's account of the shift from public punishment and executions to a 'gentler', more 'civilized' method of punishment through imprisonment reveals that the changes in penal history served not to punish less, but to punish better. Punishment became 'gentle', though not for humanitarian reasons. Foucault argues that reformists were unhappy with the unpredictable, unevenly

distributed nature of the violence that the sovereign would focus on the body of the convict. The sovereign's right to punish was so disproportionate that it was ineffective and uncontrolled. Out of this movement towards widespread, more evenly distributed punishment, a thousand mini-theatres of punishment were created wherein the convicts' bodies were put on display in a more ubiquitous, controlled, and effective spectacle. It is perhaps no surprise that Garcia's ideology reflects aspects of Foucault's theories on modern penology, such as the desire to impart on the viewer a visual lesson in morality. Garcia asserts that he saw in the lyrics and video of Michael Jackson's original *Thriller*, a much celebrated extended music video featuring the undead (zombies, werewolves) climbing out from their graves, dancing under the moonlight, much of what prison culture is like. Discussing his reasons for choosing the 1980s song 'Thriller' for the inmates to perform, he explains:

*The Dancing Inmates come as... people perceived to be evil... What I wanted inmates to do in dancing to the Thriller was for them to be convicted to sin. When I uploaded this on the YouTube, what I wanted viewers to see is how evil dances in our lives without knowing its deathly consequences.*<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that CPDRC inmates are awaiting trial, and thus innocent until proven guilty, Garcia publicly convicts them 'in sin'. His determination to make an international example of their (allegedly) criminal bodies is striking, juxtaposing medieval public spectacles of punishment with modern prison philosophy and macro level mediation potential. The CPDRC replaces corporal violence with dance rehearsals, Perillo observes, and in doing so 'redistributes public responsibility online to... bring

criminals to justice'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, while Garcia claims dance performance is pitched in opposition to punishing the inmates' physical body, he simultaneously reveals an underlying moral impetus behind the Internet broadcasting of 'Thriller', but becomes additionally affective when we remind ourselves that most of the mediated and remediated inmates remain unconvicted of any crime.

The dance routines, but more significantly their mediation, represent a shift from disciplinary societies, as Deleuze contends. The result is a 'move towards control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication'.<sup>24</sup> This is crucial in relation to CPDRC, as the benefits of exposing prisoners to pop music and dance, as well as widespread fame and (mis)fortune through their commercial spectacle, must be considered as part of a wider inclination towards new, open forms of punishment that are being introduced 'without a critical understanding (of) what is happening'.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the inmates become useful to the states' requirements, thus enacting the quintessential modernist approach to discipline, producing what Foucault designates as 'docile bodies': bodies that not only do what we want, but do it precisely in the way that we want. Accordingly, through their embodied performance, the inmates have become Foucault's subjected and practiced bodies that embody the very essence of docility.<sup>22</sup>

Measured in millions of YouTube hits, thousands of tourists' photographs and hundreds of news reports, Garcia's programme is deemed by many to be successful. Yet concerns for the inmates resurfaced in February 2010, weeks after U.S.-based Sony Pictures conducted a highly publicised visit to CPDRC. Travis Payne, Michael Jackson's

long-time dancer and choreographer, along with two professional dancers, taught CPDRC inmates an adapted choreographed routine for 'They Don't Really Care About Us.' The final performance, the first CPDRC video to be recorded in HD (higher definition) by Sony, was subsequently used to promote Jackson's posthumous 'This is it' release. Questions were raised about missing donation money after the event, and Governor Garcia suspended the dance programme (and by default, the recording and dissemination of new dancing inmates videos), expressing a desire to focus on other rehabilitative measures instead. At the same time she declined the opportunity to renew her brothers' contract as CPDRC Security Official, effectively causing his dismissal from the facility amid rumours of embezzlement. However, the demand from YouTube fans for the dance programme to be reinstated was so great that by August 2010 the governor abandoned attempts at implementing alternative rehabilitation methods. Rehearsals recommenced and the monthly live shows resumed as before. However, it appears two significant shifts occurred in the programmes' operations between February and August 2010. Firstly, since late 2010 recorded performances are no longer made or disseminated by Byron Garcia; they are instead uploaded from different YouTube accounts by various CPDRC staff. Secondly, and most notably, for the first time since its inception and with Garcia's explicit dismissal, it appears that participation in the programme is no longer mandatory. Inmates may choose to dance, and there is no

punishment or withdrawal of privileges for non-participation.<sup>e</sup>

Due to the international popularity of the videos, by the end of 2007, eight Filipino prisons had begun adapting Garcia's dance as rehabilitation. By March 2010, the Philippine government passed legislation to implement the dance programme in all prisons across the Philippines. This new public policy, signed by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), placed Byron Garcia at the helm of the new 'Ambassadors of Goodwill' programme, which featured twelve former dancing inmates, now released from CPDRC and touring the Philippine islands, with Garcia sometimes appearing alongside in the dual role of programme creator/troupe 'manager', promoting his CPDRC rehabilitation programme in other Philippine prisons and on Philippine public broadcast television shows. Garcia's actions have also been acknowledged by international sources concurrently, in the form of the 2011 Disruptive Innovator Award at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York. Since 2010, apart from sporadic YouTube posts depicting waves of dancing inmates in Metro Manila and Bilibad prisons, the impact and effectiveness of the BJMP's nationwide policy in practice remains as elusive as CPDRC's original programme.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The dance-as-rehabilitation programme, the recorded and disseminated performances and associated monthly performances are conflicting on several grounds. The true

<sup>e</sup> Interviews with CPDRC staff and reinstated choreographer Vince Rosales, in addition to observations in January 2013 confirm that at present, some inmates do not participate in the programme, it appears, for a number of reasons including old age, ill health, and personal choice. Yet for the most part, the majority of inmates 'choose' (inasmuch as one can choose in coercive environs) to participate. My research suggests their desire to participate is primarily due to a lack of other, viable options.

