

# Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty

*Perspectives, Retrospectives and Speculations on Boeremusiek*

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Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty:  
Perspectives, Retrospectives and Speculations on Boeremusiek

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

Boeremusiek, a form of indigenous, predominantly white folk music in South Africa, remains virtually unexplored in academic discourse. Ridiculed by the Afrikaner middle-class throughout its history, in popular perception today the genre is the reactionary underbelly of white privilege and exclusivity. This thesis explores the juxtaposition of duty and pleasure in the boeremusiek world. The history of boeremusiek – a genre with an historical apolitical character and hybrid racial beginnings – opens up a view on an Afrikaner popular culture often in opposition to Afrikaner nationalist politics. At the same time the impact of political ideology is evident, particularly in the invented sub-genre of “traditional boeremusiek” and in the repeated usage of Afrikaner nationalist symbols. Contemporary boeremusiek performance suffers from this schizophrenic subservience and resistance to Afrikaner nationalism.

The creation of a comprehensive master-narrative of boeremusiek is not the objective of this thesis. Rather, inspired by Adele Clark’s notion of “situational analysis”, it aims at a different kind of scholarly depth in a series of semi-autonomous chapters. These chapters employ methodologies as diverse as musical, literary and theoretical analyses, autoethnography, ethno-history, visual ethnography and biography, while also drawing widely from various disciplinary discourses within the arts and humanities.

Interspersed with the main chapters there is a series of short ruminations called “Minors” after a common boeremusiek term. The first offers a technical cameo of boeremusiek. The second is an autoethnography exploring the author’s embarrassment about the genre and its practitioners. The third is a display of kitsch boeremusiek tropes, and the fourth critiques the centrality of “fieldwork experience”, especially as it relates to audiovisuality in contemporary ethnomusicology.

The main chapters explore the duty/pleasure juxtaposition of the title from various theoretical and methodological perspectives. Chapter 1 is a theoretical, historical and ethnographic reflection on the meanings and mechanisms of the juxtaposition of duty and pleasure at contemporary boeremusiek events. A deep suspicion of live performance, a recurring theme in the genre’s twentieth-century history, is noted, and the notion of “subjunctive pleasure” as it holds true at contemporary events is explored. Chapter 2 offers an alternative historiographic reading of the origins of the genre – one deeply embedded in nineteenth-century blackface

minstrelsy. This chapter also addresses the various ways in which embarrassment about the racial hybrid origins of the genre has found expression in boeremusiek discourse. Chapter 3 is an interpretive biography of boeremusiek songcatcher Jo Fourie based primarily on archival material. Fourie's socially ambivalent position as a Dutch female immigrant is linked not only to her interest in boeremusiek but to the tension that exists in her writings between her attempts to discipline the genre and her gradual enrapturement with the music. The commercialisation of boeremusiek and the economic metaphors in the lives and careers of two of the most commercially successful exponents of the genre, Hendrik Susan and Nico Carstens, are the focus of Chapter 4. A commercially profitable relationship between Afrikaner politics and Afrikaner popular culture is suggested: one in which images of nationalist politics are exploited for apolitical ends. The notion that Afrikaner culture is per se an extension of Afrikaner nationalist ideology is hereby challenged. A visual ethnography in the form of a photo-essay of a contemporary boeremusiek festival constitutes Chapter 5. Overturning the duty/pleasure binary, the ironising effects of affective displays on discursive order are explored in collaboration with photographer Niklas Zimmer.

The thesis concludes that boeremusiek has been positioned as a "low-Other" throughout the genre's history. The polarities of "high" and "low", "duty" and "pleasure" therefore serve in maintaining the genre's illicit character.



## Opsomming

Boeremusiek, ’n hoofsaaklik wit, inheemse volksmusiekvorm in Suid-Afrika, is feitlik onverken in akademiese diskoerse. Hoewel boeremusiek deurlopend in die geskiedenis deur die Afrikanermiddelklas bespot is, word boeremusiek vandag beskou as die reaksionêre subkultuur van wit bevoorregting en alleenreg. Hierdie tesis verken die jukstaposisie van plig en plesier in die boeremusiekwêreld. Die geskiedenis van boeremusiek – ’n genre met ’n histories a-politieke karakter en hibriede rasse-oorsprong – bied ’n blik op ’n populêre Afrikanerkultuur wat dikwels in opposisie staan teenoor Afrikanernasionalistiese politiek. Terselfdertyd blyk die impak van politieke ideologie, veral in die gekonstrueerde subgenre “tradisionele boeremusiek” en in die herhaalde gebruik van Afrikanernasionalistiese simbole. Hedendaagse boeremusiekuitvoering ly onder hierdie skisofreniese onderdanigheid aan en verset teen Afrikanernasionalisme.

Die doelwit van hierdie tesis is nie die samestelling van ’n omvattende meesternarratief oor boeremusiek nie. ’n Andersoortige akademiese diepgang word nagestreef in ’n reeks deels-vrystaande hoofstukke met Adele Clarke se “situasie-analise” as inspirasie. Hierdie hoofstukke maak gebruik van diverse metodologieë soos musiek-, literêre en teoretiese analise, etnohistoriografie, visuele etnografie en biografie en ontleen aan verskeie dissiplinêre diskoerse binne die kunste en geesteswetenskappe.

Tussen-in die primêre hoofstukke is daar ’n reeks kort refleksies, getiteld “Minors”, na aanleiding van ’n algemeen bekende boeremusiekterm. Die eerste is ’n tegniese lesing van boeremusiek. Die tweede is ’n outo-etnografie wat die skrywer se verleentheid oor die genre en sy praktisyns ondersoek. Die derde vertoon kitsch boeremusiektrope en die vierde is ’n beoordeling van die belangrikheid van “veldwerkervaring”, veral soos dit verband hou met oudiovisualiteit in kontemporêre etnomusikologie.

Die primêre hoofstukke verken die plig/plesier-jukstaposisie van die titel vanuit ’n verskeidenheid van teoretiese en metodologiese perspektiewe. Hoofstuk 1 is ’n teoretiese, historiese and etnografiese refleksie oor die betekenis en werking van die jukstaposisie van plig en plesier by hedendaagse boeremusiekfunksies. ’n Diep wantroue in lewendige uitvoering, ’n herhalende tema in die twintigste-eeuse geskiedenis van die genre, word uitgewys en die “subjunktivering” van plesier by hedendaagse boeremusiekfunksies word ondersoek. Hoofstuk 2 bied ’n alternatiewe historiografiese lesing van die oorsprong van die genre wat diep ingebed is in die praktyk van

swartgesmeerde minnesangers van die negentiende eeu. Hierdie hoofstuk ondersoek ook die verskillende maniere waarop 'n verleentheid oor die genre se hibriede rasse-oorsprong in boeremusiekdiskoers uitgedruk is. Hoofstuk 3 is 'n biografie van boeremusiekversamelaar Jo Fourie en hoofsaaklik gebaseer op argivale materiaal. Fourie se ambivalente sosiale posisie as vroulike Nederlandse immigrant word nie net gekoppel aan haar belangstelling in boeremusiek nie, maar aan die spanning wat uit haar geskrifte blyk tussen 'n dissiplinering van die genre en 'n geleidelike verrukking daarmee. Die kommersialisering van boeremusiek en die ekonomiese metafore in die lewe en loopbane van twee van die mees kommersieel suksesvolle eksponente van die genre, Hendrik Susan en Nico Carstens, is die fokus van Hoofstuk 4. 'n Kommersieel voordelige verhouding tussen Afrikanerpolitiek en populêre Afrikanerkultuur word voorgestel: 'n verhouding waar simbole van nasionalistiese politiek uitgebuit word vir a-politieke doelwitte. Die beskouing dat populêre Afrikanerkultuur per se 'n verlenging van Afrikanernasionalistiese ideologie is, word sodoende betwis. Hoofstuk 5 bestaan uit 'n visuele etnografie in die vorm van 'n foto-essay van 'n hedendaagse boeremusiekfees. Die plig/plesier-teenstelling word omgekeer en die ironiserende effek van affektiewe uitdrukking op diskoerse van plig word in samewerking met die fotograaf Niklas Zimmer ondersoek.

Daar word tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat boeremusiek deurgaans geëposisioneer is as 'n "lae-Ander". Die funksie van die polariteite van "hoog" en "laag", "plig" en "plesier" is gevolglik om die ongeoorloofde karakter van die genre in stand te hou.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my two children, Nina and Hugo, who bring joy wherever they go.



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# Introduction

Boeremusiek is, contrary to the common usage of the word in English-speaking South Africa, not a catchall term for all Afrikaans music.<sup>1</sup> As a definitional point of departure, one might venture the following: a widely ridiculed form of mostly instrumental folk music, closely associated with the concertina, predominantly (but not exclusively) practiced by Afrikaans-speaking whites (so-called Afrikaners) and primarily intended to accompany informal social dancing. As such, it is a relatively distinct genre within the constellation of Afrikaans music. Although certain overlaps in repertory inevitably exist, boeremusiek is not synonymous with the Afrikaans folk song tradition nor with the folk dance tradition of *volkspele* – both regular features of Afrikaner nationalistic pomp and circumstance in the twentieth century. Neither does a simplistic identification of the genre with the use of the concertina hold true. Although the concertina is often used in popular Afrikaans vocal music as a marker of nostalgia, songs like Steve Hofmeyr's *DKW* or Laurika Rauch's *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* do not pass as boeremusiek.<sup>2</sup> Boeremusiek does also not refer to music about Boers, like Bok van Blerk's much hyped song *De la Rey*.<sup>3</sup>

Boeremusiek is associated with concertinists like Manie Bodenstein, Nico van Rensburg and Silver de Lange, groups such as Die Penkoppe, Die Kaapse Affodille and Die Vier Transvalers. More controversial figures are David de Lange, Ollie Viljoen, Hendrik Susan, Nico Carstens, the boererock group Beeskraal and the neo-conservatist Radio Kalahari Orkes. Such lists are bound to get one into trouble, however. Genre definition is an ubiquitous talking point amongst practitioners, where enemies are routinely made and allegiances sworn over matters of authenticity. What interests me, beyond defining the boundaries of the genre, is boeremusiek as a slippery, ambivalent and fluctuating discursive construct. At its core, the discursive context of boeremusiek is that of a domestic music outside the political public eye. In the historical imagination boeremusiek occurs around camp fires – where the mood is one of jolly melancholy – or at dances accompanying birthday parties, New Year celebrations or wedding receptions. Boeremusiek represents the unadorned.

Despite its domestic historical context, boeremusiek is today commonly associated with right-wing Afrikaans conservatism. The *boer* in boeremusiek means “farmer”, “Afrikaner”, “white male” or “supporter of

<sup>1</sup> The word “boeremusiek” is used without capitalisation throughout this thesis as an ideologically neutral name of a musical genre, as opposed to “Boeremusiek”, which translates as “the music of the Boers”. The inconsistent capitalisation of the term in discourses on boeremusiek is, however, retained.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Hofmeyr, *Duisend en een* (EMI CDEMIM 361, 2010); Laurika Rauch, *Stuur groete aan Mannetjies Roux* (Select Music CD200003-2., 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Bok van Blerk, *De la Rey* (Mozi Records, 2006).

apartheid”, depending on one’s perspective. Regardless of this ambiguity, however, the presence of *boer* in boeremusiek situates the music within a history of white oppression and Afrikaner nationalist ideology that has led to the stigmatisation of the genre. Today the name “boeremusiek” carries so much ideological baggage that some enthusiasts would rather it be replaced with a new term.<sup>4</sup> Yet, in what I consider to be the central paradox of the genre, boeremusiek has been ignored, sanitised or wished away from within the Afrikaner establishment from its earliest history. Boeremusiek, therefore, forms part of a popular Afrikaner culture, often in direct opposition to sanctioned (and funded) cultural practices. It has been routinely overshadowed by political ideology from the so-called and ever-changing “left” and “right”. No doubt partly as a result of this, scholarly interest in the genre has been negligible.

One will find no entry for boeremusiek in Jacques Malan’s *South African Music Encyclopedia*, where some of the most popular proponents of boeremusiek shine in their absence.<sup>5</sup> Nor has any academic South African journal, to the best of my knowledge, ever published an article dedicated to the genre. It is therefore not surprising that the term should not feature in either of the two contributions on Afrikaans music in *The World of South African Music*, the anthology of writing on South African music edited by Christine Lucia. Although a photograph of a concertinist and an accordionist illustrates W.S.J. Grobler’s *The FAK and Afrikaans Music*, his article proceeds to describe the compilation of the Afrikaans folk songbook, first published by the Federasie vir Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (The Federation for Afrikaans Cultural Societies) in 1937.<sup>6</sup> This songbook, published with piano accompaniment, initially featured mainly translated German folk songs – a culturally sanctioned version of popular culture in a largely oral musical landscape. Although it is probably true that “[i]n the development of Afrikaans music in the 1930s prominent instruments were the piano, accordion, concertina, and violin”, as Lucia’s endnote explains, the Afrikaner intelligentsia never displayed any interest in this *konserterinamusiek* (concertina music) apart from trying to lure popular taste towards more refined Afrikaner folk songs.<sup>7</sup>

The perception of an unchallenged rapport between boeremusiek and Afrikaner establishment ideology continues in Carol Muller’s *Focus: Music of South Africa*, which offers the briefest mention of the term. According

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Fannie du Plooy, interview by W Froneman, December 8, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> J.P. Malan, *South African Music Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Christine Lucia, *The World of South African Music: A Reader* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 107-108.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

to Muller, “[c]onsistent with the ideology of apartheid, the SABC focused its efforts on Afrikaans folk music and *boeremusiek* (local Afrikaans-language music for romantic crooning and social dancing)”.<sup>8</sup> This is supplemented by an entry for *boeremusiek* in the keywords glossary that situates it as the “traditional music of the ‘farmers’ or Afrikaans conservatives, mostly but not exclusively White”.<sup>9</sup>

*Boeremusiek* is discussed only indirectly in some other writings on South African music, usually in relation to the *vastrap* dance. Lara Allen’s *Kwela’s White Audiences: The Politics of Pleasure and Identification in the Early Apartheid Period* serves as an example here, as do references to *vastrap* in David Coplan’s *In Township Tonight* and Gwen Ansell’s *Soweto Blues*.<sup>10</sup> These allusions to *boeremusiek* occur incidentally to the “black music” that is the proper focus of these publications. Although Denis-Constant Martin’s *Coon Carnival* contains much information relevant to the history of *boeremusiek*, the connection between so-called “coloured” musical practice and *boeremusiek* is only hinted at.<sup>11</sup> Martin explores this connection in more detail in a published interview with Alex van Heerden.<sup>12</sup> One of the few instances where *boeremusiek* is considered in a discussion of “white music” is Christopher Ballantine’s 2004 article *Re-thinking “Whiteness”? Identity, Change and “White” Popular Music in Post-Apartheid South Africa*.<sup>13</sup> Ballantine considers some ironic uses of *boeremusiek*, “an Afrikaans idiom typically associated with white conservatism”, in post-1994 white popular music.<sup>14</sup>

In Afrikaans music historiography *boeremusiek* has been treated equally circumspectly, as alluded to earlier. Jan Bouws hardly ever references *boeremusiek*, except where it concerns the development of a more refined national art music, and even then he erroneously collapses the distinctions between *boeremusiek* and folk music, as

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<sup>8</sup> Carol Ann Muller, *Focus: Music of South Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 40.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Lara Allen, “Kwela’s White Audiences: The Politics of Pleasure and Identification in the Early Apartheid Period,” in *Composing Apartheid*, ed. Grant Olwage (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008); David B Coplan, *In Township Tonight!: South Africa’s Black City Music and Theatre*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 116, 155, 194; Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Politics in South Africa* (London: Continuum, 2005), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Denis-Constant Martin, *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town: Past to Present* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Denis-Constant Martin, “‘My Culture is a Creole Culture’: Alex van Heerden Talks about Cape Music and his Relationship to it,” *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 6, no. 1 (2009): 77-82.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Ballantine, “Rethinking ‘Whiteness’? Identity, Change and ‘White’ Popular Music in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Popular Music* 23, no. 2 (2004): 105-131.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

Carina Venter argues.<sup>15</sup> Only recently did an influential piece on boeremusiek by Stephanus Muller spark renewed interest in the genre.<sup>16</sup> Muller argues cogently that boeremusiek represents a history of the secret spaces of Afrikanerdom. He articulates the emotional currency of the music that explains the estrangement between South African academic discourse and boeremusiek: its “convivial” sound that is a “little low, a little feeble, a little simple, a little direct, a little too close to our uncultivated needs and past”; its traditions of autodidacticism; its opposition to official ideologies of race and gender; the poetic languages of boeremusiek. Despite the fact that Muller’s contribution opens up several avenues for research, the rich and varied soundscapes of boeremusiek in South Africa remain largely unexplored in academic discourse.

The only available formal publications dedicated to boeremusiek have been generated by the two boeremusiek organisations in South Africa. Piet Bester, author of three commemorative volumes on the genre, wrote under the auspices of the Tradisionele Boeremusiekkklub van Suid-Afrika (Traditional Boer Music Club of South Africa or TBK).<sup>17</sup> These volumes are rich in ethnographic material and are structured as compilations of short biographies. Ralph Trehwela’s *Song Safari* and Danie Pretorius’s *Musieksterre van gister en vandag* also offer biographical and anecdotal information on various boeremusiek musicians.<sup>18</sup> *Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van Boeremusiek* by Wilhelm Schultz, also a TBK publication, gives an account of the history of boeremusiek, of instruments and dance forms and influences on boeremusiek such as the development of Afrikaans, military bands and the recording industry.<sup>19</sup> The TBK’s newsletters, spanning more than twenty years, provide a fascinating look inside the world of boeremusiek. Die Boeremusiekgilde (Boeremusiek Guild or BMG) has published two volumes: *Die Boeremusiekgilde se 5 goue jare – 1989-1994* (The Boeremusiek Guild’s 5 Golden Years – 1989-1994), and

<sup>15</sup> Jan Bouws, *Suid-Afrikaanse komponiste van vandag en gister*, A.A. Balkema. (Cape Town, 1957), 77-81; Jan Bouws, “Die Afrikaner en sy musiek,” in *Die kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*, ed. P. de V. Pienaar (Nasionale Boekhandel, 1968), 363-375; Carina Venter, “The Influence of Early Apartheid Intellectualisation on Twentieth-Century Afrikaans Music Historiography” (M.Mus. Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2009), 74-75.

<sup>16</sup> Stephanus Muller, “Boeremusiek,” in *Van volksmoeder tot Fokopolisiekar: kritiese opstelle oor Afrikaanse herinneringsplekke*, ed. A. M. Grundlingh and Siegfried Huigen (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2008), 189-196.

<sup>17</sup> Piet Bester, *Tradisionele Boeremusiek: ’n gedenkalbum* (Pretoria: Afrikanervolkswag, 1987); Piet Bester, *Boeremusiek: tweede gedenkalbum* (Pretoria: Afrikanervolkswag, 1993); Piet Bester, *Boeremusiek: derde gedenkalbum* (Pretoria: Afrikanervolkswag, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Trehwela, *Song Safari* (Johannesburg: Limelight Press, 1980); Danie Coenraad Pretorius, *Musieksterre van gister en vandag: lewensketse en foto’s van meer as 100 musieksterre* (Pretoria: J.P. van der Walt, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Schultz, *Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van Boeremusiek* (Pretoria: A.V.A. Systems, 2001).

*Die Boeremusiekgilde se 15 goue jare – 1989-2004*.<sup>20</sup> These compilations provide invaluable information on organised boeremusiek culture. In addition, chapters entitled “The Concertina and the Boers” and “The Concertina in Africa” in the second volume of Dan M. Worrall’s *The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History*, although relying extensively on the work of Jan Bouws, Wilhelm Schultz, and Denis-Constant Martin, succeed in drawing together several historical accounts of concertina playing in South Africa as well as giving a general overview of the contemporary boeremusiek scene.<sup>21</sup> Although all these publications offer ethnographically rich perspectives on boeremusiek musicians and practices, critical reflection on the genre is conspicuously lacking.

The avoidance of the topic in academic discussion is, as Mel Watkins suggests in the context of blackface minstrelsy, “in part attributable to our lingering unease with openly confronting and examining the shadowy and ineluctable ambivalent issues comprised by the paradigm of race”.<sup>22</sup> Ronald Rodano and Philip V. Bohlman describe the silence on issues of race in (mostly North American and European) musical scholarship as “a spectre” lurking in “the house of music”.<sup>23</sup> Although South African music studies have routinely dealt with topics of race – especially since the dawn of the “New” South Africa in 1994 – much of this work has been written from racially revisionist perspectives, demonstrating how the cultural sphere of music operated in synchrony with the political ideology of apartheid. Studies of this kind – not limited to the field of music studies – have cemented the binary opposition between white and black, oppressor and oppressed to such an extent that studying “white” music in South Africa today implies the imperative of inscribing it in a complicity with apartheid. Although the complex texture of complicity is inextricably part of all South African cultural production during apartheid, hardly any effort has been made to understand the role of music in white South African spaces beyond the scope of discourses of superiority.

Boeremusiek, a music that fundamentally speaks to experiences of Afrikaner whiteness, has thus become part of a discursive ghetto one is not supposed to frequent in post-apartheid rhetoric. South African writer Antjie

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<sup>20</sup> I. L. Ferreira, *Die Boeremusiekgilde se vyf goue jare 1989-1994* (Valhalla: Boeremusiekgilde, 1995); Boeremusiekgilde, *Boeremusiekgilde: 15 goue jare 1989-2004* (Noordstad: Boeremusiekgilde, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Dan Michael Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History*, vol. 2 (Fulshear, Texas: Concertina Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Mel Watkins, “Foreword,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), ix.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald M. Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, “Introduction,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald M. Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

Krog has spoken in “halting, tortured tones” about “the apparent impossibility for whites to locate a place from which to critique or comment on events (political or cultural)” – even, or especially, in intellectual circles.<sup>24</sup> A white voice, Krog goes as far as saying, serves only to taint the argument with which it engages. Better, she suggests, to remain silent. When critical white voices do speak up, they are routinely branded in the popular media as beneficiaries of apartheid and, by implication, as racist.

In such a political climate, the decision to study boeremusiek may also be construed as a political one (for example as a defence of a certain brand of Afrikaner conservatism) and not, as I naively thought at the beginning of this project, merely as a potentially rich intellectual endeavour. Yet despite my growing awareness of these politico-disciplinary pressures, my aim in studying boeremusiek was to not shy away from the discomforts posed by the genre, but to confront them directly and explicitly.

Embarrassment about a musical genre, I suspect, does not often constitute the basis for a doctoral project, yet in my field notes and reflections I have repeatedly formulated my uneasy relationship towards the genre and its practitioners in terms of “the unwanted exposure of the self”, as one definition of embarrassment goes. Embarrassment describes the unique position I have occupied in relation to boeremusiek on the insider-outsider continuum. It has to be said, however, that embarrassment not only describes my own position, but is regularly encountered in boeremusiek reception from the 1930s onwards. Embarrassment about the genre is commonly articulated by detractors of boeremusiek, while practitioners robustly deny ever feeling embarrassed – even in the absence of any provocation. To a certain extent, then, this project can be read against the background of Michael Herzfeld’s notion of “cultural intimacy”: “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality”.<sup>25</sup> Yet, written from an insider perspective, it is not the mere recognition of the “secret spaces” of a nation that is at stake here, but uncovering the mechanisms by which these spaces are set up as “secret” in the first place. I theorise this idea in relation to the notion of “subjunctivity” throughout this thesis.

Although reasons for embarrassment about boeremusiek may vary, my embarrassment is directly related to the position of whiteness in South Africa outlined above. Writing as an Afrikaans-speaking white, I am not only

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<sup>24</sup> Georgina Horrell, “A Whiter Shade of Pale: White Femininity as Guilty Masquerade in ‘New’ (White) South African Women’s Writing,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (December 2004): 775.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.

deeply embarrassed about having had to resort to racial terminology and categories during the course of my writing, but my embarrassment about boeremusiek is a result of the recent political history of the cultural collective of which I am a member. At the same time, however, this cultural collective defines my relationships with family members and my experiences of childhood; experiences I would like to construe as not solely defined by their political contexts. This, I hold, is one of the central dilemmas of postcolonial whiteness in South Africa today: the apparent impossibility to locate spaces of innocence, even in the most intimate spheres of everyday life, and the fears, anxieties and fundamental sense of loss that result from this alienation from the everyday. One encounters the “vicious features of whiteness” in every public and personal space in contemporary South Africa – a ghost that can never be laid to rest.<sup>26</sup>

I believe that the very problematic personal relationship I have developed towards boeremusiek and, by implication, that marked collective “Afrikaner”, is symptomatic of some of the central ambivalences of the genre. These ambivalences centre on the undecidable flickering between the discursive and affective meanings of boeremusiek and I discuss this in greater detail below.

In many respects the language of boeremusiek is the language of nationalism, a musical mirror to the apartheid policy of separate development and other disturbing nationalisms of the twentieth century. Yet, to limit the meanings of boeremusiek to its politico-discursive implications would constitute an over-simplification only possible when ignoring the politically indifferent and intensely emotional, physical, spiritual and irrational responses that the music has routinely elicited. Is it not possible, even in fleeting moments, to look beyond the uncomfortable political situatedness of boeremusiek, to the personal associations with the music that defy the political? This collection of writings on boeremusiek took shape from a position of fundamental openness to both the political entanglements and affective disentanglements of the genre; boeremusiek both as a political monument and a monument of the heart.

There is, of course, nothing novel about taking seriously both the discursive and affective meanings of a musical culture. In fact, the very concept of “musical culture” implies interest in both these aspects. Mark Slobin and Jeff Tilton, for example, define “musical culture” (or “music-culture”) as “a group of people’s total involvement with music”.<sup>27</sup> They hold that musical performances are governed by rules and that discovering the rules relating to

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<sup>26</sup> Samantha Vice, “How do I live in this strange place?,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 3 (2010): 340.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Slobin and Jeff T. Tilton, “The Music-Culture as a World of Music,” in *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World’s*

musical structure, ideas about music, behaviour in relation to music and the links between them is the object of analysis.<sup>28</sup> Their model of musical culture involves four dimensions: *affect* (the emotional impact of music and its power to move, often literally), *performance* (a distinct social space for music that has a specific purpose and is interpreted by the audience as it goes along), *community* (the group that carries traditions and norms of performance), and *memory and history* (the official and unofficial remembered or recorded history of the group). Implied in all these dimensions is the possibility not only of studying processes and relationships, but of articulating links between human actions and the products of these actions (in music most commonly identified with the musical “text” as notated score or recorded performance).

Thus, although Slobin and Titon acknowledge the fact that musical cultures are unstable with porous boundaries and consequently emphasise the importance of material nonhuman objects in the study of musical culture, their model proposes a unified, uncontradictory relationship between the different dimensions of a musical culture at a specific point in time – not least between the discursive and the affective.<sup>29</sup> While enabling links between ideas or thought-processes and products, the approach I have followed additionally reserves the possibility of an incommensurability between what is said and what is done, between official and unofficial discourses, between public displays and personal affect. In studying boeremusiek this is a particularly important theoretical premise. It is entirely possible that the discourse of boeremusiek and its affect represent two (and more) opposing ideological truth claims, and that assuming causality between them could pre-emptively privilege Western assumptions about (musical) literacy. Throughout this study I have been interested in capturing the complexities of boeremusiek – tracing patterns and stabilities, contradictions, ambivalences and differences between the various dimensions of its situatedness in society.

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*Peoples*, ed. Jeff T. Titon (New York: Schirmer, 1992), 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



## Methodological premises

Critically to engage with boeremusiek in varied, interesting and responsible ways, necessitates some methodological risks. The basic methodological premises of this study was that I would allow the available sources of information on boeremusiek to dictate my methodological decisions, rather than allowing disciplinary boundaries to dictate what passes as academic rigour or propriety. In this respect I was drawn to an approach propagated by Adele Clark as *situational analysis*.

A form of “multi-site/multiscape” research, situational analysis attempts to push grounded theory, as developed by Strauss and Corbin in the 1960s, “around the postmodern bend” and treats the research situation, in all its complexity, as the key unit of analysis.<sup>30</sup> Like grounded theory, situational analysis proceeds inductively. But whereas grounded theory implies that the researcher is and should be a tabula rasa, situational analysis recognises that there is “something ludicrous about pretending to be a ‘theoretical virgin’”.<sup>31</sup> Instead, prior knowledge is seen as a valuable tool.

Clarke explains her rationale for turning to multisite/multiscape research as follows:

Because *we and the people and things we choose to study* are routinely both producing and awash in seas of discourses, analyzing only individual and collective human actors, no longer suffices for many qualitative projects. Increasingly, historical, visual, narrative, and other discourse materials and nonhuman material cultural objects of all kinds must be included as elements of our research and subjected to analysis because they are increasingly understood/interpreted as both constitutive of and consequential for the phenomena we study.<sup>32</sup>

As such, this thesis relies not on any single research method as preferable or prior to another. Instead it explores a methodological openness to insights derived from various sources and possible reciprocities between them.

Although few academic considerations of the topic exist, the available archival material on boeremusiek is vast and informs large parts of this thesis. The archive of boeremusiek songcatcher Jo Fourie, housed at the National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria, contains her transcriptions of boeremusiek tunes, diaries and notebooks and is an important resource. The SABC Sound Archives contain several hundred programmes related to

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<sup>30</sup> Adele E. Clarke, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), xxxv.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

boeremusiek. In addition, the personal archives of, amongst others, Piet Bester, Kalie de Jager, and Kobus Müller are significant.

A second category of sources is historical accounts of *boeredanse* and concertina playing. In identifying these sources I relied on the work of Wilhelm Schultz, Dan Worrall and Matilda Burden as well as historical surveys of several small towns in South Africa.<sup>33</sup>

The nationalist newspaper *Die Transvaler*, the *SABC Bulletin* and the FAK's magazine *Handhaaf* contains several articles and letters of importance. As mentioned earlier, the newsletters of the boeremusiek organisations are perhaps the most intriguing and insightful resources on boeremusiek, while the websites of the boeremusiek organisations also proved useful. I also made use of literary sources and visual representations such as the sketches of Heinrich Egersdörfer and cartoons featuring boeremusiek.<sup>34</sup>

In the course of writing this thesis I conducted several interviews and attended seven Boeremusiekgilde events. The Boeremusiekgilde comprises two regional offices – one coordinating events in the northern part of the country and the other in the south. The regional offices are in turn subdivided into several branches covering smaller geographical areas or single towns. Events hosted by individual branches usually take place at a venue like a school hall or community centre, while larger events spanning an entire weekend and attended by members of several branches, take place at holiday resorts. Friday evenings are typically dedicated to informal music-making around a camp fire, while the main event is held on Saturdays when several bands are invited to play and dedicated dancers keep going for several hours. The morning programmes are often punctuated by speeches by the chairman or invited guests. Saturday evenings are reserved for dancing. A “thanksgiving church service” will be held on Sunday mornings when a sermon is delivered and hymns sung to accompaniment of a concertina. The annual national competition is the highlight of the Boeremusiekgilde's calendar. It usually takes place at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria when hosted by the northern region, or at a wine estate in the Cape Winelands when hosted by the south.

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<sup>33</sup> Schultz, *Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van Boeremusiek*; Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2; Matilda Burden, “Die herkoms en ontwikkeling van die Afrikaanse volksdans” (M.A. Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1985); Karel Schoeman's history of Bloemfontein deserves special mention here. Karel Schoeman, *Bloemfontein, die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946* (Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 1980).

<sup>34</sup> Eric Rosenthal, *Heinrich Egersdörfer: An Old-Time Sketch Book/Heinrich Egersdörfer: 'n outydse sketsboek* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1960).

My approach when attending these events and conducting interviews was to make audio or video recordings of the proceedings, to record shorthand observations, and, later, to write more extensive field notes in which I reflected on research questions, moments I found particularly insightful, exciting or disturbing and the problems I experienced in doing ethnography. Although these field notes only come into full view at selected points in this thesis, they demarcate major structural and theoretical junctures. Even when they remain out of sight, they often express concerns that became the research questions I attempt to address here, presage the theoretical positions I have taken or point the way to methodological decisions like the inclusion of the visual ethnography in Chapter 5.

Although I followed Clarke's approach more in spirit than to the letter, the discipline of grounded theory coding – aided in this case by the qualitative data analysis software Atlas/ti – and the various ways of “mapping” a research situation as proposed by Clarke have proven invaluable tools for exploring the complex meanings of boeremusiek. It has offered me ways of grappling with different and often contradictory sources of data, including nonhuman objects and theoretical, ethnographic, narrative, visual, audio-visual and historical discourses, without the need to draw distinctions between them as I have done above. Analysing and interpreting these sources of data on an equal platform complicates not only the distinction between musicology and ethnomusicology, but also historiography and ethnography more broadly defined. My historiographic interpretations are often deeply influenced by ethnographic experiences and vice versa. Not only did Clarke's approach resonate with the exploratory nature of this project and allowed for flexibility and fortuitous events and findings, but I believe it enabled me to move beyond the often reductive readings that result from material that is politically contested.

In addition I found in situational analysis an approach sympathetic to my epistemology that allows for the creative input of the researcher. Throughout this thesis I try to refrain from speaking for the people that so generously shared their time and resources with me for reasons I explain in Minors IV. Instead I try to find a balance between speculative interpretation and writing a text practitioners can relate to – even if and when they disagree with me. Part of the reason for this approach was the saturation of knowledge I encountered when talking to practitioners and attending events. When asking someone for a definition of boeremusiek, for example, one is more often than not directed to the work of Piet Bester or Wilhelm Schultz than being offered a personal insight. There has evolved a language one uses when talking about boeremusiek that relies on a set of stock phrases. I consider some of these in Minors III. In this regard the boeremusiek organisations have succeeded in patrolling the

meanings that are typically attributed to boeremusiek. For me the scholarly imperative lay beyond an uncritical representation of “insider experience”.

Complementing these methodological premises, I chose to eschew a systematic narrative on boeremusiek. Instead, I attempted to attain a different kind of scholarly depth in a collection of semi-autonomous readings of boeremusiek. Because this project is the first large-scale academic exploration of the genre, the chapters that follow are understandably not intended to tell “the whole story”. Rather, they address some of the pertinent issues that have emerged from analysing historical material and boeremusiek discourse (understood in its widest sense) and insights derived from participation in the field. Although these readings complement each other in various ways, the contradictions and disjunctures that do exist between them are intentional and, I would argue, reflective of the ambiguous nature of the genre. This is not an approach without its sacrifices, however. Some recurring themes are only explored implicitly and links between different chapters require active reading in order to emerge. By focussing on contained arguments I hope to have emphasised the disparate meanings of boeremusiek – one of the central aims of this thesis.

Chapter 1 is a theoretical, historical and ethnographic reflection on the meanings and mechanisms of the juxtaposition of duty and pleasure at contemporary boeremusiek events. I show how a deep suspicion for “liveness” developed throughout the genre’s twentieth-century history and how the notion of “subjunctive pleasure” holds true at contemporary events. In Chapter 2 I offer an alternative historiographic reading of the origins of the genre – one deeply embedded in nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy. Chapter 3 is an interpretive biography of boeremusiek songcatcher Jo Fourie, based primarily on archival material. The commercialisation of boeremusiek and the economic metaphors in the lives and careers of two of the most commercially successful proponents of the genre, Hendrik Susan and Nico Carstens, occupy me in Chapter 4. A visual ethnography in the form of a photo-essay of a contemporary boeremusiek festival comprises the whole of Chapter 5.

Interspersed with these chapters are four shorter essays in different registers, entitled “Minors” after a common boeremusiek term. In the first I offer a technical cameo of boeremusiek. The second is an autoethnography exploring my relationship of embarrassment towards the genre and its practitioners. The third offers a display of boeremusiek kitsch, and the fourth critiques the centrality of “fieldwork experience”, especially as it relates to audiovisuality in contemporary ethnomusicology.

What ties these readings together is, as my title suggests, the complicated relationship between boeremusiek as an expression of nationalist duty and as an expression of pleasure. It is in this juxtaposition, I argue, that most of the political, social, ethical and aesthetic concerns of boeremusiek originate.



## A Note on Translation

The translation of the idiomatic and poetic Afrikaans passages included here has been an extremely difficult task. I have often grappled with the challenge of presenting to a wider audience material so embedded in the intuitive clichés of a mother tongue. All the translations from the Afrikaans included here are my own, except where stated otherwise. I have included the full Afrikaans text in footnotes as a matter of principle and to allow Afrikaans readers of this work to participate in the joy I have derived from them.





# Chapter 1

## Subjunctive Pleasure: The Odd Hour in the Boeremusiek Museum

### Boeremusiek: The “Vanishing Savage”

Of course, these savages are posthumous: frozen, cryogenized, sterilized, protected to death, they have become referential simulacra ...

Baudrillard, *The Precession of Simulacra*<sup>1</sup>

The “vanishing savage” has been a trope in ethnographic literature and often the rationale behind ethnographic adventures. It was important to document a way of life, so the argument went, before it disappears. Renato Rosaldo regards the search for “true” or “uncontaminated” natives as a form of imperialist nostalgia: the longing felt by “agents of colonialism” for the colonised culture as it was “traditionally”.<sup>2</sup> This pose of “innocent yearning” for what has been lost as a result of colonialism is used to conceal complicity with “often brutal domination”, argues Rosaldo.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, James Clifford contends that “salvage” ethnographies, aimed at saving the vanishing savage by means of the text or “bringing a culture into writing”, legitimate the power of the ethnographer to represent the other.<sup>4</sup> In folk music scholarship the vanishing savage is no less prevalent, but perhaps less well understood. According to Simon J. Bronner, Francis James Childs was, for example, greatly influenced by the brothers Grimm and viewed his collection of folk songs as belonging to a now-vanished past: “remnants of ancient types rather than examples of living performances”.<sup>5</sup> Situated as it is in uneven politics of power and intercultural representation, the trope’s frequent appearance in my own reflections on boeremusiek is disturbing. Rereading my fieldnotes, I am

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations*, no. 26 (April 1, 1989): 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Gillian Mitchell, *The North American Folk Music Revival: Nation and Identity in the United States and Canada, 1945-1980* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 28.

struck by the number of times I commented on the inauthenticity I experienced at boeremusiek events. My “vanishing savage” seems to be “real” boeremusiek and its concomitant: “real” boeremusiek enthusiasts.

Although the causes for these sentiments might indeed relate to the problematic relationship between ethnographer and native and the dilemmas of doing ethnography at home, I have become convinced that there is more to the problem. What if my experience of never encountering “real boeremusiek” were a result of the fact that practitioners themselves entertain a form of salvage discourse? That, in their attempts at self-preservation, there is located an ironic imperative for boeremusiek to be forever vanishing?

The aim of this chapter is not only to consider the “what” of authenticity discourses in boeremusiek history and at contemporary events, but the “how” and the “why”. In other words, my focus is not primarily on the nature of the ideal communities that are being re-enacted at boeremusiek events, but at the work this rhetoric is doing in the present and the historical conditions that enabled it.<sup>6</sup> The model of subjunctivity I propose here departs from notions of musical idealism that view the re-enactment of ideal communities as a function of “community maintenance and solidarity”.<sup>7</sup> My thesis in this chapter is that rhetorical gestures of authenticity and salvage, rather ironically, subjunctivises the actual experience of participating in boeremusiek, transforming pleasure into an act of mourning.

Although the subjunctive is rather weak in Modern English, it is a verb mood commonly found in Romance, Germanic and Semitic languages. The subjunctive mood is typically used to express various states of irreality or non-facts, such as wish, emotion, possibility, judgment, opinion, necessity, or action that has not yet occurred, as in: “Had we taken the other route, we would be there by now”, “I wish this day were over” or “If I were a bird, I would be able to fly”. If one extends the notion of subjunctivity beyond grammar, one might think of it as “a virtual zone where we envisage and entertain possibilities” that may later be realised, but often are not. “It is where we ... say to each other: ‘Suppose...’”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A particularly insightful conversation with Christine Lucia and Janet Topp Fargion contributed to the refinement of this idea.

<sup>7</sup> Sylvia Bruinders, “‘This is our Sport!’ Christmas Band Competitions and the Enactment of an Ideal Community,” *South African Journal of Musicology* 26 & 27 (2007 2006): 124.

<sup>8</sup> Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade, “Trafficking in the World of Possibilities”, n.d., <http://www.rememberingpractices.com/webDocs/nnn34HedtkeWinsladeweb.pdf>.

Although the verb form might be dying out, the subjunctive mood in this expanded sense proliferates in modern life, as Mikhail Epstein notes. It fuels insurance and investment industries and is evident in various kinds of “virtual thinking”.<sup>9</sup> Hours of news reporting are spent on possible outcomes of trials, future economic trends and election polls.<sup>10</sup> The subjunctive, in Epstein’s view, is also a prerequisite for historical thinking because the ascription of meaning to historical events “is only valid when alternative possibilities for these events are taken into account”.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the subjunctive indicates the discursive space of the possible – often with an impending sense of doom and loss.<sup>12</sup>

There are also occasions when the loss associated with the subjunctive can assume a therapeutic function. Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade show how, when people are talking about the dead, they often do so in the subjunctive: “She would have enjoyed this gathering tonight,” or “He would have been proud of you today”. They argue that the resulting temporary connection between the dead and the living is an important way of coming to terms with grief.<sup>13</sup> As such the subjunctive is often used to mourn unfulfilled possibilities.

Jerome Bruner has argued that the “subjunctivising of reality” is characteristic of all narratives in the sense that narratives open up worlds of possibility, as opposed to simply pointing towards, or indicating, real events, characters and plots.<sup>14</sup> I propose to extend the subjunctivising of reality beyond the linguistic and narrative space to a discursive and social one. In other words, I propose that social worlds, too, can be lived in different moods or modalities. I seek to understand how and why certain types of human behaviour and experience – in this case music-making and dancing – are subjunctivised. In addition I ask how, through this process, the potential meanings of boeremusiek – nostalgically defined in terms of the past – override meanings located in more material contexts.

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<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Epstein, *Filosofiiia vozmozhnogo. Modal’nosti v myshlenii i kul’ture (The Philosophy of the Possible: The Modalities in Thought and Culture)* (St. Petersburg: Alateia, 2001). (Summary of the book in English retrieved from [http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/phil\\_oss\\_summary.html](http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/phil_oss_summary.html) on 6 February, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Hedtke and Winslade, “Trafficking in the World of Possibilities.”

<sup>11</sup> Epstein, *Filosofiiia vozmozhnogo. Modal’nosti v myshlenii i kul’ture (The Philosophy of the Possible: The Modalities in Thought and Culture)*.

<sup>12</sup> Epstein’s notion of subjunctivity, as is my own, is related to Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality. Using the subjunctive as metaphor has the advantage of pointing to a specific mood/mode of talking, thinking or acting.

<sup>13</sup> Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade, “The Use of the Subjunctive in Re-Membering Conversations with those that are Grieving,” *Omega - Journal of Death and Dying* 50, no. 3 (2005 2004): 197-215.

<sup>14</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Like the verb form, the subjunctivising of reality exposes the inadequacies of the present, even while considering a utopian future or past. The subjunctivising of reality at boeremusiek events turns then into anti-rituals, or even a simulations of rituals. Although they exist in a mode outside of real life similar to Victor Turner's liminal moment, boeremusiek events do not anticipate future possibilities, but mourn the lost possibilities of the past. It is like speaking of the dead, while imagining that they are still present. Stephanus Muller has suggested, in the context of art music in Afrikaner society, that the emulation of Western musical models historically functioned as a "protective mask", both shielding and giving shape to "the vulnerable settler extension of the metropolis".<sup>15</sup> The protective mask has been superseded by the death mask in postcolonial white aesthetics, I would argue. Boeremusiek, like other relics of white cultural production, hovers uneasily between representing and commemorating a lost past. Boeremusiek occupies a musical present devoid of liveness.

In the first part of this chapter I trace the conditions enabling the preference for possibility over actuality in the history of boeremusiek discourse since 1938. The mechanisms and meanings of subjunctivising reality in the discourses and practices of the Tradisionele Boeremusiekkklub (TBK) and the Boeremusiekgilde (BMG) – the two largest boeremusiek organisations in South Africa – are the focus of the second part of the chapter.

## Live Boeremusiek and its Discontents

The imminent death of boeremusiek is an integral part of the discourse of the genre. An early example is a letter by an anonymous reader published in *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, a (now defunct) Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, on 20 February 1955:

The objection against traditional Boeremusiek is often raised: that it is too monotonous and repetitive. The answer to this is simple: listen to something else, but do not try to remodel the original. After all, Boeremusiek has a true heritage and answered to some goal, namely, to provide entertainment throughout the night. When all the other instruments have already floundered, the concertina infuses new life into the party.

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<sup>15</sup> Stephanus Muller, "Spaces of Nationness: On Myth, Masks, Music and Afrikaner Identity," *Tydskrif vir Nederlands en Afrikaans* 8, no. 1 (2001): 153.

If the new generation wants a new kind of music, give it to them, but do not contaminate [*verbaster*] our traditional Boeremusiek. If it must become a museum piece, let it at least be a true one. Some of us actually like spending the odd hour in the museum to draw from the past the joys that are absent in the present.<sup>16</sup>

Calling boeremusiek a “museum piece” not only suggests that it was considered a vanishing phenomenon in 1955, but, extraordinary for its time, that true boeremusiek could only be salvaged by simulating the past not by acting in the present. The author resigned himself to the mediated reality of the radio or the LP, to the obliteration of the difference between the real and the copy, and to the prepared reality of the real. As he saw it, real boeremusiek existed primarily in nostalgic simulations of the past. Drawing from the past the joys that are absent in the present (a classic formulation of nostalgia), is likened to spending time in a museum as a place where original specimens that have disappeared from real life are exhibited and protected.

The deep dissatisfaction with live performance that lies at the heart of such claims follows a long historical trajectory. It is thought that the term “boeremusiek” was coined around 1938 because of its resonance with the event that dominated public discourse that year: the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek. Herman Giliomee describes the Great Trek as follows:

Between 1835 and 1845, parties of burgher families, later called Voortrekkers, and their servants, moved out of the Cape Colony in considerable numbers ... In the first wave of the emigration of the Voortrekkers, which ended in 1840, some six thousand people (20 per cent of the whites in the eastern districts and 10 per cent of the colony’s whites) trekked.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1930s, in an upsurge of Afrikaner nationalism, the Great Trek became a talking point amongst Afrikaners, especially as the commemoration of the event in 1938 approached. Giliomee notes:

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<sup>16</sup> “Die beswaar word soms t.o.v. tradisionele nommers geopper: sou hulle te eentonig of tot herhaling geneig wees. Die antwoord hierop is voor die hand liggend: luister na iets anders, maar moet tog net nie die oorspronklike artikel probeer oormak nie. Hy het immers ’n egte herkoms en het aan ’n doel beantwoord, nl. om deur te hou tot dagbreek toe. As die ander instrumente reeds flou is, blaas die konsertina nuwe lewe in die geselskap. As die nuwe geslag ’n nuwe soort musiek wil hê, gee dit vir hom maar moenie ons tradisionele Boeremusiek verbaster nie. As hy ’n museumstuk moet word, laat hom ’n egte stuk wees. Sommiges onder ons hou nogal daarvan om telkens ’n uurtjie in die museum deur te bring en uit die verlede die genot te put wat in die hede ontbreek.”

<sup>17</sup> Herman Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), 161.