origins of the programme are difficult to construe, as Garcia interchanged the reason for initiating the programme with each media interview given. Initially, he asserts an exercise programme was created to provide discipline and control over unruly inmates, later using music to 'penetrate their psyche'.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after that it is described as a tool of distraction, to take their minds off their impending trials, as Garcia confirms: 'Inmates say to me: "You have put my mind off revenge, foolishness, or thinking how to escape."<sup>27</sup> Later still, it is pitched as a therapeutic, holistic process, a form of music therapy to help the inmates reintegrate into society after the trauma of their detention, as I mentioned earlier. These features are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as the act of dance is widely understood as a pleasurable pastime that can be rewarding, increasing fitness levels and general wellbeing.

As this essay underlines, the choreographed, (initially) mandatory programme may be understood as extensions of existing Filipino and Cebuano music and dance traditions. Yet to call it therapeutic, or a 'clinical breakthrough'<sup>28</sup> in the strictest sense is disingenuous, not least because of a lack of empirical evidence to support Garcia's claims of rehabilitative success and reduced recidivism rates. The original programme bears little resemblance to conventions of Western somatic, expressive, and rehabilitative Dance/Movement therapy, undertaken under the rigorous guidelines of a trained therapist. Dance/Movement therapy programmes in prisons may appear, by definition, contradictory – forcing another form of control over inmates within the confines of a detention centre. Indeed agency remains a vital component to any therapeutic activity. It remains unclear exactly how long participation in the programme has been optional rather than forced, and the extent to which

this programme is without any form of inherent coercion. Sharing videos of the Dancing Inmates with a global audience without permission denies the inmates' right to privacy, and is in direct opposition to core therapeutic regulations. The Web 2.0 technology that enables communicative, social networking features such as YouTube comments enables the inmates' objectification by anonymous viewers – we must be mindful of encroaching into exploitative territory. Through YouTube and various other new media platforms (such as blogs, social-networking sites, and photo-sharing galleries), the inmates' identities as incarcerated men and women have been globally disseminated without the performers' permission. User-generated videos and holiday photographs of the inmates' live performances continue to be distributed electronically and their images enjoy an afterlife that extends far beyond their time served in detention. Additionally, their participation in state-sanctioned commercial events, such as their performance in Sony's This Is It DVD promotion and 2013 Filipino film *Dance of the Steel Bars*, raises further questions of prisoner agency and increasing commercialization. Transparency regarding such commercial endeavors would better serve the CPDRC's officials. Equating free labour and promises of fame with a form of rehabilitation is a deeply problematic concept; 'Thriller's' entertaining exterior, packaged and delivered through the medium of YouTube, is clicked and enjoyed by most YouTube commenters as a moment of banal entertainment, with seemingly little concern depicted for the inmates' plight.

A boundary between the glorification and humiliation of (suspected) criminals is in danger of being crossed through the CPDRC programme, as families who reside in the area express distaste at the tourist attraction

on behalf of the victims of crime. 'Busing in tourists to see [the Dancing Inmates]', local Mariana Reyes declares, 'rewards them for the actions that led to their incarceration'.<sup>29</sup> This form of thanatourism (dark tourism) serves to add to contemporary mediations of prison culture, exemplifying the growing trend in popular cultures' obsession with prisons, with movies, television shows, websites, toys, fashion and tourist destinations celebrating 'themes of punishment and retribution with increasing frequency'.<sup>30</sup> Internet mediations of the Dancing Inmates, as well as the live monthly performances in Cebu, run the risk of alienating Cebuano residents who see perpetrators of crime being celebrated internationally. In addition, some critics argue that the novelty of the programme simply misses the point. Criminal justice professor Edward Latessa believes that more appropriate programmes including 'substance abuse or family reunification programmes should be implemented with such coordination and vigor'.<sup>31</sup> Providing leisure opportunities in the guise of rehabilitation may do more harm than good. Dance, though it helps pass the time, and ensuing Internet fame, does not train the majority of inmates in the transferable skills needed to help them restart their lives after release.

Most crucially, the distinct viral power and subsequent prison economy generated by 'Thriller' clearly serves the interests of the Philippine state. The inmates' dance is endlessly repeated on YouTube, distracting viewers from the overall reality of Philippine prison life where many prisoners live in cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions with acute overcrowding and insufficient food. Furthermore, it reduces the CPDRC inmates to a single, entertaining image that obscures the wider, more complex and ultimately unjust picture – that CPDRC inmates have been detained for up to six years awaiting

trial, amid political and socioeconomic power struggles, in a penal system that is abysmally slow. The inmates' captivating video performances as seemingly happy, cheerful and content Filipino prisoners is their double-edged sword. As we become increasingly conditioned to live in a 'Broadcast Yourself' society, where fame itself is enough reward, the resulting benign projection and banal mediation of the inmates through YouTube clearly undermines the integrity of this 'rehabilitation' programme.

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# Music and Dance Make Me Feel Alive: From Mandela's Prison Songs and Dances to Public Policy

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## Abstract

How is it possible for song and dance to exist in political incarceration and manifest itself later as public policy responding to apartheid atrocities? Examining the body of songs, oral history accounts, and eye-witness reports provided by fellow-prisoners of Mandela on Robben Island prison, I uncover a psychological environment mediated through music and dance - within the confines of a political prison. This source of prison music-making by political prisoners in detention, provide us with the artistic expressions of revolutionary songs, parody songs, praise songs, laments, etc. These music genres reflect ontologies embedded in Mandela's juristic imagination.

My framework for explaining these ontologies is a theoretical framework I call an aesthetic of function: internal ontologies that speak to the African cultural ground against which external ontologies are expressed in the jurisprudential redress to apartheid atrocities.