The re-enactment of the Trek turned out to be an electrifying event, sparking mass Afrikaner enthusiasm as the wagons wound their way through hamlets, villages and cities across the land. Men and women, often clad in Voortrekker dress with the men sporting Voortrekker beards, met the wagons. At solemn ceremonies wreaths were laid on the graves of Afrikaner heroes, and streets were re-named for Voortrekker leaders.<sup>18</sup>

Interwoven through the pages of the nationalist paper *Die Transvaler* of 1938, the presence of boeremusiek traces a counter-narrative to the solemn activities of wreath-laying and hero worship. “As I see it,” one correspondent observed, “there is one element that characterises all our events organised to welcome the oxwagons, and that is a ‘boere-orke’.” “It seems,” he continued, “as if the word *boere-orke* has become a magic spell of sorts. It seems inextricably linked to things such as *boerewors*, *braaivleisaand*, *boeredans*, *Voortrekkerdans*”, a range of Afrikaner cultural products and practices that were revived in the lead-up to the celebrations.<sup>19</sup> At a time when the Great Trek was being constructed as the key myth of Afrikaner nationalism – with the customs of the Voortrekkers being increasingly politicised – one finds the separation of boeremusiek from the sphere of political action a growing concern. This is evident in the letter columns of *Die Transvaler*, where it remained a polemical topic throughout 1938. The catalyst for the debates that ensued was the increasingly common practice, especially within the youth branches of the National Party, of hosting fundraising dance parties (see Figure 1). The intimate relationships between politics and religion are particularly obvious in letters denouncing these dance parties as National Party fundraising efforts. A certain C. Kriel, for example, expressed his disgust in a letter of 11 August 1938. “If we want to go by the name of a Christian *volk*, and expect the Lord’s grace on our great *volk* struggle”, he wrote, “these things are wholly undesirable.”<sup>20</sup> Arguments that dancing “weakens you in the fight



Figure 1: A small ad for a “huge *boeredans*” hosted by the Braamfontein Junior National Party Branch, indicating that Voortrekker dress was preferable and free refreshments were on offer. *Die Transvaler*, October 6, 1938, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>19</sup> “Maar daar is een faktor wat, soos dit vir my lyk, ’n integrerende deel uitmaak van al ons funksies wat gereël word met die oog op die ontvangs van die ossewaens, en dit is “’n boere-orke”. Dit skyn asof die woord boere-orke ’n soort towerwoord geword het, wat onafskeidelik verbode skyn te wees aan sulke dinge soos boerewors, braaivleisaand, boeredans, Voortrekkerdans, ens., ens.” Letter to the editor, “Boere-orkeste - ’n Bedenking.” *Die Transvaler*, October 11, 1938, 7.

<sup>20</sup> “As ons die naam van ’n Christelike volk wêreld wil wees, en die seën van die Heer verlang op ons groot volkstryd, pas hierdie dinge glad nie.”



Figure 2: "Terug na die verlede", *Die Transvaler*, August 19, 1938.

against the devil of adultery” and therefore had no role to play in Christian nationalist politics – a common objection at the time – were met with counterarguments that sexual indiscretion was not reserved to the dance floor.<sup>21</sup> As it was not uncommon for the musical programme at such parties to consist entirely of boeremusiek, this style became shorthand, at least in the mind of ideologues, for the moral degeneration of the Afrikaner people. This is illustrated in a cartoon of 19 August 1938, under the heading *Terug na die verlede* (“Back to the Past”), where an Afrikaner male is portrayed with his back turned against dancing and other undesirable “pastimes of modern life” (see Figure 2).

Despite the objections raised, the trend showed no sign of abating. In fact, as the symbolic oxwagon trek gained momentum, boeremusiek gained prominence. Although it was hardly ever mentioned in the paper’s official coverage of town festivals, the letter column of *Die Transvaler* reveals that it was common practice for *boere-orkeste* to play at these events – outside the official programme.

This time the debate centred less on the questionable morals that this music and dancing were said to encourage, and more on the idea that boeremusiek was too “jolly” and therefore unfit for the solemnity associated with the event. In a subtly worded article, the special representative of the paper (on tour with the trek) reported that the official entertainment troupe accompanying the oxwagons was to be disbanded owing to the growing “enthusiasm” of the larger than expected crowds in every town. “This forced us to reconsider our own ideas”, the press release stated. “The volk clearly indicates that he (sic) doesn’t particularly want to listen to recitations and song recitals. The volk is so enthusiastic that he only wants to sing Psalms, hymns and folk songs and listen to inspiring speeches ... The volk has taken possession of the festivals and we stand powerless against its zeal, love and will.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Letter to the editor, “Danspartye: A.W. Stead beantwoord.” *Die Transvaler*, October 27, 1938, 2.

<sup>22</sup> “Dit het ons genoodsaak om ons eie gedagtes in heroerwaging te neem. Die volk toon duidelik dat hy by hierdie bedevaart nie soseer voordragte en sangstukke wil hoor nie. Die volk is so vol geesdrif dat hy net Psalms en Gesange en volksliedere wil sing en na besielende

The absence of any mention of boeremusiek in this article is telling, especially since several letters to the editor expressed regret at the rowdiness of the public at oxwagon events. Mrs Anna Steyn's letter of 11 November 1938 provides a fascinating perspective on the conflicting dynamics of the official and the popular. Her letter criticized the SABC announcer at the event in Kroonstad, who apparently decided to broadcast "a few jolly popular tunes" instead of the publicised official speech. She deplored "the ways in which dead seriousness is mixed with shallow frivolity at many an oxwagon event", and went as far as saying that only the leaders of the trek and the official speakers displayed any form of earnestness. "The enthusiasm of the public," on the other hand, "for the most part takes the form of boisterous fun". "After the gravest speech, where one feels every word to have substance," she continued, "one hears: 'After such a speech . . .', and then – '*Suikerbossie*'."

That the public erupted in a rowdy song entitled "After such a speech" following an official speech, not only shows the extent of the people's "enthusiasm", but even suggests a mockery of official Great Trek discourses. It was the carelessness with which the public engaged with the symbolic Trek that bothered Mrs. Steyn. "Shallow rowdiness", she wrote, "has never been the foundation on which to build a nation." She pleaded for more control on the side of the public broadcaster rather than for them to provide the revellers merely with what they wanted to hear. She ended her letter with the following appeal:

There is the entire FAK album and its treasure of songs. Surely the *boere-orkeste* needn't focus exclusively on picnic or *tiekiedraai* songs ... We have to learn to give expression to our jolliness in songs that stand a bit higher than the *Suikerbossie* type ... and a better song wouldn't clash so painfully with the speeches that intersperse them. For many it would certainly be agreeable if the *boere-orkeste* would help sustain an atmosphere of fine civilization.<sup>23</sup>

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toesprake wil luister. Hierdie meevoerende gees van die volk om gesamentlik te sing is een van die mooiste dinge wat deur die trek geskep is en ons voel dat dit aangemoedig moet word, want dit strek tot die nasionale bewuswording van ons volk, wat vandag weer gebore word. Die volk het van die feeste besit geneem en ons staan magteloos teenoor die geesdrif, liefde en wil van ons volk." "Volk het van feeste besit geneem: Afskaffing van ossewatrek se programgeselskap." *Die Transvaler*, September 3, 1938, 1.

<sup>23</sup>"Daar is die hele dik F.A.K.-album met sy kosbare skat van liedjies. Die boere-orkeste hoef hulle tog nie uitsluitend op piekniek- of tiekiedraailiedjies toe te lê nie ... Maar dan moet ons nou begin te leer om aan ons opgewektheid uiting te gee ook deur middel van liedjies wat 'n ietsie hoër staan as die Suikerbossie-soort ... en 'n beter soort liedjie sal ook nie so pynlik afsteek by die toesprake wat hulle moet afwissel nie. Die sou vir menigeen beslis aangenaam wees as boere-orkeste meer meehelp om 'n atmosfeer van fynere beskaafdheid te handhaaf." Letter to the editor, "Prof. Labuschagne se protes – Wat Afrikaanse musiek is," *Die Transvaler*, November 11, 1938, 13. As one can deduce from this letter, the officially endorsed songs of the FAK songbook did not always prove popular with the public.



A similar apathy towards ideological discourses of nationhood is betrayed in a letter denouncing “a so-called *boeredans*” that took place in the Pretoria City Hall as part of the 1938 celebrations:

To my astonishment whiskey was served before eight o’clock that evening. Young bearded men, trying to give the impression of honouring our forebears, whiled their time away drinking whiskey during the interval. Even women in Voortrekker dress were drinking and smoking cigarettes. What an insult to our forebears. If such things must be done, shave your beards, take off the Voortrekker dress; don’t call it a *boeredans*, but a modern outlandish mimicry.<sup>24</sup>

The pre-eminence of boeremusiek at Great Trek festivals around the country was explicitly ignored in official reporting on the matter in *Die Transvaler*. If one reads between the lines, there is reason to believe that it was in fact the *volk*’s spirited engagement with the popular music of the time – boeremusiek – and not their enthusiastic singing of hymns or institutionalised folk songs that overshadowed the official proceedings. This “shallow rowdiness” posed a threat to the Voortrekker ideal of a pious and serious Afrikanervolk on a pilgrimage to establish themselves as an autonomous people. If this historical moment is anything to go by, there existed a deep rift between official Afrikaner ideology – so often today portrayed as the monolithic mindset of all white Afrikaners, past and present – and a popular Afrikaner culture that resisted it. Boeremusiek was forced into the private sphere by the ideologues of the time. Yet, it could be heard resounding from the periphery wherever one went.

Eventually boeremusiek’s alleged incitement to sin and riotous enthusiasm gave rise to a third debate concerning its musical merits and capacity to represent the *volkslewe* of the Afrikaner. In this case, the exchange between P.F. Swanepoel and S. Buys, published during November 1938, is exemplary. In a letter entitled “Boeremusiek: Radio rapped over the knuckles”, Swanepoel rejected boeremusiek on both moral-aesthetic and ideological grounds. He contended that boeremusiek was not “Afrikaans”, as he had heard “this sort of music and musical instruments”, the so-called “*skrammelorkes*”, from black farm labourers since his childhood. “I don’t know any well-educated Afrikaans family,” he continued, “who do not listen to this music with embarrassment and abhorrence ... There are hundreds and thousands of Afrikaners who are far superior to this ‘*vastrap*’ group and who

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<sup>24</sup> “Tot my verbasing is whiskey reeds voor agtuur die aand bedien. Jong bebaarde mans, wat daarmee te kenne wil gee dat hulle ons voorouers eer, het hul rustyd met die drink van whiskey deurgebring. Selfs vrouens in Voortrekkerdrag sit en drink en rook sigarette. Wat ’n belediging vir ons voorouers. As sulke dinge gedoen moet word, skeer julle baarde af, trek die Voortrekkerdrag uit, noem dit nie ’n boeredans nie, maar ’n moderne uitlandse naäpery.” Letter to the editor, “Boeredanse – Kritiek op Pretoriane”, *Die Transvaler*, November 3, 1938, 2.

constantly have to suffer the humiliation of having to bow down to that distasteful level. Why can't the underprivileged group (if in fact they are Afrikaners) not gradually be educated to appreciate higher things?" The question remained, responded S. Buys, why these "*skrammel-orkeste*"<sup>25</sup> remained so popular at every stop of the Voortrekker wagons. When he listened to *Suikerbossie ek wil jou hê*, he involuntarily started to move to the rhythm of the music.<sup>26</sup> "There can be only one reason, and that is because boeremusiek gives expression to the soul [of the Afrikaner]."<sup>27</sup> Then comes Swanepoel's incensed response:

A great musician once said that noble music makes an appeal to the top half of the human body (i.e. to the heart and the mind, feeling and reason) and cheap music to the bottom half! I don't know to which part of the body "*Suikerbossie*" made an appeal on you.

Here one sees evidenced the beginnings of the clash between the idealism of Christian Afrikaner nationalism and the materiality of boeremusiek. Swanepoel's protest, representative of the ideologically-minded Afrikaner middle and upper classes, reveals a Calvinist – and colonialist – discomfort with the materiality of the body that runs deeper than merely the association between boeremusiek, dancing and adultery. The allusion made here to boeremusiek's hybrid nature quite clearly references the myth of the innate musicality of the black native.<sup>28</sup> Swanepoel posits a primitive connection between music and the body – a connection that is able to trump reason and that plays into the instinctual nature of the primitive mind situated, as it were, in the "lower" half of the body. Boeremusiek cannot be considered music, because a person driven forward by these primitive instincts does not qualify as a human being. Boeremusiek is "banal", "lascivious" and even an act of rape; it could make one do strange things and disregard rational argument. The preference from the side of Afrikaner high culture was clear:

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<sup>25</sup> "Skrammel-orkeste", from the Afrikaans verb "to shave" presumably refers to a band formed of sheep shearers, or accompanying the act of shearing. The word therefore references race and class.

<sup>26</sup> Several artists recorded *Suikerbossie ek wil jou hê* during the 1930s, but it was David de Lange's version that really took the country by storm, selling about 200 000 copies.

<sup>27</sup> "Waarom word die skrammel-orkeste vandag by elke stilhouplek van die Voortrekkerwaens gehoor? Seker nie omdat die Afrikaner dit noodgedwonge moet aanhoor nie. Nee, daar is net een rede voor en dit is dat boeremusiek sy siel vertolk. ... "Suikerbossie ek wil jou hê" ... gee mos uiting aan my gevoel. Meteens begin u in die ritme van die musiek te beweeg. ... Hoe kry die "skrammel-orkeste" dit dan vanaand reg om my siellewe te vertolk?" Letter to the editor, "Boeremusiek: Dr. Swanepoel beantwoord," *Die Transvaler*, November 18, 1938.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 2.

the dogmatic over the material, culture over nature, reason over the embarrassments of the body. Boeremusiek not only resisted the Voortrekker image of the Afrikaner, but also its segregational politics.

## A New Era of Reception

One can listen to music in one of two ways. First, with the purpose of enjoying the piece and appreciating it as music. Second, with the purpose of dancing when you are unable to appreciate it. In my opinion it all depends on the individual's behaviour towards the music, if he considers it to be frivolous or serious.<sup>29</sup>

Letter to the editor, *Die Transvaler*, October 25, 1938.

In many ways recording technology could defuse these debates by reifying boeremusiek and making the connection with the material body seem capricious. With the increasing availability of records and the airtime it evidently enjoyed on Afrikaans radio, a new era of reception was inaugurated for *vastrapmusiek*, as it was also called. Alongside the live music of the dance scene, boeremusiek emerged as a listening culture. This move away from dancing created the possibility for a boeremusiek free of adulterous connotations and scandalous appeals to the material body and, therefore, more in line with Afrikaner Christian nationalist principles. Removed from the sinful context of the dance party, it could become a private affair, enjoyed within the home as a listening experience. Out of the public eye, one could entertain a secret passion for the music and commit one's enjoyment to a suitable time and place, where and when it did not interfere with the solemnity of religious and *volks*-political affairs.

Concomitant with the growing rift between the reception of live and recorded music, new musical categories emerged. Anton Hartman, writing in 1955, stated that "traditional boeremusiek" had been eroded from two sides.<sup>30</sup> In the absence of tradition, practitioners either turned to jazz as a musical model or sold out to

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<sup>29</sup> " 'n Mens kan na musiek luister op twee verskillende maniere. Eerstens met die doel om die stuk te geniet en te waardeer as musiek, tweedens, as u dit wil hoor met die doel om te dans wanneer jy dit nie kan waardeer nie. Volgens my opinie hang dit alles af van hoe die individu hom gedra teenoor die musiek, of hy dit ligsinnig opvat of ernstig." Letter to the editor, "Boeoreorkeste: Welmenend beantwoord," *Die Transvaler*, October 25, 1938, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Anton Hartman was appointed as programme compiler at the SABC in 1951 and later as assistant conductor of the SABC orchestra. At the same time he served on the music committee of the FAK and was a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond.

commercial concerns.<sup>31</sup> “In place of [our traditional boeremusiek] we have a flourishing ‘Tin Pan Alley’ which spins out ‘Afrikaans’ tango’s and rumba’s in a furious struggle to make money from something that goes by the name of ‘boeremusiek’, and which, for that reason, enjoys a measure of support from the public”.<sup>32</sup>

Four years earlier, in 1951, the SABC launched an extensive campaign to source old boeremusiek tunes from its listeners.<sup>33</sup> The biggest response came from Mrs Jo Fourie, who sent in about three hundred tunes.<sup>34</sup> Some of these, performed by the orchestras of Hendrik Susan and Hansie van Loggerenberg for the SABC’s transcription service, were included in a programme series called *Uit die jaar vroeg* (From years of yore), aired in 1952. Interpreted in light of Hartman’s statement above, *Uit die jaar vroeg* represented an intervention on the part of the SABC to endorse “traditional” boeremusiek as opposed to an “Afrikaans Tin Pan Alley”. Not only was it made clear in the opening programme of the series that old-fashioned boeremusiek was a vanishing phenomenon, but also that it was nearly impossible to recreate its sound and performance style because “modern *Boeereorkeste* had veered so far from the old ways of playing, that they found it difficult to return to the old paths”.<sup>35</sup> What followed was what can only be described as an invention of tradition: “Real” boeremusiek never makes use of syncopation; the rhythm is derived from the melody and not arbitrarily provided by a rhythm section; it only makes use of primary chords, even in modulations; although virtuosity exists, ornamentation always occurs within these set boundaries. Manie Bodenstein, legendary concertina player, remembers the disdain with which the members of Hendrik Susan’s orchestra treated these samples: “We thought it was musical nonsense – infantile”.<sup>36</sup> The items broadcasted by the SABC as “traditional boeremusiek” were far removed from the live musical practice of the time.

In the letter column of *Die Transvaler* of 1955 there also emerges some evidence that the disdain with which certain segments of Afrikaner society viewed contemporary boeremusiek, increasingly going by the name of

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<sup>24</sup> The musical entertainment at white parties, argued Hartman, was routinely outsourced to coloured musicians and slaves since the earliest existence of “white civilization in S.A”, hence the absence of a suitable tradition for boeremusiek.

<sup>32</sup> Anton Hartman, “Waarheen boeremusiek?,” *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, February 13, 1955, sec. Klank en kleur.

<sup>33</sup> Rudolf J. Van den Berg, “Die musiekaktiwiteite van die SAUK” (M.Mus. Thesis, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1976), 192.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>35</sup> “Transcription of *Uit die jaar vroeg*”, March 3, 1952, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>36</sup> Manie Bodenstein, interview by W Froneman, October 16, 2010.

*ligte Afrikaanse musiek* (light Afrikaans music), fuelled a reappraisal of the *vastrap* recordings of the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> The 1955 debates in *Die Transvaler* centred on claims by S. Hylton Edwards, an English-speaking South African school teacher. In a lecture given in London he stated that “boeremusiek was inferior to the music of the bantu”.<sup>38</sup> Several letters accused Edwards of confusing boeremusiek with music featuring “an American and British whining with Nigger and South American rhythms; contaminated [*verbasterde*] so-called ‘urban Afrikaner entertainment music’”.<sup>39</sup> “Boeremusiek”, another correspondent continued, “is an art few modern orchestras can master. No-one plays like oom Jan Visser and Die Vier Transvalers anymore. Unfortunately boeremusiek is degenerating. Tango’s and samba’s have no place in boeremusiek.”<sup>40</sup>

The contemporary music which, in a commercial endeavour, was “dished up as boeremusiek”, was not to be considered “real old-fashioned boeremusiek”. This would suggest that by the 1950s the ideal type of traditional boeremusiek was no longer rooted in live performances, or in “the way the old people played”, but in a set of historical sound recordings and a tradition reconstructed by Bosman de Kock and Anton Hartman and recorded for the SABC’s transcription service.

Rescued from its unsavoury connotations, the historical recording – and indeed, traditional boeremusiek as a construct – became increasingly disconnected from live musical performance. Liveness not only threatened musical authenticity, but also the racial ideology that could classify certain forms of musical behaviour as “non-white” and, on the flipside, demanded a reductive adherence to notions of civilisation and whiteness.<sup>41</sup> Despite objections in

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<sup>37</sup> *Die Voortrekkerdanskwartet* and *Die Vyf Vastrapper* were some of the first *vastrap* bands to record their music with Polliack, the local agent of Columbia records, between May and July 1930. Other celebrated recordings from that decade include those by Faan Harris, Jan Visser, Silver de Lange, Die Vyf Dagbrekers, Die Vier Transvalers, Die Vier Springbokke, Die Ses Hartbrekers, Die Vier Hugenote, and Die Lydenburg Vastrappers. These recordings continue to set the benchmark for traditional boeremusiek. David de Lange and his band, Die Naglopers, although immensely popular during the 1930s, occupies a more ambivalent role in boeremusiek discourse, due to his inclusion of singing in what was mostly an instrumental genre and as unsavoury details of his personal life have come to light.

<sup>38</sup> *Die Transvaler*, February 25, 1955, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to the editor, “Boeremusiek en Engelse kuns”, *Die Transvaler*, March 14, 1955, 7.

<sup>40</sup> “Boeremusiek is ’n kuns waarin baie van ons moderne boere-orkeste nie slaag nie. Daar word nie meer gespeel soos bv. oom Jan Visser en Die Vier Transvalers nie. Ongelukkig is boeremusiek besig om te ontaard. Tango’s en sambas hoort nie in boeremusiek tuis nie.” Letter to the editor “Boeremusiek beter as Van Wyk”, *Die Transvaler*, April 20, 1955, 7.

<sup>41</sup> For a more thorough consideration of this idea, see Chapter 2.

public forums, “modern” manifestations of boeremusiek lived on as if in a parallel universe: largely unregulated, unruly and unthinking of official Afrikaner ideology.

## Boeremusiek as Monument of the Heart

The 1955 argument for retreating into the boeremusiek museum, quoted earlier, has remained remarkably consistent in contemporary boeremusiek reception. I have argued here that, since at least the 1930s, boeremusiek posed an embarrassment to certain groups of white Afrikaners for reasons of morality, religion, racial politics and class. Such an important part of popular culture, although it could be ignored in official discourse, could not be completely suppressed. Gradually, boeremusiek was sanitised into a listening culture, freed from the embarrassing materiality of the body, and reinvented as “traditional” – a category that, as I have shown, harbours a deep suspicion for liveness.

It is in this context that the activities of the Traditional Boer Music Club of South Africa (TBK), founded in 1981, need to be understood. With only 605 members, the club exists at the margins of contemporary Afrikaner culture.<sup>42</sup> Yet, it inhabits a significant discursive space in the boeremusiek scene, primarily due to its ongoing feud with the Boeremusiekgilde (BMG) over matters of musical authenticity. The aims of the club are described as “the collection and fostering of traditional boeremusiek” and “the inviolate preservation of the inalienable and unique character of traditional boeremusiek”.<sup>43</sup> To this end the club has primarily engaged itself, since the earliest years of its existence, with the collection and re-issuing of historical recordings. Although the TBK organises dances and other live boeremusiek gatherings, the club is distinctly discourse oriented. Under its banner have appeared numerous newsletters, three volumes on boeremusiek legends, a history of the origins and development of boeremusiek and an emerging digital archive.

The club has provided various (and sometimes competing) definitions of “traditional boeremusiek” over the years, most of which acknowledge the difficulties inherent in such a project. Stephaan van Zyl, a member of the

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<sup>42</sup> Figure provided by Kobus Müller in February 2011.

<sup>43</sup> “Die versameling en uitbou van tradisionele boeremusiek” en “om die onvervreembare en unieke karakter van tradisionele boeremusiek ongeskonde te bewaar.” “Tradisionele Boeremusiekkklub van Suid-Afrika,” *Meer oor die klub - Grondwet*, n.d., <http://www.boeremusiek.org/grondwet.html>.

committee since 1985, defined traditional boeremusiek as “originally European folk music that entered the country with the settlers and, through the years, developed its own character here in South Africa. All the Dixieland, Jazz, Ragtime and other influences from America, which so dominate ‘Modern Boeremusiek’ can, therefore, never form part of traditional boeremusiek”.<sup>44</sup> Van Zyl saw the choice of instruments as a crucial component of the definition of traditional boeremusiek:

Attempting to play traditional Boeremusiek on modern instruments is a sign of bad taste. I personally consider electric guitars, electronic organs, drums, etc. undesirable and even one wrong instrument can spoil the character of traditional Boeremusiek.

The official definition, provided on the TBK’s website, states that boeremusiek (“Boer music”) is

instrumental folk music, dating from the period during which the people who practiced it were internationally known as “Die Boere” (The Boers) of South Africa. It is informal music that is played in a distinctive way and was primarily intended as accompaniment for social dancing. For the purpose of this conversation we exclude other kinds of Afrikaans music from the same period like ballads, serenades and music aimed at passive audiences.<sup>45</sup>

Ed Retief, on the other hand, identified it as music that “speaks to the soul; it touches your heart and is easy on the ear. After your feet have stopped itching, there is always something that stays with you – a longing to listen to more of those *lekker* sounds”.<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere boeremusiek is defined as a music that mirrors the soul of the Afrikaner *volk* or the music of “Europeans with mostly Afrikaans as home language”.<sup>47</sup> Jimmy MacDonald draws an interesting correlation between traditional boeremusiek and antiques:

You know, I often hear the argument that one should develop yourself and try to progress in your music [*en probeer om vooruit te gaan in jou musiek*]. I also hear the accusation that we want to drive the oxwagon on the high street of the modern age. This is how I think about this issue: When you buy a Model T Ford and adapt it with a V8 engine, you totally take away its value as an antique. If you collect antique furniture and you spray-paint an old wash-stand a different colour, you have messed it up and it is no longer of any value. There are things, therefore, that are more

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<sup>44</sup> Stephaan Van Zyl and Ed Retief, “Wat is tradisionele boeremusiek?,” *Spesiale nuusbrieff van die Tradisionele Boeremusiekkklub van Suid-Afrika*, August 1989, 7.

<sup>45</sup> “What is Boer music?”, n.d., [http://www.boeremusiek.org.za/eng\\_mainframe.htm](http://www.boeremusiek.org.za/eng_mainframe.htm).

<sup>46</sup> Van Zyl and Retief, “Wat is tradisionele boeremusiek?,” 7.

<sup>47</sup> Ed Retief, “Verskillende elemente van TBM - ’n persoonlike ervaring,” *Opskommel*, August 1992, 17.

“What is Boer music?”.

valuable in their original format. Why, then, mess them up? Concerning the oxwagon: boeremusiek was composed in the time of the oxwagon. I don't want to drive an oxwagon along the high street at peak hour, but grant me the privilege of enjoying boeremusiek at a suitable time as part of our culture.<sup>48</sup>

The lingering impact of the subjunctivising discourses of the past is particularly evident in MacDonald's version of boeremusiek as museum piece. Although his primary concern is preserving the music in its "original format", "enjoying boeremusiek at a suitable time" is a secondary function of the boeremusiek museum. Again the frivolity of boeremusiek demands careful segregation from serious matters. One enjoys boeremusiek by retreating from real life. These definitions establish boeremusiek as historical artefact, something that can be collected or discarded, displayed or forgotten, protected or contaminated. Boeremusiek, although you may hear it resounding in contemporary life, is of a bygone era. Contemporary traditional boeremusiek functions as an inner souvenir of the past – a monument of the heart.<sup>49</sup>

When traditional boeremusiek resounds in contemporary life, it is as a death mask. As the *imagines* of Roman burial rites hovered between commemorating and representing the deceased before taking pride of place in the *atrium* of the Roman home, so too, both newly composed and contemporary renditions of "traditional" numbers are firmly rooted in an aesthetic of simulation. Contemporary renditions are measured for their "correctness" against the canonical 1930s recordings, especially those by Faan Harris and Die Vier Transvalers. "Correctness" is understood in an all-encompassing way, including original instrumentation, key, melody and ornamentation. Frozen in their recorded state in terms of musical content, arrangements of these standards are frowned upon and often referred to as "stealing someone's thunder".<sup>50</sup> These cryogenised boeremusiek standards are at the same time objects of mourning and monuments to traditional boeremusiek. As the memory of a deceased loved one is carried in the heart, signifying both the end of mourning and its beginning, an acceptance of loss and a constant reminder thereof, the boeremusiek standard performs the work of mourning.

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<sup>48</sup> Letter to the editor, *Nuusbrief van die TBK*, 1996 no. 4, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Oom Willie Marais writes in a letter of thanks to the presenters of *Span die Bokseil* – a radio programme on boeremusiek: "You two are busy erecting monuments in people's hearts that will never be destroyed" (Julle twee is besig om monumente in mense harte [sic] op te rig, wat nooit vernietig sal word nie.) *Opskommel*, March 1991, 19-20.

<sup>50</sup> In Afrikaans: "om met iemand anders se kalf te ploeg", literally "to plough with another's heifer".





Figure 3: Bobby Pennells at the tombstone for Silver de Lange. Bobby won his first banjo from a lottery.

The work of mourning finds a substantive manifestation in the material commemoration of boeremusiek legends – an ongoing TBK project. In fact, the club was founded due to a fundraising effort to erect a tombstone at the neglected grave of concertina player Faan Harris. In my interview on 31 January 2011 with Lourens Aucamp, a founding member of the club, he suggested that the decision to erect the tombstone could partly be related to the popularity of the Vier Transvalers, the band with which Faan Harris played on a radio programme *Toeka se Treffers* (‘Hits of yore’, again an indication of the pre-eminence of historical recordings in TBK discourse). In 1985 followed a tombstone for Silver de Lange (Figure 3) and in 1986 an obelisk for the Lydenburg Vastrappers, the first band from rural South Africa to make recordings in Johannesburg. The most ambitious project, a *boere-orke*s in bronze in Pietersburg (now called Polokwane), was completed in 1994 with the support of the Pietersburg municipality. However, the TBK does not react positively when accused of conducting a museum culture. In a letter to the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper *Rapport* entitled “They only put stones on graves!”, a Mrs J. Lombard accused the TBK of “merely putting stones on ... people’s graves, instead of canvassing for boeremusiek”.<sup>51</sup> Piet Bester, then chairman of the club, responded indignantly with an inventory of the club’s activities. Apart from venerating the pioneers of boeremusiek, the TBK also reissued historical recordings and sponsored boeremusiek competitions,

talks and presentations at schools, and boeremusiek dances and events.<sup>52</sup> He ended his letter with the accusation that if Mrs Lombard were a “true” boeremusiek supporter, she would long since have become a member of the club and familiarised herself with its projects.

A “true” boeremusiek supporter, as is evident from the extensive coverage of the differences between the TBK and the BMG in the newsletters of the TBK, is someone who accepts the particular demands traditional boeremusiek is said to make in terms of performance practice. These markers of authenticity have many corollaries in social norms. The organisation’s continued campaign against the *verbastering* of boeremusiek cannot but be read

<sup>51</sup> Letter to the editor, “Hul sit dan net stene op grafte!”, *Rapport*, February 5, 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to the editor, “Weet u wat klub vir musiek doen?”, *Rapport*, February 19, 1989.

in terms of the Afrikaner nationalist fear for racial hybridization: for the Afrikaner to remain racially pure, its folk music had to remain equally free of alien influences.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, the same argument was made by a letter writer in 1955 in rejecting boeremusiek on the grounds that boeremusiek had origins in Cape Malay culture and was therefore unacceptable in terms of “musical apartheid”.<sup>54</sup> This shows the extent of the invention that traditional boeremusiek had undergone in fifty years: from what was commonly referred to as *hotnotsmusiek* (hottentot’s music) to a representation of Afrikanerdom, although it has to be said that the idea of boeremusiek as Afrikaner symbol has always elicited wide dissent from certain segments of Afrikaner society.

Traditional boeremusiek suffers from its schizophrenic subservience to Afrikaner nationalism, on the one hand, and the memory of its hybrid beginnings, on the other. Being at the same time too white and not white enough, traditional boeremusiek provides a haven where Afrikaner innocence can be recovered, but always with a sense of revulsion. What is mourned by traditional boeremusiek is the disorientating loss of self that occurs in the space between a tradition sanitized into a suitable history, and the realization that true authenticity can only occur where such intervention is absent. A “true” folk music tradition for the Afrikaner can only be located at the point where Afrikaner identity is impossible.

Read as a hyperreal discourse, the TBK injects signs of authenticity everywhere – references to an acutely felt but objectively absent Afrikaner folk tradition. These monuments – representing, commemorating – mark their own dissolution. The Afrikaner is not the sole proprietor of anything – not of a language and not of a music. Every performance of traditional boeremusiek transgresses its own authenticity. Yet boeremusiek inspires and saddens, touches the soul, brings the body into movement. What is left to mourn are sacred, acutely emotional monuments of the heart. Traditional boeremusiek cannot exist in contemporary South Africa. The only possible mode of existence for traditional boeremusiek is as simulacrum.

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<sup>53</sup> As in all organisations the official statements of the club do not necessarily correspond with the opinions of all of its members, some of whom are much more nuanced on these issues. Even though some TBK members would insist that they like the music and are not interested in its political connotations, I have taken the opinions expressed in the club’s newsletter as its official pronouncements on certain issues.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to the editor, “Boeremusiek en goeie Afrikaners”, *Die Transvaler*, April 12, 1955, 9.

## “A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance”: Boeremusiek as Monument to Sociality

Boeremusiek as museum culture is less obvious in the discourses and official events of the Boeremusiekgilde – considered custodians of both so-called traditional and modern boeremusiek and by far the larger of the two organisations. The BMG hardly has any prescriptions regarding performance practice, apart from set guidelines for bands competing in the traditional categories of the organisation’s annual competition. Instead there is a tacit agreement as to the limits of the genre. Where the TBK values musical authenticity, the BMG – for the most part – values musical innovation and places particular emphasis on a concertinist’s ability to develop a personal style.<sup>55</sup> Where the TBK is discourse-orientated, the BMG is strongly events-orientated. The idea of boeremusiek as museum culture might seem questionable considering the vibrancy of these events. Far from shunning all notions of authenticity, however, the BMG locates “real” boeremusiek in subliminal nostalgic simulations of sociality.

Allan Moore draws a distinction between an “authenticity of the old”, comparable to Philip Bohlman’s definition of authenticity as the “consistent representation of the origins of a ... style” or “uncontamination of practice”, and an “authenticity of the new”, concerned with an “honesty to experience”, in Lawrence Grossberg’s words.<sup>56</sup> Moore typifies an “authenticity of the new” as “defined by its ability to articulate ... a place of belonging” or a sense of “centredness”. This, for Moore, is in line with Grossberg’s suggestion that authenticity requires the “ability to articulate private but common desires, feelings and experiences into a shared public language”.<sup>57</sup>

At the contemporary BMG event there is an overlap between these two meanings of authenticity, as is evident from the following consideration of the relationship between boeremusiek and the individual:

The Boeremusiekgilde concerns itself in the first instance with the advancement of Boeremusiek. It is logical that the individual will come up when talking about Boeremusiek, because it is impossible to make music without the individual! The focus is nevertheless on MUSIC when it comes to development, and then the individual should stand back to prevent the music from being overshadowed. MUSIC always comes first and then the person, without disdaining the person or the individual. The individual will enjoy admiration without looking for it whenever outstanding music is made! The Boeremusiekgilde exists as a sounding board for musicians and to help them find opportunities to showcase their talent and expose them to healthy rivalry, all for the sake of MUSIC.

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Paul Roodt and Bets Roodt, interview by W Froneman, July 25, 2009; Jamie Du Plessis, interview by W Froneman, October 5, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Allan F. Moore, “U2 and the Myth of Authenticity in Rock,” *Popular Musicology* 3, no. 6 (1998): 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

In addition it should be made clear that the Boeremusiekgilde does not favour certain musicians above others. Every member and musician is treated in the same way. The Boeremusiekgilde has about 500 musicians under its umbrella and serves these members in the first instance. The goal of the Boeremusiekgilde is to unite these musicians and to encourage them to give joint expression to the aim of letting Boeremusiek resound joyously for all to hear and to inspire young musicians to respect, conserve and practice the traditions that helped Boeremusiek endure for more than a century.

For this reason it is so upsetting when someone breaks away from organised Boeremusiek to form his own group. This only divides the Afrikaner and his unique folk music [*volksmusiek*].<sup>58</sup>

Performing boeremusiek within the organised sphere of the BMG is more than merely a practical consideration; it is a form of enculturation, of learning one's place in society. The "authenticity of the old" discernible in this discussion is of the social and not the musical kind. It is rooted in an historically informed "honesty to experience". What should be respected, preserved and practiced is, contrary to the opening statement, not boeremusiek in the first instance, but the traditions on which it relies. Put differently, the survival of the music is contingent on the survival of the traditions of sociality in which it is embedded. The social norm most apparent here is the precedence of group values over individual ideals. Read in this way, the BMG's main priority is not the advancement of boeremusiek in the first instance, but the advancement of a unified Afrikaner cultural history.

For the BMG the "consistent representation of the origins of a style" is rooted in the social values constructed around the musical practice of the *boeredans*, which became so popular in the second half of the

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<sup>58</sup> In die eerste plek is die Boeremusiekgilde gemoeid met die uitbouing van Boeremusiek. Dit is logies dat die individu ter sprake sal kom as daar gepraat word van Boeremusiek, want sonder die individu sal die musiek mos nie moontlik wees nie! Die klem word egter op MUSIEK geplaas wanneer dit by bevordering kom en dan moet die individu terugstaan om te verhoed dat die musiek in die skadu gestel word. MUSIEK is altyd eerste en dan die mens sonder om die mens of die individu te minag. Wanneer voortreflike musiek tot sy reg kom sal die individu wat die musiek help voortbring in elk geval sonder eie bemoeienis erkenning geniet! Die Boeremusiekgilde is daar om as klankbord vir musikante te dien en om hulle te help om geleenthede te vind waar hulle hulle talente kan tentoonstel en blootgestel kan word aan gesonde mededinging terwille van die MUSIEK. Verder moet dit duidelik wees dat die Boeremusiekgilde geen voorkeure het as dit by musikante kom nie. Alle lede en musikante word onder dieselfde kam geskeer. Die Boeremusiekgilde het ongeveer 500 musikante in sy geledere en dit is na hierdie lede waarna veral omgesien word. Die Boeremusiekgilde poog om hierdie musikante saam te snoer en aan te spoor om gesamentlik uiting te gee aan die doelwit om Boeremusiek vrolik en luid te laat weerklink en om die jong musikante te inspireer om die tradisies wat Boeremusiek oor meer as 'n eeu help voortleef het te respekteer, bewaar en lewendig te hou vir die toekoms. Daarom is dit so ontstellend as iemand van ge-organiseerde (sic) Boeremusiek wegbreek om sy eie splintergroep te vorm. Dit verdeel net die Afrikaner en sy eiesoortige volksmusiek. Boeremusiekgilde, *Boeremusiekgilde: 15 goue jare 1989-2004*, 6.

nineteenth century in farming communities around the country. The structural representation of the *boeredans* in late twentieth-century Afrikaans literature and iconography holds some clues to understanding live boeremusiek events in the present. Inevitably, these representations make use of framing techniques, usually activating a memory, situating the *boeredans* in a nostalgic reconstruction of the past.

*Die Misvloernuwejaar* (The Dung Floor New Year) by Theuns Kotzé is a prose example of how the pleasures associated with the *boeredans* are subjunctivised in narratives on the topic.<sup>59</sup> Written in Namaqua Afrikaans, the story has a frame structure. A young man visits his grandfather, overcome by the beauty of the Karoo landscape in the fresh early morning breeze. For the young man the dawn landscape is a source of inspiration, an indication of future possibilities. For the old man the scene inspires only melancholy, a reminder of what has been lost: “Rain seasons. Blossoming years. Youth.”<sup>60</sup> Overwhelmed by sadness, the old man recalls the pleasurable dance parties of his youth.

The ambivalence of dancing in Afrikaner culture is highlighted at the beginning of his recollection. The host, old Kolie Kortkruisband, started to host an annual dance party when his daughters entered adolescence. Because this was not fitting for an elder in the church, the old man rationalised this ritual by contending that his daughters would not go out in search of company if they could find it at home.<sup>61</sup> It is within this mildly illicit context that the social values of the *boeredans* are recreated:

“Drink, yes, in tenfold abundance. The bottles packed out in sheets. Ginger and orange syrup. The gingerbeer’s stoppers tightly secured with shop-bought rope.”

“How about something to eat, you ask. Now look, old tan’Miemie believed a dancer should eat his fill in the early evening. Otherwise the dance floor will put him in his place.” ...

And then, Mister, just when the sun is about to set, then old Jankel Naairiem takes his boer concertina from its leather bag. And he settles on his field chair in the corner. With his head at an angle, like a pig listening to thunder, he reverently starts feeling the keys. ...

<sup>59</sup> Theuns Kotzé, “Die misvloernuwejaar,” in *Die vlugroep van die Kelkiewyn* (Kapaastad: Saayman & Weber, 1987), 44-53.

<sup>60</sup> “Reëntye. Blomjare. Jeug.” *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>61</sup> “Ou Kolie Kortkruisband had ’n trop meisiekinders. Vanlat hulle so kweperbekwaam gernaat-eetbaar beginne word het, daarvandaag af gee ou Kolie stryksaam elke jaar ’n plesiertjie ... Hoe het die ou altyd gesê? ‘Dit is nou so. As ’n mens nou net meisiekinders het, dan laat hulle jou mos dinge doen wat nie altyd pas by ’n dienende ouderling nie. Dis dié dat ek en jou tante maar elke jaar die ou plesiertjie gee. Dan hoef die kinders mos nie aanspraak elders te gaan soek nie.’ So het die ou altyd se gewete gepelie.” *Ibid.*, 45.

Oom Kolie and tan'Miemie then opens the dance floor. And after about the second turn, the young ones crowd the floor like flies on the date crate in old Rachman's shop. ...

After the first waltz old Kolie says his word of welcome. He tells us to make ourselves at home, and he speaks of ginger ale and orange syrup. And of flannel cake and jam tart. "There is more than enough of everything, friends. It's all there for you. Don't let anyone say that someone had to go home hungry. Or that someone got a stone when he asked for cake. Welcome again, friends. The evening now belongs to you."...

At a New Year's revel there are no entitlements. You have to dance with young and old. You have, after all, been invited to dance. Indiscriminately. The man who becomes picky is soon put in his place by the women. ...

Shortly after midnight the grownups start to flake off to bed. It is then when the young ones have a knees up. Now there is time to stand to one side with a girl. But not for long, because your absence is soon noticed. Then they start looking for you."<sup>62</sup>

The Afrikaner of the *boeredans* is portrayed as a jolly, hospitable people. In the historical imagination, dance parties, accompanied by the "convivial sound" of boeremusiek, often lasted through the night and were complemented by copious amounts of drink and an overabundance of food, a setting where young and old could use the public display of "innocent fun" as a smokescreen for less than innocent activities.<sup>63</sup> However, by placing the action in a nostalgic past, the author casts doubt on the verity of the recollection. Not only is the unreliability of the narrator highlighted by casting him as a character in the frame, but the pleasurable activities of the dance are

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<sup>62</sup>"Drinkgoed, ja, dié is daar ook vir 'n tienduwele oordaad. Sommer sukke plate staan die bottels. Gemmer- en lemoenstroop. Die gemmerbier se proppe is goed vas met winkeltou." "Wat van 'n koslikheid, vra jy, Meestertjie? Nee kyk, ou tant Miemie het geglo 'n danser moet sy maag vroegeand hoedkop eet. Anders sit die dansbaan hom onder. "En nou, Meestertjie, as die son so wil-wil water skep, dan haal ou Jankel Naairiem sy boerkostiena uit die rooilooisak. En hy plant hom vierkant op sy veldstoel in die hoek. Met sy kop so skuinskeef, kompleet soos 'n vark wat swaarweer luister, voel hy dan die klawers eerbiedig aan." "Oom Kolie en tant Miemie open dan die baan. So ná die tweede rondom, dan sak ons jong klomp die baan toe. Soos die vlieë op die dadelkis in ou Rachman se winkel. "Ná die eerste wals spreek ou Kolie sy woord van welkom. Hy vra ons om ons tuis te maak, en hy praat van gemmerbier en lemoenstroop. En van die skuinskoek en die jêmtert. "Daar is van alles en nog wat, vrinne. Dis daar vir julle. Opdat daar nie gesê sal worre dat iemand honger omgedraai het nie. Of dat iemand 'n klip gekry het toe hy koek gesoek het nie. Nogmaals welkom, vrinne. Die aand bewoort nou aan julle". "Op so 'n Nuwejaarspleiertjie is daar geen serwitute nie. Jy moet dans met oud en jonk. Jy word mos genooi om te kom dans. Voor die voet. Die man wat beginne uitsoek, kom gou sy dreuning teë onder die vroumense." So skuins ná middernag begin die grootmense afskilfer. Kooi toe. Dis dan wanneer die jong klomp die plek op horings neem. Nou is daar tyd vir opsy staan met die nooi. Maar ook nie vir lank nie. Want jy word gou vermis ...

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ferreira, *Die Boeremusiekgilde se vyf goue jare 1989-1994*, 1.



Figure 4: Cartoon by Frans Esterhuyze, “Opskommel”, August 1992, 12.

published in *Die Transvaler* and reproduced in a TBK newsletter of 1992 (see Figure 4). Two things are particularly striking in this cartoon: the presence of caricatured black servants joining in at the margin, and the

subjunctivised by his conscious anxieties: “You wish that you could hold on to the newness of the new year. And you wonder whether the elation with which you dance the polka doesn’t perhaps make you look silly from a distance.”<sup>64</sup> The narrator is alienated from experiencing pleasure by drawing attention to himself dancing and becoming conscious of his desire to hang on to the sensation. It is in the subjunctive mood – framed by more realistic perspectives on the hardships of life – that the social values of the *boeredans* are formed: familiarity, hospitality and jollification, egalitarianism, epicurism and paternalism of the behind-every-successful-man-stands-a-strong-woman variety. A world of sexual innuendo, courtship and youthfulness, of saint it in public and sin in secret.<sup>65</sup>

A similar subjunctivising of reality is found in a cartoon by Frans Esterhuyze, first

<sup>64</sup> “[J]y wens dat jy die nuwigheid van die jaar nuut kan hou. En jy wonder of die uitgelatenheid waarmee jy die polka dans, jou nie straks op ’n afstand verspot laat lyk nie.” Kotzé, “Die misvloernuwejaar,” 53.

<sup>65</sup> The narrative is dispersed with sexual innuendo. Cf. the titles of the items the *boere-orke* played: “Mame, die bokkie het vir my gestoot”, “Sussie, kom pluk vir my die blou blommetjie”, “Grootrivier se voël”.

ancestral portrait on the wall, here depicted smiling down at the dancers and musicians in approval.<sup>66</sup> It is the portrait that achieves two distinct frames in this sketch. It implies that the party is taking place in the *voorkamer* – the front room of a traditional Cape Dutch homestead – thereby acting as reference to a lost domesticity and its associated social and racial relationships. At the same time the portrait acts as symbol of tradition, which for boeremusiek enthusiasts manifests in a collective duty to preserve one’s cultural heritage. The frame of pleasure forms the fictional present and yet the past and its preservation are at stake here. It is as if the dancers are alienated from their actual pleasure by being made conscious of their place in a cultural lineage. The instrumental role of pleasure in preserving traditions that are practically extinct is highlighted by the presence of the portrait. In this case, nostalgia acts as means of subjunctifying present enjoyment, of making it hyperreal, like watching oneself having fun.

### Boeremusiek Performance as Ritual of Mourning

“The museum, instead of being circumscribed as a geometric site, is everywhere now, like a dimension of life.”

Jean Baudrillard – *The Precession of Simulacra*<sup>67</sup>

Pleasure at contemporary boeremusiek events is framed by discourses of duty in similar fashion. Boeremusiek today is considered to be in clear alignment with South Africa’s history of white oppression, which has led to the stigmatization of the genre. Yet, it has been repressed by the Afrikaner establishment as an undesirable form of Afrikaner popular culture from its earliest history. The history of boeremusiek is testament to the limiting effects

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<sup>66</sup> Speaking within the context of a decades-long exile in London, the composer Stanley Glasser “remembers” precisely this caricature of boeremusiek as marker of South African innocence: “Go to a Vastrap and see what you can do with it. Go to a Vastrap evening in Nelspruit or wherever. And see what it means, the dancing, the life, it’s all part of the music ... I’m talking about if there’s a dance in Nelspruit on a Saturday night and all the farmers are coming in and the locals are coming in and there is a Boereorkes. Where do you guys ... do you ever roll up to that sort of thing? No. I used to love it in Bethel, going to a dance in the local hall, with a Boereorkes playing. It was so lively and everybody was in a good mood and you’d see African children looking through the window and everybody was enjoying it in their own way.” Stanley Glasser. Interview by Stephanus Muller, January 18, 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 8.



that dominant notions of whiteness have had on the scope of white aesthetic expression. Much of the self-reflexive discourses of the genre hinge on trying to carve out a space for the sensuous pleasures afforded by this type of music within the set boundaries of Afrikaner nationalist ideology.