Examining his external (jurisprudential) ontologies through song and dance, one realizes that the best way for him to have solved the unprecedented public redress of apartheid atrocities is evident in the songs he sang in Robben Island prison. Retribution could have been a logical solution for him. Instead, he turned to truth-telling and

reconciliation as public policy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's unprecedented breaking of social and jurisprudential boundaries, the claim of agency for both victims and perpetrators, and public policy of South Africa's first democratically elected black president, lie deeply embedded in cultural practices he testified to in his autobiography, "The Long Walk to Freedom". These cultural practices in prison were singing and dancing.

This paper complements the music-as-torture trope: here music in detention carries ontological agency. Musical evidence of stylistic features, text, and contextual analyses, and related literary criticism devices, expose Mandela's embedded internal and external ontological cultural practices. Here, song and dance have agency to influence public policy despite the constraints of political detention.

*Any suffering we experienced was made more real by song and rhythm which leads to a culture of defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity (Steve Biko, tortured and died in Pretoria Prison)*

*Singing is part of the cultural life of South Africans, especially black South Africans, singing is part of our very rich culture. ... Every facet of our life is celebrated through music. So when you go to jail the tradition continues ... When you are down, music uplifts the spirit, gives you hope. ... You cannot stop a political prisoner from talking, you cannot stop an African from singing*

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*(Lionel Davis, Robben Island prisoner 366/64)*

*Ironically, it is in jail that we have closest fraternization between the opponents and supporters of apartheid. ... We have eaten of their food, and they ours; they have blown the same musical instruments that have been 'soiled' by black lips (Ahmed Kathrada, Robben Island prisoner 468/64)*

*It was not the searing pain that seemed to come as an explosion that took my breath away and had the greater impact, but rather the thought that fellow human beings were doing this to me in a completely cold blooded manner. The effect was dehumanizing and the anger generated was difficult to control (Sedick Isaacs, Robben Island prisoner 883/64)*

*Singing with your heart [in silence], it sustains you, it composes you, because you are alone, you remember the songs that you used to sing and the songs that were sung during the times of the wars of resistance among Zulus ... those songs that they used to sing when they go for war are the songs that gave me power to face the enemy when I was all alone and knew that here [in detention] they can kill me. So those songs will give you power ... My body will just be a stone upon other stones to build the castle of tomorrow (Grant Shezi, Robben Island prisoner)*

*Janie Cole being awarded the 2010 Janet Levy Prize from the American Musicological Society. Her website states: "This moving story will be told via a multi-media book, a documentary film, a double album of music and a unique archive of South African oral history."*

*All quotes with one exception (Biko) – first-hand accounts of song and dance on Robben Island shed light on the chapter discussed below—are taken from the website of Music Beyond Borders. For more information, see <http://www.musicbeyondborders.net>*

**Key words:** Mandela, song, dance, truth and reconciliation commission, ontologies, apartheid, torture

## **Introduction**

When Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela said "Music and Dance make me feel alive" during an unidentified interview, I knew that the statement was a matter of cultural embeddedness, not simply a frivolous comment of mere entertainment. This chapter attempts to explore that deeper meaning behind his words.

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on cultural practices that can be overlooked in discussing public policy positions taken during political transitions. I examine the role of song and dance as cultural practice in the context of political imprisonment during apartheid (1948-1994) on Robben Island, the infamous prison eight miles outside Table Bay, South Africa. Furthermore, I posit that one has to take cultural practice into account when examining the legacy of one of the world's most significant statesmen of modern times, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

From the numerous quotes at the top of this article, the role of music on Robben Island (except for the quote by Steve Biko) shed light on identity formation through defiance, endurance of brutal inhumane treatment, and the therapeutic role of singing and dancing among political prisoners on Robben Island, where most of South Africa's black celebrated male political prisoners were dehumanized by white prison guards. In his autobiography, Mandela attests to this fact, saying "[N]o one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens but its lowest ones—and South Africa treats its imprisoned African citizens like animals."<sup>1</sup> (pp 174,175) The humanizing expressions of song and dance while being treated 'like animals' as Mandela says, point to sophisticated ways in which intellectual/artistic/cultural abilities were marshaled

by political inmates in prison. I argue that the use of song and dance was of far greater significance than at first meets the eye. Song and dance formed the cultural grounding for public policies that Mandela could use during his presidency of South Africa.

In order to examine the shift from cultural grounding to public policy, I argue that a significant marker of Mandela's identification with the lowest citizens is through songs and dances. This identification with the common people through song and dance, practiced during his youth and his adulthood in prison and in public, is a significant tenet of his belief system. 'A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens', he declared, 'but how it treats its lowest ones'.<sup>1</sup> (pp 174,175) Nation-building and his resultant public policy positions during his presidency rest in large measure on the fact that he believed the moral strength of a nation to be in the way it treats the least of its citizens. After discussion of the songs and repertoire of political prisoners on Robben Island, I examine the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), instituted by Mandela, during 1995–2002. The reason for mentioning this commission is that it serves as an example of a public policy accomplishment of Mandela's term as president of post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>a</sup> A consequence of using this public policy accomplishment produces a significant by-product; Mandela's emphasis on

reconciliation, not retribution.<sup>b</sup> This public position was by no means insignificant for a new South African government transitioning from an undemocratic police state to a new democracy.