The BMG's code of conduct illustrates this objective. It stipulates that "in accordance with the moral standards of our Afrikaner *volk*" every event shall be opened with prayer, that members shall refrain from any conduct that can bring the organisation into disrepute, and that "drunkenness, debauchery, foul language" and "any deed harmful to the reputation of the Boeremusiekgilde" will not be tolerated. Members who fail to adhere to these measures face termination of their membership.<sup>68</sup> In reality these measures are less stringent than they might seem. To my knowledge no-one has ever been expelled from the BMG for contravening the code, which seems to function as a rhetorical subservience to Afrikaner nationalist politics.

Opening events with a reading from the Bible and prayer is another contemporary example of framing pleasure with discourses of duty. The passages chosen are inevitably either Psalm 150, a call to praise the Lord with music and dancing, or "A time for Everything" from Ecclesiastes 3: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: ... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance..."<sup>69</sup> This extraction of pleasure from theological discourses often goes hand in hand with subconscious feelings of guilt, as is evident in jokes involving *dominees* (ministers), dancing and sex and unsolicited justifications for dancing made from the stage. Nevertheless, it provides a theological justification for the less stern Afrikaner social world that boeremusiek is thought to embody.

This strategy might have been successful, were it not for the stark contrast between the event space and the harsh realities of life in contemporary South Africa. The BMG explicitly and continuously affirms its apolitical character as a strategy of uniting competing factions amongst its members and, after 1994, as a survival strategy within a political context inimical to white minorities. Yet, the very negation of the contemporary political reality sets up these spaces as otherworldly – especially considering the fact that Afrikaners habitually engage in political talk, almost as a leisure activity, and that Afrikaans media are awash with political discourse. Enjoying oneself in the sole company of other whites is one of the privileges afforded by the entrance ticket. Black presence is always

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<sup>68</sup> Boeremusiekgilde, *Boeremusiekgilde: 15 goue jare 1989-2004*, 122.

<sup>69</sup> New International Version, 2010, [www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes%203&version=NIV](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes%203&version=NIV)

at the periphery, as in the Esterhuyze cartoon: selling goods, cleaning up.<sup>70</sup> The freedom for children to run around without an anxious parent on the lookout for danger is turned into a commodity. One can buy the hospitality of a freshly baked pancake, *kerrie en rys*, *vetkoek*, *spookasem* and pretend that the gathering has come about spontaneously. The event, however, is about more than mere political escapism. The fact that politics are kept outside of these events creates a simulation of a lost set of social relations, a performance of colonial nostalgia. It suggests a time before South African democracy, and even before apartheid, when whiteness in South Africa seemed “natural” and without anxiety; when patterns of oppression were so ingrained in the fabric of a society that it went unnoticed, deserved no comment, and entertained the fiction of innocence. This is the dilemma of postcolonial whiteness in South Africa: that it has become impossible to locate retrospectively such spaces of innocence.

The obvious dislocation of real life and performance space, a result of the knowledge that the reality of the event is in very distinct ways a prepared one, triggers a desire for authenticity, a desire to come close again to the nostalgic reconstructions of the past. “The desire for authenticity”, as Janelle Wilson has noted, “stems from a process of fragmentation and a feeling of distance or loss. We seek the authentic because we want to regain something lost; we wish to make our own existence more credible”.<sup>71</sup> Ironically, the nostalgic discursive move of casting boeremusiek as forever vanishing, a move that creates the conditions for the perception of the contemporary boeremusiek as unreal in the first place, becomes a necessary stratagem for maintaining the credibility of the contemporary. In the face of a loss of authenticity a process is set in motion that Baudrillard calls the “the panic-stricken production of the real”. A second strategy of salvage, rather ironically, therefore involves a reinjection of the pleasures of the folk into discourses of duty. In his history of the first five years of the Boeremusiekgilde, I.L. Ferreira, for example, states that when it comes to the advancement of boeremusiek, it is not merely a matter of longing for sensuous pleasure, but about advancing the *volkseie* (perhaps best translated as “national character of the *volk*”).<sup>72</sup> The organisation’s concern with youth development should be understood in this context. Preserving

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<sup>70</sup> I do not mean to suggest any sinister motivations behind this phenomenon – merely that, as a predominantly white folk music, these events by implication celebrate whiteness. That I should feel the need to explain myself on this point is again an indication of the difficulty in being “innocently” white in a still racially stratified South Africa today.

<sup>71</sup> Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Massachusetts: Rosemont, 2005), 58.

<sup>72</sup> “Want dit gaan by die bevordering van Boeremusiek nie bloot om die sug na singenot nie, maar om die bevordering van die volkseie.”

the folk nature of boeremusiek practices by actively participating in pleasure, becomes a moral imperative in a cultural nationalist project.

An example of this process can be found in a rhetorical question I have often heard from the stage at boeremusiek events: “Who said boeremusiek can’t be fun?!” when, at least as far as the participants are concerned, no-one had suggested it in the first place. This question achieves several things at once. Firstly, it subjunctivises the reality of the participants who had, in fact, been having fun. Secondly, it is an example of how pleasure is reinjected into a revised discourse of duty. Far from a casual enquiry, it creates crisis: you are obliged to have fun for the greater cause of preserving boeremusiek. Finally, having created the conditions for experiencing a loss of authenticity, the future of the genre is depicted as balancing precariously on the existence of the organisation; it starts depending on this discourse of crisis for its continued existence. Pronouncing the death of fun therefore serves, simultaneously, in creating a simulated reality and in portraying the ideals of the organisation as the primary means of overcoming the resulting lack of authenticity. What initially served as representations of pleasure is overturned by discourses of duty into commemorations of pleasure.

## Conclusions

Since the earliest public considerations of the genre, boeremusiek has been forever vanishing. Suppressed by the Afrikaner establishment as an undesirable form of white popular culture, boeremusiek and public institutions have attempted to recover the stigma associated with the genre by trying to align it with Afrikaner nationalist discourses. Nonetheless the ambivalence of the genre remained, celebrating the materiality of the body despite Calvinist preferences for ideality and racial hybridity despite a political ideology of separate development. Rather than challenging the status quo openly, boeremusiek has been practised in the virtual zone of subjunctivity. By constructing the pleasures of boeremusiek as a simulatory performance of an extinct social or musical practice, it became possible to enjoy the music within a system opposed to it. Contemporary boeremusiek events are embedded with discourses relating to these historical antecedents. Yet the subjunctivising of contemporary boeremusiek can also be understood from the perspective of the present. In an unfortunate turn of events, the genre, despite its

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Ferreira, *Die Boeremusiekgilde se vyf goue jare 1989-1994*, 6.

complex relationship with Afrikaner nationalism, is today considered to be in clear alignment with South Africa's history of white oppression. If a certain measure of white redemption were possible in a musical sphere negligent of an unjust ideology, this is no longer the case. It has become impossible in the current political climate to play innocently at the historical social and political reality of the *boeredans*.

The contemporary boeremusiek event mourns the end of Afrikaner innocence. It is a simulation of a utopian historical, social and political reality and, by the same token, a monument to what has been lost: musically, politically, socially, and above all, personally. It mourns the loss of spaces of white innocence in the intimate settings of the household, the loving nature of intergenerational relationships, a mother putting her child to bed with the reassuring sounds of boeremusiek, the uninhibited movement of the body in dance. The concertina carries with it all the pain of a personal cultural heritage fundamentally tainted by political transgression. It points to the initial success and inevitable demise of whiteness in Africa. It speaks of vulnerability, of frustration at unrealised potential, of work that has been in vain. It carries the burden of history, the attempts of people trying to live authentically despite this burden, the becoming unwanted on a continent one has called one's home. The concertina echoes the melancholy of the loss of power, of a way of life, of innocence, of freedom – a nostalgia that cannot hide one's own cultural complicity in this sorry state of affairs. Boeremusiek cannot exist in contemporary South Africa: it can only exist in the subjunctive.

## Boeremusiek Basics

In Afrikaans the concertina is sometimes called a *donkielong* – a donkey’s lung.

Not only does the term point to the braying sound of the instrument, but also to its mechanisms of respiration. The metaphor denoting the instrument’s bellows as breathing in and out is too alluring to resist. The concertina sounds as if it is barely clinging on to life. Out of breath, phrases end off belabouredly before the next loud inhalation – gasping, wheezing, asthmatic. The connection between the emotions and the respiratory system holds no subtle poetry. A voice sighs in a rapid exhalation of breath or quivers (*bewe*) with emotion, as a concertinist would shake his instrument on held notes to effect a “vibrato” of sorts.

Boeremusiek relies on stock representations as triggers of shared sentimentality. It is a celebration of the Afrikaner familiar, a mournful recovery of the everyday on a *boereplaas* (boer farm):

Soepvlees-polka (“Soup-meat Polka”), Lekker Kafferbier (“Tasty Kaffir Beer”), Pinana Booi (“Banana Boy”), Kamiesberg settees (“Kamies Mountain Settees”), Jou Flerrie (“You Flirt”), Eensaam wals (“Lonely Waltz”), Dik Dawid settees (“Fat David Settees”), Die Soebat wals (“The Pleading Waltz”), Lentebloeisels (“Spring Blossoms”), Pannekoek wals (“Pancake Waltz”), Ou Willie se vastrap (“Old William’s Vastrap”), Rietspruit Galope (“Reed Stream Gallop”), Die Blomkool polka (“The Cauliflower Polka”), Die Skelmvy-wals (“The Slap-and-tickle Waltz”), Vaalhoed (“Faded Hat”), Eensaamheid (“Loneliness”).<sup>1</sup>

The sentimental Afrikaner everyday of these titles represents a topography of memory: in Stephanus Muller’s words, “an Afrikaner topography far removed from the triumphalism of Afrikaner monuments, statues, theatre complexes and sport stadiums”.<sup>2</sup>

Boeremusiek “makes the feet itch”, so one repeatedly reads of the music’s ability to bring the body into movement. The structure of the boeremusiek standard shuns notions of musical coherence in favour of the requirements of dance. A boeremusiek number is identified as a *mazurka*, *galop*, *wals*, *polka*, *settees* or *vastrap* solely on account of its rhythm and not its structural features. The two themes of a standard are known as *draaie*

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<sup>1</sup> Muller, “Boeremusiek.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

(turns), suggesting different steps or different dance directions at each occurrence of A and B. Although both themes usually have a strict 8-bar periodicity and follow predictable primary chord progressions, the order in which they occur after the first statement, and the number of subsequent repetitions, vary widely. Following the lead of the concertinist, structural decisions are taken by gauging the mood of the audience. An important aesthetic category is derived from this interaction: whether the music *stamp*. *Stamp* (thumps) is a term that is intuitively understood by dancers as a band's ability to inspire their audience to take to the dance floor.<sup>3</sup> One of the criteria by which bands are judged, the Boeremusiekgilde defines the term as “*slaghout/saamvoel met ander*” (keeping the beat/feeling with others). A steady, pulsating, slightly hypnotic bass beat supported by rhythmic tightness is the desirable outcome.<sup>4</sup>

On the structural level of the theme, exceptions sometimes unwittingly occur. “Stealing” or “scaling” arises when beats are added to or subtracted from the 8-bar norm, as in Hans la Grange's recording of the *Wonderboomvastrap* (Tree of Wonder, or Miracle Tree *vastrap*):<sup>5</sup>

## Wonderboomvastrap



Figure 5: Transcription of Hans la Grange's rendition of the *Wonderboomvastrap*

<sup>3</sup> Manie Bodenstein and Cora Bodenstein, interview by W Froneman, August 19, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Hans la Grange, *Konsertina meesters: Hans la Grange* (Gallo CDTGE 100, 2003); Bodenstein and Bodenstein, interview.

Strangely absent from the semiology of boeremusiek are musical meanings associated with modality. Only in exceptional moments of musical experiment is the minor key employed. Within the margins of the major key, the repertoire of the standard is expressive of a largely differentiated register of melancholy. From a mere touch of sadness to heart-wrenching wailing, the prevailing aesthetic is one of “tears of joy”. Even the most energetic *vastrap* will feature plunging melodic contours and chromatic lamenting bass figures in abundance.

Should the concertinist deem a number to become too tedious, he/she will initiate a contrasting middle section, known as “minors” – a short and sudden eight or sixteen-bar modulation to the dominant key. Minors – pointing to insignificance rather than mode – is characterised by concertina tremolo figures of an octave or a major sixth. The onomatopoeic term *sakkie-sakkie*, as well as *skommel* (sway) and *wikkel* (jiggle) are used to describe this action. Minors are sometimes used to foreground the quasi improvisations of other instruments in the band, usually the banjo. It has been suggested that minors traditionally functioned as a signal for dancers to twirl around enthusiastically. Always a possibility out of the harmonic dreariness of the boeremusiek standard, minors ironically offers a new mood of excitement in the form of harmonic stasis.





# Chapter 2

## Boeremusiek as Blackface:

### Historical Perspectives on the Creole in Boeremusiek

#### Introduction: White Justifications for the Creole History of Boeremusiek

The music video of Afrikaans pop singer Dewald Dippenaar's hit song "Wys jou muis" (Show off your mouse) is set in an urban working-class gentlemen's club of the pre-war era.<sup>1</sup> The patrons – drinking, gambling, and smoking – are vying for the attention of a well-cleavaged, blonde waitress. Under encouragement to "show her mouse", an actual white mouse makes its appearance in a thinly veiled sexual allusion. The video opens with a few coins being dropped into a hat, after which the band comes to life and the music starts. The three-piece *boere-orkes* – consisting of concertina, guitar and drums – is dressed in so-called coon costume. Two musicians evidently wear blackface, while the concertina player is really black. He is merely miming and not actually playing the concertina on the soundtrack. When I asked about his reasons for using the concertina in his songs, Dippenaar responded that the concertina's sound is one with which the "Afrikaner community can identify with" and that the concertina is as quintessentially part of the "Afrikaner *volk*" as "*boerewors* and *koeksisters*".<sup>2</sup> The question of why he decided to portray the boeremusiek band in blackface was clearly a sensitive matter since he did not respond to enquiries asking for clarification or explanation of this decision.

In many respects this music video is representative of the ambiguous nature of boeremusiek. It raises two important paradoxes of the genre. First, the fact that boeremusiek functions today as an emblem of Afrikaner nationalism while it has always been closely associated with the Afrikaner working class and, second, that despite being a marker of white ethnicity, boeremusiek has an apparent creole history. What, then, are the historical conditions that enable the success of a music video, obviously directed at a white Afrikaans market, featuring a

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<sup>1</sup> Dewald Dippenaar, *Wys jou muis*, 2007, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYCuAJzNLGM&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYCuAJzNLGM&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>2</sup> Dewald Dippenaar, "Re: Konsertina", May 10, 2011.

blackface *boere-orke*s? More importantly, how is it possible for the concertina, as metonymy for boeremusiek, to remain emblematic of the “Afrikaner *volk*” despite its racial ambivalences?

These are questions that commentators on boeremusiek have grappled with for a long time. Anton Hartman offered the following explanation in 1955:

Don't our old country and people have their peculiarities! Many of these can be attributed to our history and the fact that different nations with different levels of development collided here. Take the word “*hotnotsvy*” [lit. Hottentot's fig] as example. The term is known only to a handful of whites in S.A. [South Africa]; to the rest of the world it is unknown, because it is only our circumstances that could give birth to this concept.

In the same way the word “*hotnotsmusiek*” [Hottentot's music] originated amongst us. The term referred to almost every form of indigenous folk music. And the reason? It was discovered in the early days of white existence in S.A. that some slaves and Coloureds had an innate talent for music and soon the white man's music at dance parties was performed by these people. The white man left it to them, just like he left certain forms of labour to them and eventually people referred to the music as “*hotnotsmusiek*”. ... The music was performed by people of colour for such a long time and on such a large scale that they too put their stamp on it. But in its essence it was Afrikaans folk music and as the walls of prejudice broke down, it resounded from our cities, towns and far-flung plains.<sup>3</sup>

Hartman portrayed the outsourcing of “the white man's music” to slaves as nothing more than one of those little quirks of the Afrikaner people; an unfortunate but amusing accident of history that temporarily alienated white people from their true folk music. This mishap, which remains historically vague, was in itself not sufficient reason to doubt the “natural and obvious” feel “*boeremense*” (boer people) had for the music, in this reading.

The interstice of white and so-called “coloured” culture is also one of the main themes of Wilhelm Schultz's *Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van boeremusiek* (The genesis and development of boeremusiek), the only attempt at

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<sup>3</sup> “Ons ou land en mense het darem maar eienaardighede! Baie van hulle ontstaan uit ons geskiedenis en die feit dat verskillende nasies met verskillende ontwikkelingspeile hier gebots het. Van nou maar die woord ‘hotnotsvy’. Dit is maar net ons handjievul blankes in S.A. wat hierdie begrip ken; die res van die wêreld nie, want dit is net hier by ons wat omstandighede geboorte aan so 'n begrip gegee het. Net so het daar by ons die begrip ‘hotnotsmusiek’ ontstaan. Die woord is gebruik om feitlik alle soorte inheemse volksmusiek aan te dui. En die rede? Sommer vroeg in die bestaan van die blanke samelewing in S.A. is ontdek dat sommige slawe en Kleurlinge 'n gebore aanleg vir musiek het en gou-gou was hulle die mense wat die blanke se musiek op danspartytjies gespeel het. Die blanke het dit maar aan hulle oorgelaat, net soos hy sekere soorte werk aan hulle oorgelaat het, en mettertyd is daar gepraat van ‘hotnotsmusiek’ ... Die musiek is vir so lank en op so 'n groot skaal deur gekleurdes beoefen, dat hulle ook hulle stempel daarop afgedruk het. Maar dit was tog in die kern Afrikaanse volksmusiek en toe die walle van vooroordeel eers gebreek is, het dit onkeerbaar uit ons stede en dorpe en ver verlate vlaktes opgeklink.” Hartman, “Waarheen boeremusiek?”.

a comprehensive history of boeremusiek.<sup>4</sup> Schultz, affiliated with the TBK, conceptualises the development of the genre in terms of the development of the Afrikaner – the “Boer” as he refers to this collective. His history is, in this sense, as much a mythology of the Boer as it is of boeremusiek.

In his second chapter, *Musiek en dans aan die Kaap tot 1806* (Music and dance in the Cape up to 1806), Schultz comes to the conclusion that this period in history was important for the development of boeremusiek for three reasons: it highlighted the musical abilities of the Cape Malay slaves, the ordered existence of the *plattelanders* (white rural inhabitants) and the young people’s apparent love for dancing.<sup>5</sup> Schultz is surprisingly forthcoming with information on the influence of Malay slaves on the musical life of the Cape Colony: “The Malay slaves were evidently keen musicians because one reads again and again that they performed for well-off Cape colonists at different occasions.” Despite their inability to “read notes” and the fact that they “ostensibly played only by ear”, the slave musicians “nevertheless became invaluable for the performance of light music for entertainment and on the dance floor”.<sup>6</sup>

Later in his book Schultz paraphrases Augusta de Mist, who reportedly said that the group she travelled with was “amazed when they noticed how talented the slaves were, since ‘nature’ was their only teacher; they were ignorant about the rules of music”.<sup>7</sup> He even includes a description of a New Year’s party, written by Lady Duff Gordon on 3 January 1862, which clearly indicates that, on that occasion at least, slave musicians were far more competent at playing the concertina than their Afrikaner counterparts:

Problems were experienced in order to find musicians for the ball. An Afrikaner played the concertina, but, as is evident from Lady Gordon’s comments, he hadn’t yet perfected the technique. The problem was solved on the arrival of two Malays. One took the concertina, which he played “masterly”. The other used his tambourine as a drum. They played a large variety of tunes, all by ear.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Schultz, *Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van Boeremusiek*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> “Die Maleier-slawe was klaarblyklik geesdriftige musikante want ’n mens lees telkens dat hulle opgetree het by welgestelde Kapenaars om musiek te maak by verskillende geleenthede”. *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> “Sy vertel dat dat die reisgroep verbaas was toe hulle opmerk hoe talentvol die slawe was, aangesien die ‘natuur’ hulle enigste leermeester was; hulle het self geen benul gehad van die reëls van musiek nie.” *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> “Probleme was [sic] ondervind om musikante te kry om musiek te maak vir die bal. ’n Afrikaner het op ’n konsertina gespeel maar hy het die tegniek klaarblyklik nog nie baasgeraak nie, soos blyk uit Lady Gordon se kommentaar. Die probleem was [sic] opgelos toe twee

Schultz solves the paradox of boeremusiek's creole origins as emblem of Afrikanerdom by creating a dichotomy between a cosmopolitan metro-culture that featured racial intermixing, faltering morals and scantily clad ladies on the one hand, and an emerging rural Afrikaner culture demonstrating racial segregation, sustained morals and general propriety on the other. Boeremusiek is, of course, attributed to the latter. According to Schultz the interracialism of the Cape Colony – at least as far as it concerned music-making – was far removed from the musical life on the *platteland* after the Great Trek. There the musical entertainment was provided by one or two musicians – “their own people” – whilst the music in Cape Town and some of the larger towns was provided by a military or slave orchestra.<sup>9</sup> The reason for this phenomenon – so one reads between the lines – was that the “colonists who were born in the country gradually developed a strong racial prejudice, whereby an unbridgeable divide between white and non-white was formed”.<sup>10</sup>

According to this logic, the influence of slaves and Cape coloureds on boeremusiek could be discredited because real boeremusiek originated as part of an emerging rural Afrikaner community; that the impact of “non-whites” on the musical life of the Cape Colony is undeniable, yet that this tradition bears little relevance to boeremusiek because the genre is associated not with Cape colonists but with Boer settlers. Put differently, the reasoning behind Schultz's argument seems to be that the values of boeremusiek correspond to the values of rural Afrikanerdom and not to those of colonial Cape Town. The nature of these values is apparent from the comparison he draws between life on the rural periphery and the centre of the colony.

For this purpose, Schultz employs the travel writings of J.B.N. Theunissen, a Dutchman whose ship stranded near Port Elizabeth in 1823. Schultz paraphrases Theunissen's description of a typical rural dance party as follows:

The band consisted of only one or two players, who played only for the love of entertaining; they are not compensated for their services. The violin is the most important musical instrument. A dance floor is created by moving chairs, couches, etc. to the side. In one of the corners of the room stands a container of *wynmos* [fermented grape juice] and a few flasks of peach brandy. The room is lighted by two or three candles. The women arrive early during the afternoon

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Maleiers opgedaag het. Die een het die konsertina geneem, wat hy 'meesterlik' bespeel het. Die ander een het sy tamboer soos 'n drom gebruik. Hulle het 'n groot verskeidenheid wysies gespeel, alles op gehoor." Ibid., 46.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>10</sup> "Alhoewel daar gedurende die vroeë jare wel bloedvermenging aan die Kaap voorgekom het, het koloniste wat in die land gebore is geleidelik 'n sterk kleurvooroordeel ontwikkel, waardeur 'n onoorbrugbare kloof tussen blank en nie-blank gevorm is." Ibid., 18.

by oxwagon, and the men arrive on horse around sunset. The clothing of the older women sometimes resemble that of the city and sometimes that of the *platteland*, the clothing of the young ladies resemble the city – especially when it comes to cut. The image he paints of the young ladies is that they are dressed appropriately and are pleasing to the eye. The young men, too, are neat and well-dressed.<sup>11</sup>

Although Theunissen later refers to the minuet – not a boeremusiek dance form – this description underlines some of the social norms that are typically attributed to the *boeredans*: the non-commercial nature of Afrikaner music-making that sets it apart from slave orchestras, the “oor-en-weer groetery, en uitvraery oor mekaar en bekendes se welstand” (back and forth greetings and inquiries after each others’ health), the apparent indefatigable energy of the dancers who “go at it” till late into the night or early in the morning, the abundance of food and free availability of *perskebrandewyn* (peach brandy), always within the limits of “onskuldige vrolikheid” (innocent fun).<sup>12</sup>

In contrast with the rural dance practice, Schultz includes an account by M.D. Teenstra of a ball hosted by the Governor in the Company Gardens on 17 June 1825:

He doesn’t speak of the ladies with much regard; according to him they were dressed in little more than their birthday suits. He couldn’t get himself to imagine anything but a gathering of garlanded girls from the harem of an important sultan. Although he views the Capetonians as noble and likeable, he is astonished at the affluence and indolence that has taken root amongst them as a result of the multiple slaves that have to tend to them hand and foot.<sup>13</sup>

The differences between these two dance parties are obvious: a presumed slave orchestra versus an orchestra made up “of their own people”; music as commercial enterprise versus music as natural expression of the *volk*; sexual

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<sup>11</sup> “Die orkes het uit net een of twee spelers bestaan, wat net uit liefde vir die vermaak speel; hulle word nie vir hulle dienste vergoed nie. Die viool is die belangrikste musiekinstrument. Dansruimte word voorsien deur stoele, banke, ensovoorts, eenkant-toe te skuif. In een van die hoeke van die vertrek staan ’n houer met wynmos (gegiste druiwesap) en ’n aantal fesse perskebrandewyn. Die vertrek word met twee of drie kerse verlig. Die vrouens daag reeds vroeg op gedurende die middag per ossewa, en die mans daag teen die aand te perd op. Die kleding van die ouer dames is soms soos die van die stad en soms landelik, maar die van die jong dames, veral wat die snit van die klere betref, is soos die van die stad. Die beeld wat hy van die jong dames skets is dat hulle aanvaarbaar gekleed en aanvallig van voorkoms is. Ook die jongmans is netjies en goed gekleed.” Ibid., 20.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> “Van die dames praat hy nie met veel lof nie; volgens hom was hulle nie in veel meer as Eva se gewaad geklee nie. Hy kon hom nie anders voorstel as dat hy ’n menigte ‘bebloemde’ meisies uit die harem van ’n ‘grooten heer’ voor hom sien nie. Alhoewel hy die Kapenaars as edel en beminlik bevind (sic), is hy verbaas oor die weelde en luiheid wat daar onuitdelgbaar wortel geskiet het, as gevolg van die menigte slawe wat hulle tot in die geringste takies moes bedien.” Ibid., 21.

immorality versus sexual propriety; ostentatious wealth versus unpretentious hospitality; indolence versus a Calvinist work ethic. In short, Schultz's instructive comparison confirms what has become known as "Voortrekker values".

Although Schultz portrays the formation of bands consisting solely of Boers as a positive – and natural – moral development of the rural Afrikaans white, he also admits that these developments had a more practical origin. After the abolition of slavery and the subsequent decline in slave orchestras, "whites inevitably had to learn to make music themselves".<sup>14</sup> In this respect Schultz's narrative of origin, although more nuanced, mirrors that of the Boeremusiekgilde:

Boeremusiek is what it says. It is the interpretation of the music that was brought by the European to Africa and that the South African, in his isolation in remote districts and farms, kept up as part of his own culture. Especially the cattle-farmers, who ventured further from established civilization in the Cape of Good Hope, kept up in their own way the music of civilised Cape culture, in reality nothing but an extension of European civilization.<sup>15</sup>

In many respects this version of the origins of boeremusiek has become the dominant one, even outside of boeremusiek – and Afrikaner nationalist – discourse. It has been adopted by such eminent scholars of South African music as Carol Muller, for example, who defined the genre (as mentioned in the Introduction) as the

traditional music of the "farmers" or Afrikaans conservatives, mostly but not exclusively White, that derives from European folk/dance traditions – schottische, the waltz, the two-step – often tied to social dancing ...<sup>16</sup>

Carina Venter has recently shown how the myth of an exclusively European origin for boeremusiek in the rhetoric of Jan Bouws and Anton Hartman served as a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of a true Afrikaans folk music that would, in turn, inspire a national art music.<sup>17</sup> My contention in this chapter is that, contrary to the myth of European descent, the creole origins of boeremusiek played, and continue to play, an integral role in both the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>15</sup> "Boeremusiek is wat dit sê. Dit is die vertolking van dié musiek wat die Europiër (sic) uit Europa na Afrika gebring het en die Suid-Afrikaner in sy isolasie op verafgeleë grondgebiede, plase, as deel van sy kultuur voortgesit het. Veral die veeboere, wat verder van die gevestigde beskawing in Kaap die Goeie Hoop ... uitgewyk het, het op hulle eie manier die musiek uit die Kaapse beskawing, eintlik maar die Europese beskawing, voortgesit." Ferreira, *Die Boeremusiekgilde se vyf goue jare 1989-1994*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Muller, *Focus: Music of South Africa*, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Carina Venter, "The Influence of Early Apartheid Intellectualisation on Twentieth-Century Afrikaans Music Historiography" (M.Mus. Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2009), 74-75.

stock iconographic descriptions of the genre and the low regard in which it is held by the Afrikaner middle classes and elite. The creole origins of boeremusiek are located at the interface between genre hybridity and Afrikaner cultural symbolism. Contrary to both Hartman and Schultz, who portrayed it as peculiar and irrelevant respectively, I argue here that the creole history of the genre is one of its most crucial meaning-generating forces.

### Musical Exchanges Between Master and Servant

The contention that the phenomenon of “coloured” musical entertainment at white social dance parties was reserved to the Cape Colony and to the period before the formal abolition of the slave trade can be challenged in many ways. First, the image of the Dutch Boers trekking by themselves into the interior of the country to escape British rule is largely the product of Afrikaner nationalist historiography. Compelling arguments exist that the abolition of the slave trade, with its resulting challenge to the Afrikaners’ paternalist way of life, was one of the motivations behind the decision to trek, but also that some Voortrekkers, opposed to emancipation, took slaves with them across the border. Louis Tregardt, widely considered to be the “first Voortrekker”, serves as an example. According to Herman Giliomee he “became disaffected by the government’s refusal to grant him tenure of a farm in the neutral territory as he remained a slave-owner. Determined to ignore the emancipation proclamation, he took his ten slaves with him into the interior”.<sup>18</sup> Whether the Voortrekkers continued to treat the formally emancipated slaves as before, or whether they were afforded the status of apprentices, indentured slaves or servants is open to debate. Giliomee states that “Voortrekkers and trekboers were able to persuade many servants or ex-slaves to go with them”, but according to Bredekamp it remains unclear whether indentured slaves followed their masters out of free will or under duress.<sup>19</sup> What is clear is that the Voortrekkers did not trek alone and that, in all probability, servants who could not do their work by day because at night they were “playing the fiddle and having dancing parties” continued to be a “problem” even in the deep interior.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, 147-148.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 147; Henry C. Bredekamp, “Die slawe-vrystellingskwessie en die Groot Trek: ’n terugblik” (South African Society for History Teaching, Symposium: The Battle of Blood River, 16 Dec. 1836, 2006), <http://www.sashtw.org.za/Bredekamp%20%282%29.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, 147.

Karel Schoeman, in his history of Bloemfontein – a city in central South Africa and historical capital of the Boer republic of the Orange Free State – mentions that during the 1860s the “lively but utterly unsophisticated dances accompanied by a little Coloured orchestra – violin, concertina, harmonium, and guitar” was a common sight.<sup>21</sup> This band probably resembled Heinrich Egersdörfer’s sketch of a coloured orchestra c. 1885 (Figure 6).<sup>22</sup>

What is fascinating about accounts of the musical life of the Boers in the late nineteenth century is not so much the mere presence of people of colour, but suggestions of a shared musical culture. Another sketch by Heinrich Egersdörfer (Figure 7) illustrates an easy, if unequal, intimacy between master and servant, as a white child and a servant share a dance accompanied by a concertina played by a Boer.

A similar picture emerges from a 1900 account by Dudley Richard, a British traveller to South Africa, showing both the pre-eminence of the instrument amongst Afrikaners at the turn of the century, and what must have been a typical musical exchange between master and servant:



Figure 6: Heinrich Egersdörfer's sketch of a "coloured orchestra", c. 1885.

<sup>21</sup> Schoeman, *Bloemfontein, die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Egersdörfer was a German-born artist, illustrator and cartoonist who emigrated to South Africa in 1879. Later he and his partners founded the *South African Illustrated News*. His sketches document everyday life in the Cape Colony and were often used in local publications. Eric Rosenthal, *Heinrich Egersdörfer: An Old-Time Sketch Book/Heinrich Egersdörfer: 'n outydse sketsboek* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1960).



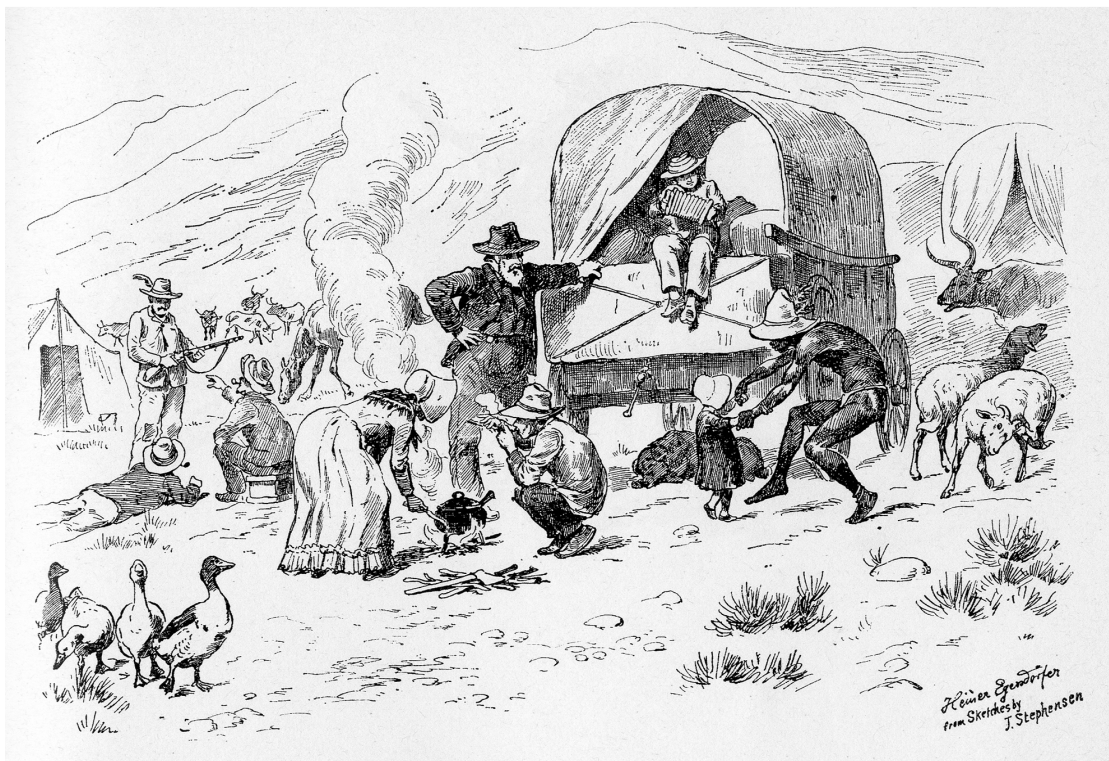


Figure 7: Sketch by Heinrich Egersdörfer, late nineteenth century.

Every Boer believes himself to be a born musician, but whence this idea remains a mystery ... and every Boer homestead possesses some musical instrument, as a rule a concertina, though in some cases the family has risen to the grandeur of a harmonium. The latter, however, is kept chiefly for ornament, and is used only on grand occasions, while the concertina is in use every day, and at all hours of the day. Now the concertina is all right in its way if the performer can play it, but when his only knowledge is that it “sings loud,” and his one object is to extract all the “song” he can, it is apt to pall the listener. When the Boer goes away on a transport journey he takes his concertina with him. From every waggon [sic] trekking slowly along the dusty road you will hear strains of this instrument breaking out on the quiet air, and if you give a backward glance, you will see the boss stretched out on his mattress in the tent of the waggon, pipe in mouth, grinding out some world-forgotten tune. When the waggon outspans, the owner will climb out, take his seat on the waterkeg and serenade the Kaffirs as they build the fire and prepare the coffee. When the night closes in, the transport rider will play himself to sleep. On the farm, too, the concertina is never idle, for the “boys”<sup>23</sup> take it with them, as they go out in the early morning to watch the cattle feed, and again in the evening, when they count the stock as they are driven in.<sup>24</sup>

The uncomfortable intermingling of intimacy and domination in the depiction above challenges the master-narrative of South Africa’s racial history on several accounts. The suggestion here is that the concertina was the communal property of the household. Read with Figure 7, this account describes a paternalist household as much as one divided along racial lines. In Figure 7 the servant is portrayed at the same level as the Afrikaner woman and

<sup>23</sup> “Boys” was the common term for male servants at the time.

<sup>24</sup> Dudley Richard, “The Musical Boer”, *Hampshire Telegraph and Naval Chronicle* (Portsmouth, England), July 14 1900, quoted by Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2:12-13.

child, engaged in household activities. The Afrikaner men, on the other hand, are lazing about. Within the bounds of paternalist domination, the servant is allowed certain liberties (as is the wife on occasion), like taking the concertina into the veld. Suggesting that the relationship between servant and master is exclusively one of dominance is, therefore, like implying that no intimacy between married couples is possible within a paternalist context. This relationship, rather, is one of ambivalent flickering between dominance and familiarity. This is the primary source of unease in Figure 7: the ambivalent relationship between the dancing servant and the child. One interpretation would be that the servant is merely minding the child, and therefore engaged in work as opposed to leisure. The question remains: was there any possibility of further intimacy between master and servant within the constraints of structural racism?

A colourful description of dancing at a (white) birthday party by Sophie Levisieur in her book “Ouma [Granny] looks back”, seems to suggest that there was:

The room was small. The floor was made of mis [dung]. The musicians were four yellow boys, with the musical instruments always used at dances in those days. Two Griquas played the violin and concertina, accompanied on a *fluitjie* [mouth organ] and a guitar by two Hottentots. As the dancing and music became fast and furious, the musicians swayed backwards and forwards, and from side to side. The dancers made no sound with their feet on the mud floor, the only sound heard above the music being a shout every now and then of “askoek” or “hiertjou” from an excited dancer. Occasionally a mournful wail was produced by the guitar of the small Hottentot player who, when the leader of the orchestra called “vee! vee!” [sweep, sweep] swept the backs of his nails along the strings of his instrument.

The music stopped with a sudden jerk. Players and dancers were equally exhausted and the whole party flocked out to the veld to partake of birthday cake and coffee.

Refreshed, the dancers went back into the voorhuis, which, in the meantime, had been sprinkled with water to settle the dust.

Amid much laughter and fun, Ouma Gouws and Tan’ Hannie announced that they would be the musicians for the next dance, Ouma armed with the concertina and Tan’ Hannie only with her voice. They both sang in high treble voices while Ouma played “Jan Pierewiet, Jan Pierewiet, staan stil.” The dancers twirled round and round and sideways, planting each foot in turn on the ground with a thump at the words, “staan stil”.

Presently the musicians came back and played “Die Bitter Bessie Bos”, the young people squatting on their heels round the room, clapping their hands, singing and laughing, while each couple took turns at dancing in the middle of the floor.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than a divide across racial lines, the impression is given here of a shared musical idiom: the exchange of the concertina between the Griqua and the Boer matriarch; the movement of bodies to the shared rhythm of the music; the possibility that master and servant enjoy refreshments together during a break. In contestation of claims that “coloured” musicians were merely in it for the money, these musicians seem fully engaged with the music, swaying “backwards and forwards, and from side to side”. But it is the fascinating mention of a “mournful wail” produced by the guitarist amidst “much laughter and fun” that points towards a different level of racial intimacy altogether.

### Experiences of Slavery as Antecedent to Boeremusiek

Descriptions of the sound of boeremusiek as mournful or melancholic, even though the music evidently accompanies dancing and having fun, have become a stock theme of boeremusiek discourse. Elsewhere I refer to it as the “tears of joy” trope.<sup>26</sup> This trope is usually understood as emanating from white experiences of heroic hardship – whether during the Great Trek or the struggle against British Imperialism. The fact that references to boeremusiek embodying mourning can be found as early as Levisieur’s description (which dates from 1924 but describes events 50 years earlier), implies alternative readings for this distinctive boeremusiek trope.

A sketch by Heinrich Egersdörfer (Figure 8) was re-published in 1960 with the following caption:

“Emancipation Day” now means nothing at the Cape, but in the 1880’s the liberation of the slaves only fifty years earlier was still celebrated. Outside the house of some dignified Malays in the Oriental quarter stands a group of Coloured people, who have brought along two “guys”, one male and one female, in whose honour they play on a variety of quaint instruments ...<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Sophie Levisieur, *Ouma Looks Back* (Port Elizabeth: Unie-Volkspers, 1944), 25.

<sup>26</sup> See Minors III for some examples of this trope.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal, *Heinrich Egersdörfer: An Old-Time Sketch Book*.

The “quaint” instruments include a violin, drum and, notably, a concertina. Denis-Constant Martin has pointed to the link that has existed between celebrations in the Cape of Guy Fawkes Day (5 November), Emancipation Day (1 December) and New Year (1-2 January) since the end of the nineteenth century – a connection that is evident in the caption above.<sup>28</sup> He argues that Guy Fawkes Day marked the beginning of a season of celebrations for the end of slavery that culminated in the Coon Carnival on New Year. Seen this way, the white “guys” in this etching, rather than alluding to the original “gunpowder plot”, allude to the end of (one cycle of) white oppression.

Such celebrations, centred on experiences of slavery, would have been occasions characterised by “tears of joy”, as accounts of the first celebration of Emancipation Day suggested:

On 1 December 1934, large numbers of men, women, boys and girls who until that day had been slaves “promenaded the streets” of Cape Town, “many of them attended by a band of amateur musicians”. They had paraded before, to celebrate the New Year, a day on which they had been “permitted to enjoy the day with their own friends; on which occasion they dress in all their best clothes”, and perhaps followed bands round the streets. On this day, though, matters were different – *joyous, not drunken, but tinged with sadness for those who had not lived to see their freedom, and whose tears, at least according to later tradition, caused it to rain, unseasonably, on Emancipation Day.*<sup>29</sup>



Figure 8: Heinrich Egersdörfer's “Emancipation Day”, late nineteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> Martin, *Coon Carnival*, 31-34.

<sup>29</sup> My emphasis. Robert Ross, *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750-1870: A Tragedy of Manners* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 146.

“Joyous, not drunken, but tinged with sadness” is a description that might easily be applied to boeremusiek. In terms of instrumentation the Egersdörfer etching shows clear similarities with “coloured” celebrations of emancipation. But there are also other indications that the music of slaves and their descendents in the Cape could have served as musical and emotional antecedents to boeremusiek. Vincent Colbe, in a description of the slaves’ limited leisure activities, noted that

[w]hen the slaves were brought here, there was an obvious element of melancholy among them. So on Sunday afternoons they’d go down to the beach to discord themselves – and beat on the goema drum. ... The mish-mash of “coon” dance steps has also been drawn from and influenced by slaves imitating dances of their British rulers – the lances, the squares, the quadrilles. The klopse *passies* is in itself a derivative and variant of the French “pas” as in “pas de deux”.<sup>30</sup>

What Kolbe describes above was the process of creolisation, which, according to Martin, “implied an exchange of cultural traits between members of the dominated groups, in particular among slaves, and the production of syncretic features which were then transmitted to the new generations”. This process also resulted from “a different type of interaction between masters and slaves, in which each became acculturated to the other”. For Martin creolisation means, on the one hand, that slaves could invent a world of their own distinct from that of their masters, but on the other, that the musical world of the slave “was never cut off from the dominant culture, but, on the contrary, kept interacting with it – influencing it and being influenced by it”.<sup>31</sup>

The musical intimacy between master and servant after the Great Trek implies a similar syncretism. In fact, it is hard to distinguish where the music of the servant ended and where that of the Boer began, with coloured bands routinely providing the entertainment at white parties, the concertina featuring in both traditions, the same instrument changing hands, similar musical abandonment at celebrations of New Year, and the fact that musical gestures, like the “mournful wail” of the guitarist in Levisieur’s description, could be translated from an experiential context of slavery to one of a *boere* birthday party. I am positing here that boeremusiek is imbued with the “tears of joy” associated with experiences of slavery.

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<sup>30</sup> Yazeed Fakier, “Renewed Interest in Goema Music in Cape”, *Cape Times*, December 17, 1988, based on an interview with Mr. Vincent Kolbe, in Denis-Constant Martin, ed., “Chronicles of the Kaapse Klopse”, 2007, 2, [http://132.204.113.176/upload/U7d3zo\\_DCM\\_Chronicles.pdf](http://132.204.113.176/upload/U7d3zo_DCM_Chronicles.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Martin, *Coon Carnival*, 53.

## Blackface Minstrelsy and White Afrikaans Culture

Apart from the intimacy of the household, experiences of slavery could also have crept into white Afrikaans culture through that most influential of nineteenth-century musical fads – the blackface minstrel show. The significant influence of blackface minstrelsy on musical life in Southern Africa has been explored by Carol Muller (gumboot dancing), Veit Erlmann and Dale Cockrell (*isicathamiya*), and Denis-Constant Martin (Cape Town Coon carnival).<sup>32</sup> Its influence on white Afrikaans culture, however, has thus far received little attention. A few remarks by Jan Bouws are the exception. In an article entitled “Minstrel, Too, Seem to Go On Forever”, Bouws writes that the minstrel hit “Jim Crow” was introduced in the Cape in the 1840s and that local groups known as “serenaders” staged minstrel-like shows since the late 1840s. The first group from overseas to call themselves “Christy minstrels”, however, only arrived in Southern Africa in 1862. According to Bouws the “songwriters were particularly productive during the American Civil War from 1861 until 1865”,

and although South Africa was far removed from the battlegrounds, songs like “Just Before the Battle, Mother”, “Ellie Rhee”, and “Old Folks at Home” stirred the heart. They were sung again and again, and then not only in Cape Town. All kinds of groups came to be formed by enthusiasts, some with rather odd kinds of names, like Roman Catholic Christies, that of the Psychological Association, the Afrikander Musicale.<sup>33</sup>

If minstrelsy could be the source of such popular Afrikaans folk songs (a related but distinct genre from boeremusiek) as *Sarie Marais* (a.k.a. “Ellie Rhee”) and *Wanneer kom ons troudag, Gertjie* (a.k.a. “Just before the battle, Mother”), and *Daar ver op ons plasie* (a.k.a. “Old folks at home”), it is entirely possible that blackface minstrelsy left its mark on boeremusiek too.

The earliest confirmation of this hypothesis is the 1862 diary entry by Lady Duff Gordon, mentioned in passing earlier, written the same year the Christy Minstrels arrived in Southern Africa. Gordon’s description of New Year celebrations merits further investigation and I therefore include it here at length:

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<sup>32</sup> Muller, *Focus: Music of South Africa*, 139; Veit Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 158-160; Dale Cockrell, “Of Gospel Hymns, Minstrel Shows, and Jubilee Singers: Toward Some Black South African Musics,” *American Music* 5, no. 4 (1987): 417-432; Martin, *Coon Carnival*.

<sup>33</sup> Jan Bouws, “Die minstrels skyn die ewige lewe te hê,” in *Solank daar musiek is...: musiek en musiekmakers in Suid-Afrika (1652-1982)* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1982), 80-82. Transl. by Gerald Stone.

We have had tremendous festivities here – a ball on New Year’s-eve, and another on the 1st of January – and the shooting for Prince Alfred’s rifle yesterday. The difficulty of music for the ball was solved by the arrival of two Malay bricklayers to build the new parsonage, and I heard with my own ears the proof of what I had been told as to their extraordinary musical gifts. When I went into the hall, a Dutchman was *screeching* a concertina hideously. Presently in walked a yellow Malay, with a blue cotton handkerchief on his head, and a half-breed of negro blood (very dark brown), with a red handkerchief, and holding a rough tambourine. The handsome yellow man took the concertina which seemed so discordant, and the touch of his dainty fingers transformed it to harmony. He played dances with a precision and feeling quite unequalled, except by Strauss’s band, and a variety which seemed endless. I asked him if he could read music, at which he laughed heartily, and said music came into the ears, not the eyes. He had picked it all up from the bands in Cape Town, or elsewhere.

It was a strange sight, – the picturesque group, and the contrast between the quiet manners of the true Malay and the grotesque fun of the half-negro. The latter made his tambourine do duty as a drum, nodded and grinned in wild excitement, and drank beer while his comrade took water. The dancing was uninteresting enough. The Dutchmen danced badly, and said not a word, but plodded on so as to get all the dancing they could for their money. I went to bed at half-past eleven, but the ball went on till four.