Naturally, certain questions arise, given the premise of this chapter. What makes a political prisoner, imprisoned for 27 years, of which a significant part was spent breaking rocks by hand on an offshore penal island, emerge as a man of reconciliation? Was it a strong internal moral compass? Was it a belief in truth, honesty and human dignity? Was it the mores learned during his royal upbringing? Was it the stimulating companionship of his fellow political prisoners? Yes, it was all these factors and more. I argue that a strong internal cultural grounding, expressed through song and dance, not least of which experienced during imprisonment, provides us a clue to the unconventional public policies enacted by Mandela when he became the first president of a democratic South Africa in 1994. I refer to this internal cultural grounding expressed through song as an internal ontology.<sup>c</sup> By contrast, I refer to the practical implementation of his public policy ideas as his external ontology. Together, the examination of the internal ontology(/ies) combined with the external ontology(/ies) constitute a theoretical framework which I call an aesthetics of function.<sup>d</sup> Therefore, I contend that the theoretical framework of the aesthetics of

<sup>a</sup> The charter of this commission was promulgated by an act of the South African Parliament: Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995. For more information, see the United States Institute of Peace. Available from: <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-south-africa> 19 October, 2013.

<sup>b</sup> The TRC's concentrated on 'gross violations' of human rights such as 'killing, abduction, torture or severe ill-treatment of any person'.

<sup>c</sup> Every time the word 'song' is used, it is understood to include dance as well.

<sup>d</sup> I use the terms ontology and ontologies interchangeably, referring specifically to the nature and relations of being, by extension ways of discussing the nature of being and the knowledge that such discussion would yield.

function consist of first, internal ontologies (African cultural ground) and second, external ontologies (visible, jurisprudential ground).

Why focus on the role of singing? Unlike the rich drumming cultures of West Africa, accounted for by the tropical forests, in the grasslands of Southern Africa in general – and South Africa in particular, it is singing that occupies the central role of music-making in cultural life. Therefore, singing is a primary cultural expression in that country.

To illustrate the salient role of singing in the context of imprisonment, I shall reference a moving account of a political prisoner, Thandi Modise, who was heavily pregnant while in police detention at John Vorster Square (the infamous secret police headquarters in Johannesburg).<sup>2</sup> Driven to suicide due to the brutal torture visited upon her, her symbolic interpretation of the unborn child's kick was astonishing. Suspending her suicide attempt, Modise came to the realization: 'They do not want you to sing!' This counter-intuitive answer speaks of the high value political prisoners placed upon singing as a life-affirming practice. Singing is by its very nature an expression of a human virtue, a virtue upon which the prisoner set high value. It did not matter what songs Modise sang after coming to this realization. It mattered that she sang 'anything and everything' as she says in the documentary. Song brought defiance, but song also brought hope. It is this two-pronged feature, both defiance and hope, that gives the agency

of song particular value in the political prisons during apartheid in South Africa.<sup>e</sup> Such seemingly contradictory roles of the act of singing affirm an internal ontology that is invisible, deeply rooted in the cultural web of memories, private and communal utterances, and a marker of an identity that responds to the effects of torture through song.

This first-hand account illustrates the centrality of song in coming to terms with incarceration through defiance and encouragement through hope, but there is another feature of singing that is valuable to consider: spontaneous song formation in Black South African musical culture in general, a common practice of structuring song phrases that reference daily occurrences. Through repetition of song fragments, the pre-composed formulas generate new songs that might only be two or three sentences long. These short songs would become the chorus for improvisatory verses alternating with the leader who is nearly always the creator of the song. This explains why there exists a body of songs extolling the living leaders of the apartheid struggle. Indeed, Mandela was often present when his fellow prisoners would sing songs in praise of him.

### **The Problem Examined**

We shall examine the formation of songs in the political prison context and establish why song and dance are cultural expressions of an internal ontology. Political prisoners in apartheid South Africa (1948-94), and particularly those on Robben Island, used singing as

<sup>e</sup> To this day foreigners often remark on the stunning phenomenon that singing is ubiquitous in urban and rural areas in South Africa. Traveling in buses, trains, and vans, in the factory, and even humming along with Muzak in public places is a common occurrence.

<sup>f</sup> A fascinating historical article on the question of exclusion and isolation from the 16th through 20th centuries on Robben Island appears in "Patterns of exclusion on Robben Island, 1654-1992" by Harriet Deacon. Appearing in the same source, is an article "Beating the system: prison music and the politics of penal space" by Ethan Blue in which the subversive role of music in a prison context is explored. This chapter is drawn from a collection of essays by Strange C and Bashford A.<sup>3</sup>

I. religious practice, II. to overcome rivalries, III. to invert the power structure through parody, IV. in an educational context to lighten the workload, and V. to reinforce a cultural and socio-economic identity.<sup>f</sup> This exploration will eventually answer the following question: how is it possible for song to exist in political incarceration and manifest itself later as the seedbed of public policy responding to apartheid atrocities?

Criminologists Haney, Rodley, Ojeda, and others, have documented the traumatic effects of imprisonment on the human psyche.<sup>4-6</sup> Therefore, it is natural to expect psychological regression among political prisoners, especially the South African intellectuals on the infamous Robben Island. Contrary to such expectations, evidence I present in this article confirms the opposite. Now we extend the argument: ‘Can song and dance, as markers of internal, invisible ontologies, later function as the seedbed of public policy to address apartheid atrocities?’ To answer this question, my primary focus is on the body of songs that Mandela cites in his autobiography, “Long Walk to Freedom”. In addition, I use recordings of songs made by his fellow-political prisoners, the Robben Island Singers (RIS) as source material to establish an understanding of the repertoire of political prisoners on Robben Island. I argue that the artistic expressions in their revolutionary songs, parody songs, praise songs, laments, nostalgic, ironic, and even love songs, further reflect internal ontologies that were embedded in Mandela’s juristic imagination. I uncover the internal psychological fortitude of political prisoners, making song and dance markers of internal ontologies,

within the confines of a political prison.<sup>g</sup> Political prisoners were, until 1976, primarily the leading intellectuals who advanced the role of organizations such as the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, or the Pan Africanist Congress in countering the apartheid government. These political activists advocated the overthrow of the South African apartheid regime whether by organizing public protests, burning the hated passbooks, advocating sabotage against government installations or similar activities. At the Rivonia Trial Mandela received a life sentence in 1964. At that trial he made a now-famous statement: ‘I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to see realised. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.’

This psychological fortitude is not unlike the concentration camp prisoners who held out hope. In the cases where hope predominated, it seemed that such concentration camp prisoners were more resilient than those who gave up hope. Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy is the discipline that emerged out of this World War II concentration-camp phenomenon. Two famous tenets of his perspective are insightful in understanding Mandela’s prison triumph: ‘When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.’ And ‘Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.’<sup>8</sup>

<sup>g</sup> For arguments regarding the use of music in prison, see ‘Harmony behind bars: evaluating the therapeutic potential of a prison-based music programme’ by Léon Digard and Alison Liebling. By contrast, the current situation of South African prisons and the issue of human rights in a new democratic country, see ‘Awaiting justice in South African prisons: performing human rights in a state of exception’ by Aylwyn Walsh. Both chapters appear in “The Arts of Imprisonment: Control, Resistance and Empowerment.”<sup>77</sup>

My point of departure for explaining these ontologies is a theoretical framework I call the aesthetics of function. This formulation has two components. First of these are internal ontologies that speak to the African cultural ground. Against these internal ontologies functions the second component of my aesthetics of function; the external ontologies that express the public, visible, and jurisprudential ground seeking redress from apartheid atrocities. Mandela's internal/cultural ontologies, enhanced by African song and dance strategies of social realities (such as syncretism and spontaneous song formation), consolidate an African worldview and cosmology. These internal ontologies are evident in the songs he sang and danced to in prison. Public display of Mandela's spontaneous dancing during his term as president, is an external manifestation of such an internal (cultural) ontology carried forward from childhood and imprisonment, through to his days as a world statesman.

### **Nelson Mandela's Accounts of Singing and Dancing in Prison<sup>h</sup>**

Far from making an examination of song and dance culture within the Robben Island prison an homage to Mandela, it is my intention to examine his personal perspective on song and dance. This examination yields insights into the varied repertoires as expressions of cultural ways of knowing that shaped his internal ontology. Others have documented his enormous sense of dignity, but that dignity, I argue, is also grounded in a cultural identity that is based upon artistic sensibilities. One of the most impressive observations, regarding his dignified presence, came from an unexpected source: a Minister of Justice of the apartheid regime

that Mandela fought against. Kobie Coetzee, meeting Mandela in a hospital during 1985, remarked: 'He came across as a man of Old World values. I have studied Latin and Roman culture, and I remember thinking that this is a man to whom I could apply it, an old Roman citizen with dignitas, gravitas, honestas, simplicitas.'<sup>10</sup> Beyond the 'Old World values' of dignity, honesty and simplicity was a cultural grounding of which song and dance were significant constituent parts. In order to marshal evidence for my position, I have to cite Mandela's own accounts of his song and dance participation and observation. It is therefore imperative to examine first-person accounts by Mandela himself to illuminate his prison experiences of singing and dancing. These accounts are revealed in his autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom".<sup>1</sup> Complimenting these accounts, as further source material, are recordings of the RIS. These recordings were made by the RIS, three former prisoners on Robben Island whose CDs are titled *Songs From South Africa's Freedom Struggle*. These political prisoners were incarcerated with Mandela during the latter part of his stay there, from 1976 to 1982. Combining Mandela's autobiographical accounts and the RIS recordings, I categorize the songs below in an attempt to give perspective on the internal cultural ontologies that song and dance reveal.

### **I. Hymn-Singing during Christian worship services on Robben Island**

Perhaps the most deeply-held internal ontologies are those that reveal religious sentiment. Associations with memories of repertoire, emotional sensibilities expressed in worship practices, and linguistic expres-

<sup>h</sup> One of the fascinating autobiographies written by Mandela's contemporaries on the Robben Island prison is "The Mission: A Life for Freedom in South Africa."<sup>9</sup>

sions, contribute to religious songs taking on meaning that is different from recreational songs. In the case of the oft-sung song on Robben Island prison, *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* [God bless Africa], this song's prayer-like supplication ('God bless Africa, may her glory be lifted high, hear our petitions', etc.) was transformed into a song of resistance. John and Jean Comaroff have written on the significance of this religious song being transformed into a song of resistance in their work *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*.<sup>11</sup> The post-apartheid national anthem of South Africa contains two anthems: *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* [God bless Africa], and the apartheid era anthem *Die Stem van Suid Afrika*. This 'reconciliation' of two highly contested anthems at Mandela's inauguration in 1994 was later officially accepted as the nation's national anthem, a kind of public manifestation of conciliatory tendencies of the Mandela era.

Mandela does not reflect upon the religious songs sung in Robben Island prison, but instead he points to the agency of a Welsh priest who enlivened the singing in an unusual way. Mandela describes those occasional moments as follows: 'We always sang hymns at the end of services, and I think Father Hughes visited us so frequently just to hear us sing. He brought along a portable organ, and he would play for us.'<sup>1</sup> (p 452) Almost as an afterthought, Mandela reports a compliment the priest gave the prisoners, saying that their singing 'was the only singing that matched the choirs in his native Wales'.<sup>1</sup> (p 453) Full participatory communal singing is a means of building deeply meaningful internal communal ontologies.

The RIS did not sing any religious songs in their commercially-available collection of 19 tunes (see [robbenislandsingers.com](http://robbenislandsingers.com)). However, two laments that they have recorded, show a

deep sense of the internal ontological world reaching for transcendence in their search for answers to painful questions. Here we examine 'Sikhalela Izwe Lakhiti' [We Are Crying for Our Country That Was Taken By the Colonizers] and 'Singoban' Thina' [Who Are We?]. Both are laments that reinforce the internal and communal ontology of the imprisoned community.