Next night there were genteeler company, and I did not go in, but lay in bed listening to the Malay’s playing. He had quite a fresh set of tunes, of which several were from the “Traviata”!<sup>34</sup>

The scene Gordon describes bears strong resemblances to the blackface minstrel shows that were so popular all over the world at the time. First there is the tambourine played like a drum. The tambourine was, according to Robert Winans, one of the “primary rhythm instruments” of early minstrel show music.<sup>35</sup> The minstrel tambourine “was larger than the common modern one and had fewer rattles”, which would suggest that “while the modern tambourine is more rattle than drum, the minstrel one was the reverse”. The contrast Gordon notes between the “quiet manners” of the Malay concertinist and the “grotesque fun” of the “half-breed” tambourine player may also point towards two of the stock characters of the nineteenth-century minstrel show: the “Interlocuter” and “Tambo”. The Interlocuter, usually in blackface, served as “bogus mouthpiece for the high culture” according to Alexander Saxton, and spoke “with a resonant voice, proper diction, and a rich vocabulary”.<sup>36</sup> The “endmen”, *Tambo* and

<sup>34</sup> Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from the Cape* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 80-81.

<sup>35</sup> Robert B. Winans, “Early Minstrel Show Music, 1843-1852,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 142.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 2003), 170; Michael Campbell, *Popular Music in America: And the Beat Goes on* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2008), 25.

*Bones* (so called after the instruments they played), “by costume and vernacular” were of a lower class “plantation nigger”.<sup>37</sup> The different coloured handkerchiefs worn by the “picturesque group” on their heads, confirm the suspicion that the musicians in Gordon’s description might have alluded to minstrel costume.

That the concertina – today the lead instrument in boeremusiek and occupying iconic status in white Afrikaans culture – is mentioned in the context of what is ostensibly a minstrel-inspired scene is particularly interesting. From Gordon’s description of “a Dutchman ... *screeching* a concertina hideously” one could infer that the instrument was a novelty in the region. It has been suggested that the banjo – another important boeremusiek instrument – was introduced in South Africa by travelling minstrel groups in the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> It is plausible that the concertina was introduced by a similar route – especially considering the speed with which the instrument became popular among all racial groups in South Africa. That the concertina formed part of blackface minstrel shows in South Africa is evident from various sources. Bouws refers to an 1874 concertina competition in Cape Town with the prize of a gold watch where a “duet was performed in the manner of the minstrels to the accompaniment of a banjo and ‘bones’”.<sup>39</sup> Dale Cockrell included the concertina in a list of instruments featured in a “typical minstrel show”, although he provided no references to support this claim.<sup>40</sup> The concertina also featured regularly in English and American minstrel groups in the nineteenth century, leading Worrall to believe that the concertina “found a ready place in Cape Town ‘Christy Minstrel’ knockoff bands”.<sup>41</sup>

The possibility of the concertina being closely associated with blackface minstrelsy in nineteenth-century South Africa provides the beginning to unravelling the mystery behind how a musical tradition with a pronounced creole history could have become an emblem of white Afrikaans ethnicity during the twentieth century.

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<sup>37</sup> Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 170.

<sup>38</sup> Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2:47.

<sup>39</sup> Bouws, “Die minstrele skyn die ewige lewe te hê,” 81-82.

<sup>40</sup> Cockrell, “Of Gospel Hymns, Minstrel Shows, and Jubilee Singers: Toward Some Black South African Musics,” 419.

<sup>41</sup> Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2:47.



## Blackface and White Consciousness in South Africa

The popularity of blackface minstrelsy among various population groups in Southern Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century has invited various interpretations. Erlmann, in his study of black South African performance (1991), contends that it was the “crude racist mockery” of white minstrel performers “acting the nigger” to which white settlers were drawn and that (white) working-class audiences found in minstrelsy a favoured form “of releasing racial hatred”. “Acting the nigger,” or acting out white fantasies about blacks, was ideally suited as a rationalization of the anxieties of white settlers in South Africa attempting to come to terms with the strength of precolonial social formations and independent African political power, according to Erlmann.<sup>42</sup>

Martin, on the other hand, has read this phenomenon as an extension of the creole culture at the Cape, emphasising that the initial contents of these shows were “mixed, anti-authoritarian, imbued with youth and working class rebellions”. Martin argues that:

against the anxiety of being distinct among the audiences, these shows managed to convey a fascination, a desire even, for those who were not identical. ... [N]ot only were whites thrilled by the minstrels. Africans were also fascinated by the performances. ... Coloured Capetonians were fascinated to the extent that the aesthetic of the New Year festivals was going to be deeply transformed by the infusion of minstrelsy.<sup>43</sup>

More persuasive, in my opinion, would be an interpretation of blackface minstrelsy as documenting the “dialectical flickering of racial insult and racial envy, moments of domination and moments of liberation, counterfeit and currency”, as Eric Lott has theorised the meaning of early blackface minstrelsy in American racial politics.<sup>44</sup> Such a dialectical flickering becomes particularly evident when the focus is shifted from black to white consciousness. The words of a *Natal Mercury* critic, writing in 1865, are a case in point here:

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<sup>42</sup> Erlmann, *African Stars*, 30-31.

<sup>43</sup> Martin, *Coon Carnival*, 79.

<sup>44</sup> Eric Lott, “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 6.

[The] coloring of the skin justifies a breadth of treatment in representing the grotesque, which would not otherwise be obtainable. What would seem silly and distorted in an actor of our race, loses its insane aspect when done by a mock ethiopian.<sup>45</sup>

While racial prejudice and stereotyping is hardly concealed in this statement, it also points to the limits of white expression; limits that could only be transgressed when donning blackface. Read this way, blackface minstrelsy is about freeing up a space, by means of black stereotyping, for “low” white cultural expression that would otherwise be impossible. Part and parcel of this operation is the notion of the “innate musicality” of the non-white.

Mention of the “innate musicality” of the non-white appears too frequently to be accidental or innocent.<sup>46</sup> Venter has unpacked some of the meanings of this recurring theme, as they featured in the writings of apartheid theorist Geoffrey Cronjé.<sup>47</sup> For Cronjé music functioned as a marker of the “spiritual apparatus” of a race:

The spiritual apparatus of a race also entails his temperamental, emotional and other spiritual properties. We know from experience that white and black races differ with respect to these spiritual properties. Thus we know, for example, that the Bantu has fine musical talent. However, we also know that his music is very different to that of the white man. Amongst others, it is strongly characterised by the repetitive rhythms that we, unlike the Bantu, find tedious. It is very probable that the native has a different musicality to the white man. In all probability this is similar to the way in which he has a different spiritual apparatus to the white man.<sup>48</sup>

The connection drawn here between innate musical aptitude and the “temperamental, emotional and other spiritual properties” of the so-called non-white has significant implications. The non-white relates to the world in a visceral way, as opposed to the rational engagement of the white; the non-white answers to nature, while the white answers to culture; the non-white is primitive, while the white is progressive. The fact that the non-white allows music to exert power over him to induce trance-like mental states is construed as a lack of civilization. Civilization, on the

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<sup>45</sup> *Natal Mercury*, October 7, 1865, quoted by Erlmann, *African Stars*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> The recurring theme of the innate musicality of the “non-white” is evident in many descriptions discussed in chapter 1.

<sup>47</sup> Venter, “The Influence of Early Apartheid Intellectualisation on Twentieth-Century Afrikaans Music Historiography,” 30.

<sup>48</sup> Transl. by Carina Venter. “Die geestelike toerusting van ’n ras omvat egter ook sy temperamentele, emosionele e.a. geestelike hoedanighede. Ons weet uit ervaring dat die wit en swart rasse t.o.v. hierdie geestelike hoedanighede verskil. So weet ons b.v. dat die Bantoe ’n goeie musikale aanleg het. Ons weet egter ook dat sy musiek baie anders is as dié van die witman. Dit is o.a. sterk gekenmerk deur herhalende ritme wat vir ons as ‘eentonig’ voorkom maar vir hom nie. Dit is baie waarskynlik dat die naturel ’n ander musikale aanleg as die witman het. Na alle waarskynlikheid het hy op dieselfde wyse ’n ander geestelike toerusting as die witman.” Geoffrey Cronjé, *’n Tuiste vir die nageslag: die blywende oplossing van Suid-Afrika se rassevraagstuk* (Johannesburg: Publicité, 1945), 18.

other hand, is identified as the ability to resist the natural inclination of the emotions and the body to be swept away. It is through the notion of “innate musicality” that the non-white becomes subhuman.

For Cronjé the biological determinism of musical aptitude extended to labour preferences too. Here one sees the intimate connection between race and class that has featured so often in South Africa’s past. The report of the Carnegie Commission on the “Poor white problem” in South Africa noted, for example, that the level of unemployment among whites could to a certain extent be ascribed to their reluctance to engage in “kaffir work” – demeaning forms of labour that had been routinely outsourced to “non-whites”.<sup>49</sup> Cronjé found a musical basis for this “natural” division of labour. “The native’s suitability”, he wrote, “is apparently particularly focussed in the area of the concretely empirical, in particular in the performance of the repetitive work through which he experiences, as it were, a kind of ‘monotonous’ rhythm that would have a tedious and even pacifying effect on the white man”.<sup>50</sup> This is what Cronje wanted to believe, anyway. From other accounts, “black” music-making had anything but a “tedious” and “pacifying” effect on white audiences.

The “negro” spiritual, a successor to blackface minstrel groups, evidently struck an emotional chord with Boer audiences, as Erlmann has noted. “It is wonderful”, wrote a member of the ultraconservative audience after a concert by the Jubilee singers at the Huguenot Seminary in Wellington, “to see our staid Dutch people go into ecstasies over them, and our servants who were allowed to go into the anteroom to listen to them were taken right off their feet.”<sup>51</sup> Erlmann also recounts the meeting between Orpheus McAdoo’s Jubilee Singers and Boer republic President Paul Kruger:

In February 1891 Transvaal President Paul Kruger not only set foot in a theater, probably for the first time in his life, but when the Jubilee Singers sang “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” it is reported, tears ran down “the rugged features of the President”.

Erlmann attributes the unusual emotional connection between Kruger and expressions of slavery to paternalism – an ideology of “superordination and subordination” that made the “lord and master ... vulnerable to the assertions of

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<sup>49</sup> Carnegie Commission, *Die armblanke vraagstuk in Suid-Afrika*, vol. 1 (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1932), 164-166.

<sup>50</sup> Transl. by Carina Venter. “Die naturel se geskiktheid is blykbaar veral in die rigting van die konkreeteanskoulike geleë en met name in die verrigting van die herhaalde arbeid waardeur hy as’t ware ’n soort ‘eentonige’ ritme beleef wat op die witman ’n vervelende en selfs sussende uitwerking het.” Cronjé, *’n Tuiste vir die nageslag*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Erlmann, *African Stars*, 39.

the slaves' humanity expressed in the 'sorrow songs'".<sup>52</sup> In my view these two episodes could equally convincingly illustrate a form of racial envy.

Local blackface minstrel groups were immensely popular with white audiences around the country during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Mention is made in the histories of several towns in South Africa of the practice of groups of white musicians performing music and making jokes in blackface.<sup>53</sup> A description of such a minstrel performance is found in a letter by Samuel Zwaartman (the pseudonym of H.W.A Cooper) to *Het Volksblad*, part of the series *Boerenbrieven uit Fraserburg*, written in 1870:

The other day there was a fun event in town, they call it a concert. The young ladies and a few married women played the piano and sang. ... Just as one had stopped singing, the guys in the audience made such a huge racket that it drove all the melodies out of one's head. They stamped their feet and clapped their hands something crazy. ... They say that the noise was made on purpose so that you don't give the music too much attention; it will only make you sad. Because in English they sang "aail waats voor die baaie de moonlit bouer" [I'll watch for thee by the moonlit bower], and similar songs of that kind ... But after the first act, a whole troupe of *Masbiekers* and a *meit* too, was brought on stage. They all kissed the *meit* and then everyone burst out in song. Neef Sagrijn told me that it was white people who had painted their faces black, and after a while I could make out that it was Brithen and Meerhaar and Neef Bruidegom en Gert Wewers en Jonnie Kom-miek en Klein Klij, and Chewie played the *meit*. They played and sung well and everything went jolly. Gert played on his violin, and Chewie did a good job at swaying her skirt and everyone was happy. I will surely go listen to them again if they put up another concert.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>53</sup> A.W. Wegelin, *Die musieklewe in Potchefstroom 1838-1925* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1965), 45-46; H.D. Voorendyk, "Die musiekgeskiedenis van Wes-Transvaal (1838-1960)" (M.Mus. Thesis, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1971), 21-22; Johannes Gerhardus Boje, "Winburg's War: An appraisal of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 as it was experienced by the people of a Free State District" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2010), 39, <http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-05092010-210157/>; Schoeman, *Bloemfontein, die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946*, 53.

<sup>54</sup> *Masbieker* is a racist term referring to a slave from Mozambique or, in general, any person with very dark skin. *Meit* refers to a coloured or black woman, usually a servant. "Daar was nou laas een mooi spulletje op de dorp in de kantor, hulle noem dit een konsert. De nooientjes en een paar getrouwde mijsiemense het gespeel op de klavier en dan gezing ook. Kerel! dat was al te mooi; ... Net soos één klaar het met sing, dan maak de kerels wat onder de gemeente zit zoo een lawaai, dat dit al de mooie muziek uit en mens zij kop slaat. Hulle stamp met de poote en klap met de hande, dat dit een naarheid is ... Hulle seh dat de lawaai aspres gemaak wort dat en mens nie te veel jou de muziek moet aantrek nie, dat dit altemet jou hart zal zeer maak; want op engels het hulle gezing "aail waats voor die baaie de moonlit bouer", en zulke ander psalms van die aart. ... Maar toe de eerste speul klaar was, toe het hulle een heele trop Masbiekers daar ingebrenge en een meit ook; toe zoen hulle almal ver die meit, en toe gaat hulle almaal aan sing. Toe seh Neef Sagrijn

Blackface emerges here not only as racial insult, but as racial envy. Blackface minstrelsy provided a socially sanctioned arena where whites could play at alternative – and fundamentally non-Western – associations with music. Adopting blackface was like becoming savage; allowing the instinctual over the rational; the demands of the body over that of the mind. Musical “ecstasies” and wild abandon, which usually remained off-limits in notions of white civilization, could be enacted when donning blackface. It is indisputable that blackface minstrelsy ingrained in whites a skewed image of blackness. At the same time it points to a white desire to transcend the restrictive boundaries imposed by centuries of Western musical aesthetics.

### (White) Musical Ecstasies

The few existing descriptions of *boeredanse* in rural Afrikaner societies portrayed such pleasures as carefully isolated from real life and relegated to clearly demarcated ritual events amidst the laborious life on a farm. Because of the impact of such events on a household’s resources and time, *boeredanse* usually accompanied rituals of passage like New Year, weddings and birthdays. A recurring theme in descriptions of the concertina, however, posits an intimate spiritual connection between the instrument and the South African landscape, evident in quiet moments of everyday life.

The rather negative account of the musical life of the Boer by Dudley Richard, discussed earlier, concludes with this fascinating exception to the rule:

The one time when the sound of the concertina pleases is *on a quiet, moonlight night as you sit on the stoep and the weird charm of the South African night holds you captive. I have then listened spellbound for hours*, but in the morning, when the young brother has taken his instrument, and started operations, I have walked away hastily lest I might strangle him.<sup>55</sup>

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ver mij ... dat dit wit mense was wat zwart gesmeer is, en toe nadrant kon ik uitmaak, dat dit Brithen en Meerhaar en Neef Bruidegom en Gert Wewers en Jonnie Kom-miek en Klein Klij was, en Chewie was meit geweest. Hulle het mooi gespeul en gezing ook, en dit het alles plezierig gegaan. Gert het ook mooi viool gespeul, en Chewie het goet die hoepelrok gezwaai en al maal was te vrede. Ik zal zeker weer gaan om te zien en te hoor als hulle weer konsert maak.” “Boerenbrieven uit Fraserburg no. 21” in Samuel Zwaartman, *Die Afrikaanse geskifte van Samuel Zwaartman*, ed. Gabriel Stefanus Nienaber (Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers, 1942), 52-53.

<sup>55</sup> My emphasis. Dudley Richard, “The Musical Boer”.

The similarities with other epiphanies about the sound of the concertina are striking. Consider Jo Fourie's account of the conditions under which her opinion of the instrument changed:

For a long time I found the screeching sound of the concertina unbearable, *until I heard it from a distance of half a mile one evening as I was sitting on the stoep in near darkness. And then I heard it. From that moment on my opinion about the thing changed and it is as if I relive that evening's sensation every time I hear it.* I think we should adopt it as our national instrument like the bagpipes of the Scots.<sup>56</sup>

In similar vein a South African-born woman identified as "Miss Russell" gave the following account of Boer customs in the mid-nineteenth century in an address to the American Geographical Society:

Until the last few years, it was customary for each Boer family annually to pack up such goods and chattel as were necessary to the trek, and with their wool, skin, butter and other produce to make a journey to Natal, their nearest market. I may mention here that the Boer's method of traveling is by wagon and ox-team, which no Boer is without; and he always takes his wife and children with him ... it means a six week's picnic campaign: we must lay in a store of provisions and such articles of household comfort as are necessary to life anywhere, and resign ourselves to camping life, or as we term it, avelat life. *To some natures this quiet, dreamy existence is full of charm; it is healthy and indolent.* ... Round the campfire of an evening scene is often most inspiring: busy hands preparing supper; merry jesting growing merrier as the fragrant odor reminds the hungry travelers that the meal is ready; *the loud talking of the natives, and the sad music of the concertina, adds to a picture a wild and weird charm which would draw forth the artist's fancy* ...

Though the Boers have simple habits and few wants, you must not imagine them to be poor. Many of them are very rich, possessing countless herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, and there are many of them whose wool brings them in a very good income. In their homes the Boers are very hospitable, never refusing to entertain a stranger ... They are very fond of music and dancing, and many of them play with much taste on the violin and concertina. This they acquire by ear: their dancing is chiefly confined to reels and at New Year, when they assemble in great numbers at different houses, *they keep up this dancing for two or three consecutive days, not even resting at night.*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> My emphasis. "Lank was die [konsertina] vir my stuitlik deur sy skreeuerige geluid tot ek een skemeraand dit op 'n halwe myl afstand hoor speel terwyl ek op die stoep gesit het, en toe hoor ek dit. Vanaf daardie oomblik het ek 'n ander opinie oor die ding gekry, dis of ek aldeur opnuut daardie aand se sensasie beleef as ek dit hoor. Vir my part kan ons dit maar aanneem as ons nasionale instrument soos die Skotte hul bagpipes." Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, "Lezing oor boeremusiek", c 1949, 3, Jo Fourie Collection, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>57</sup> My emphasis. Miss Russell, "The Republics of South Africa", *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*, December 22, 1876, 235-251, quoted by Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2:6.

A letter of 20 April 1955 to *Die Transvaler* makes similar claims in defence of boeremusiek:

I wonder whether any of the anti-boeremusiek clan has ever trekked at night, under the cover of darkness, through our far flung planes like Betsjoeanaland. *If one hears from afar the rhythm of the violin and accordion music – the boeremusiek – playing a vastrappie, only then does one feel that boeremusiek fits in perfectly in our landscape and in our volksaard.*<sup>58</sup>

Several themes emerge from these accounts. The first is the apparent seductive powers of the instrument: its ability to effect altered states of consciousness; its capacity to enrapture. The “wild and weird charm” of concertina music is evident in the behaviour of both dancers and musicians: the former typically could not bring themselves to stop dancing, for days on end, and the latter “swayed backwards and forwards, and from side to side” in a trancelike state.<sup>59</sup> The construction of different notions of “distance” in these accounts is striking.<sup>60</sup> All of them are set against the remote, rural landscapes of South Africa – places far away from the centres of white civilisation. Invariably it is precisely the remote setting that draws the attention to the charm of the concertina. Yet, within this rural remoteness, the sound of the concertina pleases only from a distance and when the listener is safely situated within the boundaries of the homestead or the laager. That the concertina should please at night is also noteworthy. The notion of darkness has special significance in colonial literature. “The dark continent” is not only a reference to race, but also to barbarity as, on the other hand, light signifies (white) civilisation. The distancing of the concertina, as if its irresistible powers were wilfully to be resisted, points towards attempts to separate the colonial world and that of the natives and, later, the white-world and that of the non-white.

At other times, however, the two worlds collided in a heady mixture of dust, blood, alcohol, sexual innuendo, repetitive movements and rhythms, cyclical patterns and sleep deprivation:

The dancing begins at 5 in the afternoon to the music of a concertina played by a “Cape boy,” which is to say a half colored man. Everyone appears in their ordinary dress, uncouth, untidy and slouchy in the extreme. The women

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<sup>58</sup> My emphasis. “Ek wonder of een van die anti-boeremusiekers wel eens by nag, in duisternis gehul, deur ons verlate vlaktes soos bv. Betsjoeanaland getrek het. As dan vanuit die verte die ritme van viool en trekorel-musiek – die boeremusiek, ’n vastrappie of so, gehoor word, dan eers voel jy dat die boeremusiek volkome in ons landskap, by ons volksaard, pas.” Letter to the editor, “Boeremusiek”, *Die Transvaler*, April 20, 1955, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Levisieur, *Ouma Looks Back*, 25.

<sup>60</sup> I am indebted to Carina Venter for this train of thought.

almost invariably wear black with, perhaps, a bit of colored ribbon. The men are in corduroys or cheap tweeds, often wearing their “smasher” hats and shod in heavy veldschoens, or boots.

No “square” dances are performed, but one dance is like another – a slow, jumpy, heavy, monotonous whirl, something between an elephantine waltz and a cumbersome polka. The girls sometimes place their two hands on their partner’s shoulders and the men clasp the girls’ waists with their two hands.

After a few hours of serious jumping about, the room has to be cleared, for, the floor being of earth, a terrible dust is knocked up and, as the doors and windows are invariably closed, the atmosphere becomes thick with floating clouds of dust. Everyone goes out onto the stoep and is refreshed by dop (Boer brandy), lemonade, cookies (cakes) and sweets. In the meantime the room is swept and sometimes a calabash of bullock’s blood is brought in with which the floor is smeared by the natives. From time to time – say, every two or three hours – this is repeated, so that intervals of dancing, dusty cloudiness, refreshments on the verandah and smearing of the floor succeed one another periodically.

This sort of thing goes on until about 8 in the morning, when everyone gets a bit sleepy. A general adjournment takes place. The women collect in the side room and snatch a few hours’ sleep and the men lie down in the wagon house, or under their carts on the veldt, to smoke and rest. At about noon, after a hearty meal, they begin dancing again until late in the afternoon. At last they go home after about four and twenty hours of it and scatter over the veldt to their far distant homes.<sup>61</sup>

The style of dancing described above, often referred to as *vastrap* (fasten/stamp) has been the subject of a hot debate within boeremusiek circles, resulting in several competing origin myths of the dance form. The one pole of this debate emphatically insists that the *vastrap* bears no relation to the *riel* (also spelt “reel” or “riël”), a form of dancing closely associated with the Khoi people of South Africa and their descendents. Instead the origin of the dance is said to refer to the stamping down of a newly constructed dung floor. According to Wilhelm Schultz “many of the old farm houses were not fitted with wooden floors on account of the cost”:

When the farmer had completed his building, which could also be a barn, the floor had to be made from clay. For this purpose, generous use is made of “ant heaps” (actually the mounds built by termites over many years). The top portion of the ant heaps are collected (which usually contain the living termites), which are mixed in with the clay, to form a tough mortar, which is used for the filling of the hollow space under the floor. Because the mortar is still very spongy, it has to be consolidated as much as possible. The farmer would then arrange a festivity, and call up all his neighbours for the *vastrap*. You can imagine all the tramping going on, until the floor is properly consolidated. In the

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<sup>61</sup> “Boers great dancers” *Omaha Daily Bee* (Nebraska), 14 December 1899, 4, quoted by Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2:10-11.



meantime, all the festivities have been proceeding very well! ... They are then allowed to dry properly, which may take a few days. When the floors are dry, they are smeared with cow dung.<sup>62</sup>

Here the *vastrap* serves to consolidate certain key features of the mythical Boer as much as it does the floor. The *vastrap* here becomes a marker of civilization, a key process in transforming wild Africa into a habitable abode. It cements the characteristics of the Boer as poor but noble, successful but unpretentious. The transformation of ant heaps into flooring confirms the pragmatic nature of the Boer, evident in the idiom *'n boer maak 'n plan* (a boer finds a solution). The willingness to help out one's neighbour and the generous hospitality of the Boer are framed in terms of work, rather than leisure.