A quick breakdown of the categories of the RIS songs, younger singers during the latter part of Mandela's stay on the island after 1976, is insightful. Looking at the selection of 19 songs, one notices a single ironic song, a single love song, a single nostalgic song, and a single praise song. The selection further includes two parody songs, two laments, and no less than eleven revolutionary songs. Among the revolutionary songs are references to Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, and songs marking the sabotage of a South African oil refinery in protest of the apartheid government.

## II. Singing to overcome rivalries

It should not be forgotten that Robben Island, a penal island with slate quarries, held common criminals as well as political prisoners during Mandela's incarceration. He provides a fascinating account about gangsters taunting the political prisoners in song. He writes:

One day, they [the gang members] began singing what sounded like a work song. In fact, it was a famous work song with their own adaptive generics: 'Benifunina eRivonia?', which means 'What do you want at Rivonia?' The next line was something like 'Did you think that you would become the government?' They sang exuberantly and with a mocking tone. They had obviously been encouraged by the warders, who were hoping that the song would provoke us.<sup>1</sup> (p 407)

Setting up markers of internal ontology

to incite conflict is a pernicious way to bait two communities that shared the same cultural markers: language, song, dance, and communal memories. This is the musical equivalent of dog-fighting.

The solution would identify the intellectual high ground that the political prisoners would have to defend. Mandela describes the moment as follows:

Although the more hotheaded among us wanted to confront them, instead, we decided to fight fire with fire.

Within a few minutes, we were all singing the song 'Stimela', a rousing anthem about a train making its way down from Southern Rhodesia (currently Zimbabwe). 'Stimela' is not a political song, but in the context it became one, for the implication was that the train contained guerrillas coming down to fight the South African army.<sup>1</sup> (p 407)

Clearly, the covert transcript of performing a favorite song that spoke of miners coming from many parts of the African sub-continent, got turned into an overt transcript of threat. In this context, the political prisoners sang that the freedom fighters, not the miners, would have been on their way to South Africa. This musical counterpunch done through parody also revealed an intellectual sophistication. The sparring match of sorts was an attempt by the black political prisoners to outwit the white prison guards who tricked the less sophisticated black criminals into subservient compliance. The internal ontology of the criminals being manipulated by their jailers is in itself an undignified joke played on a group of violent criminals who feign power, but became lap dogs for the jailers who had power over them.

### III. Singing to Invert the Power Structure through Parody

One of the strongest markers of the power of

internal ontologies is the use of parody. Exercising intentional manipulation of a text for the purpose of inverting the power of words is a strategy that Mandela and his political prisoners used frequently. He mentions how they added new songs and changed lyrics as the political prisoners sang and worked. He describes the situation as follows:

Our repertoire increased, and we were soon singing overt political songs, such as 'Amajoni', a song about guerrilla soldiers, the title of which was a corruption of the English slang word for soldier, Johnny.<sup>1</sup> (p 408)

He goes on to reference another popular song 'Tshotsholoza', ['Shoshloza'] which he describes as 'a song that compares the struggle to the motion of an oncoming train. (If you say the title over and over, it mimics the sound of the train.) We sang a song about the freedom and another about the Transkei whose lyrics said "There are two roads, one road is the Matanzima road and one road is the Mandela road, which one will you take?"<sup>1</sup> (p 408)

There is a fine line between improvising text for parodying and creating songs referencing current events. Mandela does not mention what it felt like for him to hear a parody deriding Chief Matanzima, a government 'puppet', and hearing his own name valorized in protesting the apartheid regime. Perhaps it was like Handel walking past his own statue in the Vauxhall Gardens in 18th century London. Here, yet another aspect of the internal ontologies arises: spontaneous song formation of social realities. The song ascribes power to the seemingly powerless prisoner, Mandela. Here, power reversal functions at its best when parodies empower the prisoner in the midst of the political prisoner community.

Was this shining moment to last forever? It could only last if the communal linguistic

ontology kept the jailers ignorant and the political prisoners acutely aware of the subtle layers of meaning in the parodies. The rivalry between the criminals (what Mandela calls the gang members) and the politicians was one form of ontological power inversion. Once the indigenous linguistic barrier was crossed by a white jailer who had knowledge of the internal communal ontologies, a drastic exercise of power created a situation of draconian power enforcement. The story ends in this manner:

The singing made the work lighter. A few of the fellows had extraordinary voices, and I often felt like putting my pick down and simply listening. The gang members were no competition for us; they soon became quiet while we continued singing. But one of the warders was fluent in Xhosa and understood the content of all songs, and we were soon ordered to stop singing. (Whistling was also banned.) From that day on we worked in silence.<sup>1</sup> (p 408)

Parody which emphasized song power dynamics now resulted in the silencing of singing and whistling, an internal ontology of immense power.

The RIS draw attention to one of the most humorous parodies that political prisoners sang on Robben Island. Sung in English, this parody on the tune 'Oh My Darling Clementine'. 'What a System' (What a Crime) builds on texts that enforce a wry sense of humor on the apartheid system. In this case, testing the safety of linguistic unfamiliarity of the jailers with this song is a brazen attempt at challenging the jailers' power dynamics in a language that the jailers understand. It would be instructive to know if

the song was sung in secrecy out of the hearing of the jailers, or not.

#### IV. Singing in an Educational Context to Lighten the Workload

'Robben Island University' is the name popularized through the intentional system of daily 'lectures' by more learned political prisoners to those less educated among them. This expansion of the knowledge base reinforces an internal ontology that fundamentally redefined the nature and contents of the knowledge dissemination for a society beyond apartheid. Fran Buntman has drawn attention to the fact that 'antiapartheid activists and organizations used prison to train, recruit, sustain morale, cultivate leadership, and educate their members with important consequences for the nature and strength of apartheid's opponents...'<sup>12</sup> This building of conventional and unconventional knowledge emphasizes growth potential of the repository of cultural and intellectual knowledge in broadening the internal ontologies of the prison community.<sup>1</sup> The topics they covered were physical training, history of the ANC and the history of African-Americans, African traditional healers, and African music. Describing the importance of the latter topic, Mandela says:

*Every day, Vuyisile Mini, who years later was hanged by the government for political crimes, led the group in singing freedom songs. One of the most popular was: 'Nans' indod' emnyama Strijdom, Bhasobha Nans' indod' emnyama Strijdom' [Here's the black man, Strijdom, beware the black man, Strijdom]. We sang at the top of our lungs, and it kept our spirits high.*<sup>j, 1</sup> (p 201)

<sup>i</sup> For expanded reading on several related topics, see "Studies in Symbolic Interaction."<sup>13</sup> Examining the role of prisons, the author studies topics such as 'justifying persecution; consciousness, resistance, and collective action; justifying protection; reflected resistance and modernity'.

<sup>j</sup> Here Strijdom's name was later substituted for Verwoerd, his successor.

Here the covert threat to the apartheid enforcer Prime Minister Strijdom, substituted by his successor Verwoerd, – is hidden by a jovial, dance-like external appearance and a Xhosa threat not known to those who do not speak the language. To such aims came the inclusion of local and universal importance, an expanding of the community's cultural ontologies, internally.

To this broadening of the knowledge base belongs a substantial body of revolutionary songs. From Cuba comes a song in Spanish, never heard in South Africa at that time: 'Avante Popular'. Awareness of the Zimbabwean situation at that time came to the attention of political prisoners on Robben Island in songs like 'Bulawayo' (The Enemy Appears from Around the Corner?) and 'Sihole We Mqabuko' (Lead Us Joshua Nkomo Into Zimbabwe) sung in a South African Nguni language.

The song 'Sasolburg' valorizes the sabotage efforts of the freedom fighters working under cover. Thandi Modise, referenced at the beginning of this article, was one such freedom fighter who was assigned sabotage activities. From this song comes a distinctive valorizing of the public, external working of the internalized cultural song manifestation.

### **V. Singing to Reinforce a Common Cultural and Socio-Economic Inter-Ethnic Identity**

One of the most remarkable events that illustrates the universality of a common cultural ontology bears reading as an entire account. The context of the prison as a rhetorical space is illustrated in an account of inter-ethnic solidarity. Mandela recounts this moment that transcends ethnic differences, distinctively emphasizing the public expression of a shared internal ontology.

One time Masabala Yengwa (better known as M. B. Yengwa), the son of the Zulu labour and the provincial secretary of the Natal ANC, contributed to a lecture on music by reciting a praise song in honour of Shaka, the legendary Zulu warrior and king. Yengwa draped himself with a blanket, rolled up a newspaper to imitate an assegai [spear], and began to stride back and forth reciting the lines from the praise song. All of us, even those who did not understand Zulu, were entranced. Then he paused dramatically and called out the lines 'Inyon' edl' ezinye! Yath' isandl' ezinye, yadl' ezinye!' The lines liken Shaka to a great bird of prey that relentlessly slays its enemies. At the conclusion of these words, pandemonium broke out. Chief Luthuli, who until then had remained quiet, sprang to his feet, and bellowed, 'Ngu Shaka lowo!' [That is Shaka!], and then began to dance and chant. His movements electrified us, and we all took to our feet. Accomplished ballroom dancers, sluggards who knew neither traditional nor Western dancing, all joined in the indlamu, the traditional Zulu war dance. Some moved gracefully, others resembled frozen mountaineers trying to shake off the cold, but all danced with enthusiasm and emotion. Suddenly there were no Xhosas or Zulus, no Indians or Africans, no rightists or leftists, no religious or political leaders; we were all Nationalists and patriots bound together by a love of our common history, our culture, our country, and our people. In that moment, something stirred deep inside all of us, something strong and intimate, that bound us to one another. In that moment we felt the hand of the great past that made us what we were and the power of the great cause that linked us all together.<sup>k, 1</sup> (p. 202)

This inter-ethnic cultural expression lies

<sup>k</sup> Consider here the song 'Luthuli Bambiza e Oslo' (Tribute to Chief Albert Luthuli – Nobel Prize Winner).

at the heart of developing public policies after incarceration. Apartheid functioned on the basis of legalizing ethnic division; this inter-ethnic expression of solidarity erased ethnic division and expressed a common humanity, as Mandela states there were ‘no Xhosas or Zulus, no Indians or [indigenous] Africans’. In his essay on ‘The Rhetorical Space of Robben Island’, Richard Marback draws upon Roxanne Mountford’s definition of rhetorical space as ‘the geography of a communicative event’ which amplifies the significance of Mandela’s account.<sup>14 (p 7)</sup> Marback quotes Harriet Deacon who explicates the rhetorical space of Robben Island by saying that, ‘Seldom has one small piece of land been so heavily imbued with a symbolism which remains, like understandings of its past and hopes for its future, so deeply contested’.<sup>14 (p 7)</sup> In the above-mentioned incident, the contested symbolism of Robben Island now regarded as a cultural heritage site, functioned as a significant rhetorical space for singing and dancing during Mandela’s imprisonment. Therefore, this rhetorical space functioned as a kind of inter-ethnic ‘reconciliation’ enacted through song and dance as public and corporate embodiment of the internal cultural concepts of inter-ethnic embrace.

### **Transition from Internal Ontologies to External Ontologies of Public Policy**

I build my argument that Mandela identified with the lowest citizens through the songs and dances that he interpreted during his youth and during his adulthood on a significant tenet of his belief system. Nation-building and his resultant public policy positions of his presidency rest on the fact that he believed the moral strength of a nation rests on the way it treats the least of its citizens. In his own words, he declared the central tenet his public policy as follows: ‘A

nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.’

An important part of making public policy from his inner convictions is Mandela’s capacity for empathy. This capacity for understanding his enemies forms an important part of his private and public outlook. Commenting on ‘the most callous and barbaric commanding officer (CO)’ at Robben Island, Mandela wrote: ‘Ultimately, Badenhorst [the CO in question] was not evil; his inhumanity had been foisted upon him by an inhuman system. He behaved like a brute, because he was rewarded for brutish behaviour.’<sup>15</sup> This empathy is remarkable given the brutal inhuman treatment of prisoners on Robben Island. In his 1984 memoir, *Hell-Hole: Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner*, Moses Dlamini provides a stark first-hand account of human rights violations. Writing in his review of Dlamini’s book, Richard Marback states: ‘The arbitrary and sadistic brutality of the warders, or white prison guards, and the self-destructive violence of the Big Fives, a gang of [black] criminal convicts complicit in the brutal treatment of political prisoners, are presented as intensely focused depredations of an apartheid system that dehumanizes everyone, black and white, who comes in contact with it.’<sup>14 (p 16)</sup> Such were the conditions in which non-political gang members were made to dance the ‘tauza’ to amuse the guards. Political prisoners, like Mandela, refused to yield to such humiliating actions.<sup>14 (p 16)</sup>

The internal cultural ontologies, among them dancing and singing, had to find expression in his life among the Thembu maidens of his youth and the songs he and his friends sang and danced on Robben Island. Singing and dancing in prison served as analogs to identify with the lowest citizens. In turn, these internal ontological practices

shaped his decisions as president. He became a performer of indigenous cultural practices, the common expressive modes of the lowest citizens and as a result implemented public policies that could withstand public judgement.<sup>1</sup> One example of an unprecedented public policy that he implemented was the institution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). His embrace of song, dance, language and cultural riches of the 'lowest citizens', as he called the indigenous downtrodden population of his home country, revealed jurisprudential ontologies of enormous substance.

### Conclusion

As one examines Mandela's external jurisprudential ontologies (e.g. establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) through song and dance, one realizes that the best way for him to have solved the unprecedented public redress of apartheid atrocities is evident in the songs he sang and danced to in Robben Island prison. Retribution, a kind of Nuremberg trial's juristic answer, could have been a logical solution for him. Instead, he turned to truth-telling by creating an unprecedented public policy solution: a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In so doing, Mandela draws upon confession, amnesty, and reconciliation as redress for human rights violations perpetrated in the name of the apartheid government system. The breaking of social and jurisprudential boundaries, the claim of agency for both victims and perpetrators, and the brilliant mind of South Africa's first democratically elected black president, lie deeply embedded in cultural practices he testified to in his autobiography, "Long Walk to Freedom". These cultural practices in prison were singing and dancing.

We have lingered substantially on formulating the internal ontologies of my aesthetics of function. To recapitulate: the theoretical framework of the aesthetics of function consist of first, internal ontologies (African cultural ground) and second, external ontologies (visible, jurisprudential ground). Therefore, the internal ontologies (African cultural ground) in this examination are manifestations of defiance and hope, cultural web of memories, private and communal utterances. In addition, song types: revolutionary, parody, praise songs, laments, nostalgic, ironic, love songs display strategies of social realities (e.g. syncretism, spontaneous song formation). Additional features of this internal ontology reveal religious sentiment, the use of parody, the role of communal linguistic ontologies, and the nature and contents of knowledge.

The second component of the aesthetics of function is what I call the external ontologies (visible, jurisprudential ground). These external ontologies find expression in the public display of Mandela's spontaneous dancing and his jurisprudential public policy (e.g. Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

This article complements the music-as-torture trope: here music in detention carries ontological agency. In this article, musical evidence of stylistic features, text, and contextual analyses, embodiment and related literary criticism devices expose Mandela's embedded internal and external ontological cultural practices. Here, song and dance have agency to influence a public policy despite, or perhaps because of, the constraints of political imprisonment.

In her perceptive analysis of the blurring of contested political lines during late apartheid (1980s-1994), Ingrid Byerly draws attention to the central role that music

<sup>1</sup> It became common practice at frequent public events that Mandela would invariably break into spontaneous dancing.

played in South African history. Speaking about the 1960s until the inauguration of Mandela as president of South Africa, she says ‘These are the 10,900 days of complex human drama that went from despair to euphoria; from the funeral dirges of the Sharpeville victims in 1960 to the triumphant anthems of Mandela’s inauguration in 1994. Musically, the 1960s reflected the debilitating effects of the new broadcasting policies. They were also marked, however, by the persistent efforts of artists who refused to bow out of the struggle.’<sup>16</sup> I would argue that political leaders, like Mandela, who refused to give up the struggle for freedom, used song and dance in ways that were less visible, but infinitely more useful in cementing a cultural grounding, their internal ontologies, to (i) identify with the common person, and (ii) to implement public policies (for instance the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) to define a new transitional political reality.

In the interest of giving a summation of the end of the Robben Island context, I close with an overview that highlights the role of music at the end of apartheid, the closing of the imprisonment era of Mandela. Byerly provides this analysis: ‘Music created for symbolic purposes (for the re-assertion of identity) was presented through four objectives: cultural renaissance, historical review, cultural critique and cultural elevation. Music created for practical purposes (for intercultural communication) was presented through four forms: collaborations between individuals, fusions between songs or anthems, combinations of genres, and collaborations between groups. Music created for tactical purposes (for political mobilizations and social change) was presented through dynamic dialogues exploring political issues of a confused past, an unstable present, and an envisioned future.’<sup>16</sup>

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