This description cannot be further removed from the late Alex van Heerden's version of the origins of *vastrap* – perhaps equally influenced by ideology, but this time from the perspective of multiracial twenty-first century South Africa.<sup>63</sup> Van Heerden saw *vastrap* as having “the same roots as the Afrikaans language, arising from the meeting between Dutch, other European settlers, African and Eastern slaves with the indigenous Khoesan people of South Africa”. Van Heerden drew a distinction between *vastrap* as it is practiced closer to large towns where, although “European influence on *vastrap* is more apparent ... the rhythm is still distinctly non-Western”.<sup>64</sup> “Often a dance will begin with more sedate waltzes and popular songs, but as the evening wears on,” he continues, “the *vastrap* becomes more prominent, and the veneer of ‘Western civilization’ can wear very thin indeed as the party goes on until the sun comes up!” On farms in the Great Karoo, however, the *vastrap* resembles more closely the “shamanic trance-dances of the San/Bushmen”:

with single dancers employing intricate foot movements to the pulse of the guitar-driven *vastrap* beat. ... The instruments, (mostly guitars and homemade violins) are often tuned to mimic the natural harmonics of traditional instruments such as the mouthbow, and thus sound slightly out of tune to the “equal-temperament” western ear. The *vastrap* songs here are repetitive motives, the lyrics often being no more than one line repeated over and over, in a mantra-like fashion.

The *vastrap* best Van Heerden refers to usually manifests as the following rhythm:

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted by Ibid., 2:11.

<sup>63</sup> Alex van Heerden, “*Vastrap*”, November 10, 2007, [www.frontierrogue.com/vastrap](http://www.frontierrogue.com/vastrap).

<sup>64</sup> The intersects between *vastrap*, *kwela* and boeremusiek are also noted by Lara Allen, “*Kwela's White Audiences: The Politics of Pleasure and Identification in the Early Apartheid Period*,” in *Composing Apartheid*, ed. Grant Olwage (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008).

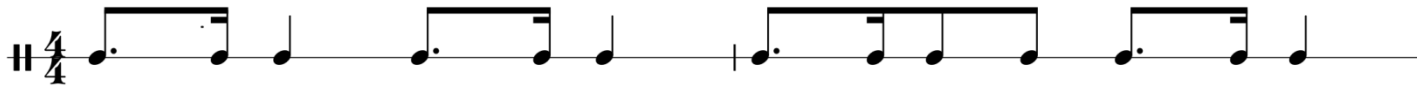


Figure 9: A typical *vastrap* rhythm in boeremusiek.

Van Heerden contends that the modern development of *vastrap* was “stunted by the fragmentation of Afrikaans culture, brought about by colonialist ideals and apartheid”:

Afrikaner nationalists saw it as a threat to their fragile European identity, a threat to their position of power within the master/slave relationships so common in South Africa. After their defeat in the Anglo-Boer war, power and “European descent” became very important to the Afrikaner, and *vastrap*, with its association with abandonment, ecstasy, sexuality and African “lack of respectability”, slowly became a marginalized music. Ordinary people, however, did not lose their love for it, and it stayed alive in “langarm” dance bands all over the Cape, in “boeiorkeste”... across rural Southern Africa, in “klopse” carnival groups in the townships of Cape Town, in the countryside churches and farm-labourers’ cottages of the Karoo.

The shared history of boeremusiek and the music of the Khoi, alluded to here, is evident in another account, by Lennox van Onselen, of the dances of the last generation of nomadic *trekboers* (Dutch herders) in the Northern Cape:

“We’re warming up the band”, he said in a high-pitched voice. I now saw that the orchestra had arrived and were being attuned with “barbed wire” [a potent homemade brew] to the right pitch of revelry.

The three-piece ensemble consisted of coloured men of the usual Hottentot-Bushman admixture. ... They sat on their haunches and held their instruments before them with great dignity. The instruments were a ramkie [a two-stringed Khoi lute], a guitar, and a battered concertina. Everybody now crowded into the room. The small room strained at the seams. ...

I do not know what I had expected. Certainly not the hellish cacophony of sound; *the unearthly screeching and wailing that shattered my composure and made me quiver like a leaf in a high wind* ... The ramkie has a musical range of only two notes ... his initial plink-plink whets the appetite but it is the variations on the theme of plink-plink-plank-plank *that sets the audience back on their heels and unleashes the animal in them*. In conjunction with a guitar that

should have been strangled whilst it was still a banjo, a concertina that sounded like asthma on the low notes and a scalded cat on the high ones, *the result was what we sinners deserve but are often spared by divine intervention*.<sup>65</sup>

The “wild and weird” charm of the concertina is portrayed in these descriptions in terms of racialised musical experiences of ecstasy. It is precisely the ability of the music to trump reason – to “unleash the animal” in white participants – that made it so engrossing despite often being at odds with the “Western ear”. I am arguing that listening to or playing the concertina, dancing the *vastrap*, engaging with boeremusiek in terms of the modes of expression it enables, is similar to donning blackface. In this respect boeremusiek’s uneasy relationship with Afrikaner nationalism takes on a different meaning. It is through the opportunities afforded by boeremusiek to “act the nigger” that the stigma of the genre as belonging to a lower class Afrikaner took shape. Music functioned as a marker of both race and class in the same way as did certain forms of labour. At the same time, the strong emotional and physical pull of the music, emanating naturally, as it were, from the South African landscape, led to a deep association with the music, which in the nationalist vocabulary of twentieth-century white South Africa, gave expression to the soul of the *volk*.

## Conclusions

While serving a marked role in nationalist discourse, historical accounts of boeremusiek as an extension of European folk music fail to account for one of the central paradoxes inherent in and provoked by the genre: that boeremusiek is deeply associated with white Afrikaans culture, yet has been denigrated as belonging to the lower class from within in all its twentieth-century manifestations. This paradox, embarrassing as it might be to some, begins to make sense when a possible creole history for boeremusiek is taken into consideration. Not only does the connection between boeremusiek and musical experiences of slavery in the nineteenth century provide an alternative explanation for the “tears of joy” trope in boeremusiek discourse, but it situates boeremusiek within an historical orientation towards race that is clearly at odds with both the twentieth-century racial ideology of the

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<sup>65</sup> My emphasis. Lennox van Onselen, *Trekboer* (Cape Town: Howard Simmons, 1961), 62-65, quoted by Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2:49-50.

Afrikaner elite and the crude exaggeration of a monolithic Afrikaner culture of more recent South African historiography.

Part of the explanation of the strong historical association between the Afrikaner working class and boeremusiek has to be sought in the racial politics of twentieth-century South Africa. With blackface minstrelsy as important influence on boeremusiek in the late nineteenth century and the creole history of music-making that is evident into the early twentieth century, the modes of expression that boeremusiek enabled came to be typified in racial terms. Not only was the genre initially known as *hotnotsmusiek*, but the “weird and wonderful charm” of the music was a spiritual experience that was, consciously or subliminally, associated with being non-white. For white people to engage with the genre despite these racial associations to the extent that they did and continue to do, suggests that their connection with the music can be understood as a form of blackface. In some respects, then, the adoption of the concertina, the *vastrap* and aspects of the traditional *boeredans* as emblems of white ethnicity function as a metaphorical donning of blackface. Boeremusiek as blackface opens up the opportunity for spiritual and somatic connections with music that has not been considered accessible to white notions of “civilization”.

## The Riches of Embarrassment

At the end of 2009, a couple of months into this research project, two otherwise unrelated newspaper articles caught my attention. In the first, left-wing photojournalist Paul Alberts tells of the unanticipated and disturbing rapport between him and the late right-wing extremist leader Eugène Terre'Blanche (also known as ET). After doing a week-in-the-life-of photo essay of ET, Alberts confessed: "I differ fundamentally from the AWB – in terms of politics, religion, everything. But they are *my* people. It was a homecoming. I realised that in calling myself an Afrikaans-speaking South African, I was being dishonest with myself. I'm an Afrikaner, and that's that."<sup>1</sup>

In the second piece Deon Maas stands up for the right of his children to attend an Afrikaans university. According to Maas, the only problem with making this argument, is that by defending this right, he is associating himself with a group of people with whom he has nothing in common: "Guys who wear these cute two-tone khaki shirts" and listen to "Kurt [Darren], Steve [Hofmeyr] and Juanita [Du Plessis]". People who see Afrikaans as a (racist) "political statement" rather than as a "medium of communication".<sup>2</sup>

Read together, these seemingly contradicting points of view correspond, to a certain degree, with my conflicted feelings towards boeremusiek and, by implication, to that marked collective, "Afrikaner". This is, however, not the epiphanous story of my journey into Afrikanerdom; nor is it a politically correct vilification of Afrikaner whiteness. Rather, I'd like to explore in this section how the embarrassments of crossing over between these two hegemonies influenced my research decisions and some of the good and the bad that came from it.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ek verskil van die AWB's soos dag en nag – politiek, godsdiens, álles – maar dis my mense. Dit was 'n tuiskoms. Daar't ek besef ek's oneerlik met myself om my 'n Afrikaanssprekende Suid-Afrikaner te noem. Ek's 'n Afrikaner, en basta met die res." "Hanlie Retief gesels met Paul Alberts," *Rapport*, December 26, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The artists mentioned are some of the most popular Afrikaans singers, often criticised within more intellectual circles as having no depth. "Ouens wat oulike kakiehempies dra wat 'n ander kleur hier op die sleutelbeen het" en luister na "Kurt, Steve of Juanita". Ouens wat Afrikaans as 'n (rassistiese) "politieke statement" sien eerder as 'n "medium van kommunikasie" Deon Maas, "My kinders verdien 'n Afrikaanse universiteit," *Rapport*, April 7, 2010, sec. Weekliks.

Both Alberts and Maas are describing a self/other-relationship that has evolved beyond recognition from the easy dichotomies of modern thinking. In the last few decades, it has become fashionable to theorise this relationship as one of hybridity where the Self and the Other are in a relationship of close proximity, sometimes quite literally sharing the same blood, yet remaining fundamentally incommensurable. The space between Self and Other thus belongs to both at the same time and, yet, exclusively to neither. The problem with any kind of ethnomusicological study, like mine on boeremusiek, is that as a discipline ethnomusicology relies at a very basic level on the modern distinction between a radically different researcher and “native”. This is probably why embarrassment does not usually feature in ethnomusicological writing. Embarrassment requires an empathic relationship between Self and Other. Psychologists Robbins and Parlavecchio write:

The self-reflexivity of embarrassment ... may involve a kind of proto-self that understands itself through an empathic, imaginative projection of one's self through the other ... To be ashamed ... is to have one's existence reduced to the object of another person's evaluative gaze. Beyond that, the experience of shame requires the shamed person to have the capacity to project him- or herself into the position of the observing other. To the extent that one is capable of putting oneself into the perspective of the other, one is therefore capable of also having a reflexive relationship toward one's own self as an object subject to evaluation.<sup>3</sup>

From this description, it is reasonable to contend that embarrassment can function as an unexpectedly enriching component – even a driving force – for research.



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<sup>3</sup> B.D. Robbins and H. Parlavecchio, “The Unwanted Exposure of the Self: A Phenomenological Study of Embarrassment,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 34, no. 4 (2006): 325-326.

This “unwanted exposure of the self”, as one definition of embarrassment goes, is evident from an exchange with one of my Facebook friends in January 2010:<sup>4</sup>



After joining the group I quickly looked into ways of hiding the fact from my Facebook friends but, even though I knew this status update would cause me embarrassment, I decided to let it remain on my wall.

I can think of at least two distinct but related reasons why I would feel embarrassed about my boeremusiek status update. The first is what I call “autoethnographic embarrassment” – the sort of embarrassment Deon Maas describes when one feels one is associated with a group one would, for a variety of reasons, prefer to disown.<sup>5</sup> The embarrassment of being associated with right-wing Afrikaans conservatism played itself out at the 2009 Klein Karoo National Arts Festival’s *Kontreikuns* seminar where I was invited to speak on my research. Before I took the

<sup>4</sup> My comment translates as: “WHAT? I want to be able to post – all in the name of research” to which Stoltz replied: “Amandla (a Zulu and Xhosa word for “power” – a popular rallying cry in the resistance movement against apartheid), in the name of research. Hope your comrades enjoy your postings.”

<sup>5</sup> Maas, “My kinders verdien ’n Afrikaanse universiteit.”

stage, a representative from the *volkspele* movement gave a talk. When asked whether people of colour were now allowed to become members of the *volkspele* movement, she had to admit that its members are still exclusively white and that this would remain the case for the foreseeable future – an answer that was met with disbelief and a fair amount of ill feeling. When it was my turn to speak, I planned to end my presentation by singing a song Jo Fourie collected near Oudtshoorn. While I was voicing my embarrassment at what I was about to do, the *volkspele* representative stood up, opened her official *volkspele* songbook and started singing “my” song.

What is there to say at the juncture where an innocent little song, reminiscent of my childhood – a song like many of the songs my pre-schooler cheerfully sings from the moment he gets up in the morning – becomes the product of a collective history that I have forgotten but can never escape? How does one live unselfconsciously as a white Afrikaner when whiteness and Afrikaners are so embarrassing? How does one function as a scholar of culture when one’s cultural collective is so embroiled in a hegemony one doesn’t believe in, when one cannot write in one’s mother tongue without it becoming a political statement?

What is there to learn from such an embarrassment? Talking about a trashy TV game show for newlyweds, John Fiske argues that embarrassment is

experienced at the point of conflict between the conventional and the subversive, between the dominant and the subordinate, between top-down and bottom-up power. Exposing and enjoying the disagreements in a couple is embarrassing only because the dominant group’s ideological values are experienced simultaneously with the everyday values of the subordinate that contradict them. The pleasures of liberating repressed or subordinate meanings can never be experienced freely, but only in conflict with those forces that seek to repress or subordinate them.<sup>6</sup>

In the zig zag movement between being an insider and being an outsider, autoethnographic embarrassment allows me to inhabit a space traversing the dominant and the subordinate. According to the dialectics of traditional theories of hybridity like those of Glissant and Bhabha, the space of relation or in-betweenness is a space of social resistance and hence, the site for potential social change. Embarrassment has none of these social utopian goals. It is a position fundamentally devoid of social power. But it is, as the Fiske quote suggests, a potential site of epistemic power. Embarrassment opens up fleeting opportunities to release meanings hidden under hegemonic influences. Moreover, embarrassment challenges traditional ideas of what passes as knowledge by suggesting a radically different position for the researcher. Rather than doing the work of evaluating, embarrassment exposes the

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<sup>6</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 61.



researcher as the object of judgement. From this powerless self-conscious position one can begin to explore the ghettos where discourse fails.

By way of example, after an interview with a member of the TBK, I wrote the following memo:

When we left today I felt so uncomfortable. I am mixing with people of a different class (what a snob I am!). The house was terrible – knitted concertinas and guitars on the wall, a picture depicting the Groot Trek, old telephones and musical instruments, milk cans, a broken car in the backyard. The *tannie* really looks like a poor white.

The black neighbours started to play loud music. “There goes the kaffir again”, says X. Daughter says: “Ssh, Dad, that thing is recording!”. I switch off my cell phone. “He is still a kaffir”. X’s son in law, a police inspector, shouts something over the wall. The neighbour must have recognised the inspector, as the music goes quiet immediately.

The two little girls of about nine and ten wear bright red lipstick – “You girls look just like *tannie* Cora Marie,” says their dad the inspector, with approval.

I feel dirty – I want to have a bath. We are called for lunch: “*Kom dat ons gaan derms stop*” (Let’s go and stuff ourselves). I am offered a chair, a very dirty one.

The children look poor, the toilet seat is up. I shudder at the thought of eating the watery salad and *braaivleis*, even though it is clear that this is a special treat. I down both of the whiskys and diet Sprite I am offered, even though I don’t want to. We brought along wine and Turkish Delight. They will probably not know what to do with it once we leave.

The layers of embarrassment in this field note need unpacking. That my embarrassment has a class dimension is obvious, as is my embarrassing complicity with the interviewee’s racism. But as I move from treating the field note as mnemonic aid to looking at it as a text in itself – recording my reactions to what I have written – more layers are revealed; layers I would at times prefer not to confront.

When I look into the mirror of my own text I am embarrassed at how I emerge from all of this: my politeness morphs into deception; physical dirt becomes a classist metaphor of contamination. It is hard to air such dirty laundry in public, but it is only in these intimate, unsanitised moments – usually either not considered worth noting, or edited out of field notes constructed for an audience – that embarrassment can be located. It is at this point that theory becomes a medium of solving problems I experience acutely as researcher, rather than merely being of academic value, as it were.



If autoethnographic embarrassment is a doomed strategy to differentiate myself from an oppressive white hegemony, it is running up against another oppressive hegemony that is the second reason for my Facebook embarrassment. By commenting on my status, my friend was in effect telling me that I *ought* to feel embarrassed about joining the Boeremusiekilde group. Because I knew that keeping the status update on my wall would cause me embarrassment, thereby setting up the whole exchange as one of embarrassment, I have, in some sense, chosen to embarrass myself.

Research on embarrassment shows that individuals who deliberately embarrass themselves usually do so to achieve a sense of solidarity with a group in power – by participating in embarrassing initiation rites, for example. In other words, in some instances, embarrassment is not the anti-hegemonic move described earlier, but in fact a position *dictated* by hegemony.<sup>7</sup>

That a certain measure of embarrassment for whiteness is required in the current political hegemony, was made disturbingly clear at the Music and Exile symposium hosted by the Goethe Institut in Johannesburg on 27 and 28 January 2010. The few papers on white composers – particularly the Afrikaans-speaking ones – were initially met with utter silence, almost as if they hadn't occurred at all.<sup>8</sup> This tension, caused by conceptually stretching the notion of “exile” beyond its revered post-apartheid meanings, repeated similes between apartheid and Nazism, and differences of opinion about whether a composer's political views should influence the way his work is judged,

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<sup>7</sup> W.F. Sharkey, H.S. Park, and R.K. Kim, “Intentional Self-Embarrassment,” *Communication Studies* 55, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Arnold van Wyk, John Joubert, Friedrich Hartmann and Priaulx Rainier were among the white composers discussed. The programme is available at [http://www.join-mozart-festival.org/pages10/symposium\\_programme.html](http://www.join-mozart-festival.org/pages10/symposium_programme.html).

finally led to a small outburst by one of the conference-goers that summed up what I considered to be a universally felt but unspoken opinion of a large section of the audience: that it was heretical to speak of white Afrikaners in the context of exile.

Against this backdrop, Christine Lucia read a thought-provoking paper on exile in the work and life of Joshua Pulumo Mohapeloa, Abdullah Ibrahim and Kevin Volans, and told the following story about Volans: On 16 December 1976, the year of the Soweto uprisings, Volans went to Mgungundlovu (or Dingaanstat) in northern KwaZulu-Natal, to record the annual Day of the Covenant memorial service, commemorating the defeat of the Zulus by the Boers at Blood River in 1838:

I was all dressed up in my grey three-piece suit and my white Yves Saint Laurent pig-skin shoes ... Then all these people turned up in their kappies and stuff, and I lost my nerve. I thought, I just cannot go into this church and record this church service ... [But] I had been dropped off and I was going to be picked up [much later], so I just wandered around and recorded the insects. It was a blazing hot day. Those recordings, when I took them back and listened to them in Cologne ... struck me as being stunning ... You're dealing with the sounds of insects that probably haven't changed for thirty million years ... And you realise that we evolved hearing those sounds. They're deeply, profoundly embedded in our consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

I was strangely hurt and embarrassed by this story: there is little hermeneutic difference between *kappies* (bonnets worn by Voortrekker women), *Geloftefeeste* (Day of the Vow commemorations) and boeremusiek. Even though I also laugh at *kappies* and wouldn't be caught dead at a *Geloftefeeste* – embarrassments that I imagine establish difference between me and the hegemony these cultural symbols stand for – on some level the Volans of Lucia's story had erased my particular past from his recordings, but had let the cicadas live. I realised that these were imposed embarrassments. I imagine that my sincere embarrassment is a form of redemption, but in reality it is only a form of white guilt that keeps me from raising white issues in public, thereby legitimating a new hegemony – a hegemony that wants to eliminate the possibility of a nuanced definition of whiteness. In the eyes of my imagined Other, all Afrikaans white people wear the *kappie* of racism.

Thus I find myself caught between two hegemonies, neither of which I feel at ease with. At the same time I cannot completely dissociate myself from these hegemonies. Perhaps that is what it means to study Afrikaans

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<sup>9</sup> Christine Lucia, "The Smell of a Grass Fire" (Symposium on Music and Exile, Goethe Institute, Johannesburg, 2010). Volans told this story in an interview with Christine Lucia at a point where he was explaining the "sound-scapes" project of Cologne composers of the late 1970s.

music today – embracing hybridity not as a space for social revolution, but as a hidden hermeneutic position that allows for perspectives that defy hegemonic discourse. Boeremusiek, like Eugène Terre'Blanche, is an embarrassment. Yet, on some level, I have to admit, like Paul Alberts does, that it is mine.

Part of the appeal of boeremusiek as research topic is that it is stuck in this ghetto of embarrassment between hegemonies. It was slighted by the apartheid establishment, yet is stigmatised today for its apartheid connotations. This ghetto of embarrassment can only really be explored from a position of personal, as opposed to theoretical embarrassment; by understanding where boeremusiek fitted into the scheme of apartheid, but also, that on other levels, a statement like the following, has nothing at all to do with politics.<sup>10</sup>



**Marinda Fourie** Ons luister graag Boere musiek, omdat ons daarmee groot geword het, dis deel van ons kultuur, van ons tradisie. Daar het al so baie dinge in hierdie pragtige land van ons verander, dat dit die een ding is wat nog regtig ons eie is. Toe my seuns babatjies was, en hulle was moeilik en wil nie slaap nie, dan het ek vir hulle Boere musiek opgesit en sommer gou gou het hulle aan die slaap geraak. Vandag is hulle 9 en 10 jaar oud, leer self kitaar speel, want hulle wil Boere Musiek speel, dis die droom. My jongste wil glad 'n boer word, sodat hy en sy boetie eendag op sy eie plaas in sy eie skuur 'n regte boere opskop kan gee.

about 5 months ago · Report

<sup>10</sup> “Marinda Fourie: We like to listen to Boeremusiek because we grew up with it. It’s part of our culture, of our heritage. So much has changed in our beautiful country, but this is one thing that is ours. When my sons were babies and they were being difficult, I would play Boeremusiek when they could not sleep. This put them to sleep in no time. Today they are 9 and ten years old and are teaching themselves to play the guitar, because they want to play Boeremusiek. That’s the dream. My youngest even wants to be a farmer when he grows up, so that he and his brother can someday host a real *boeredans* on his own farm in his own barn.”

# Chapter 3

## She Danced Alone: Jo Fourie, Songcatcher of the Groot Marico

### Introduction

The most widely circulated photograph of Jo Fourie, taken in 1955, shows a woman sitting at a desk, pen in hand (see Figure 10). She is 68, but looks much younger. She seems to be writing, although, upon reflection, it is more likely that she is posing for the camera with an old manuscript book. Behind her is a bookcase filled with books, imparting to her a sense of erudition. One has grown accustomed to older, white women in South Africa being depicted in or around the home, busying themselves with needlework, cooking or children. In contrast, the photograph in Figure 9 captures Jo Fourie in an act of writing that evidently exceeds domesticity. There is an air of authority about her, a steely quality belying her friendly smile. One can imagine that she was a woman who did things her own way.

Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie was born on 17 September 1884 in Zwolle, the Netherlands, where her father owned a book-publishing firm. She met Herman Fourie – an Afrikaner – in the early 1900s. Herman, after going back to South Africa in 1899 to fight in the Anglo-Boer War, returned to The Netherlands in 1902 to complete school and enrol for a theology degree at the University of Utrecht. The couple married in 1910 and settled in Bronkhorstspuit, South Africa, where Herman, who would later contribute to the first Afrikaans translation of the Bible, accepted a call to the Hervormde Kerk.<sup>1</sup> The family moved to the Groot Marico in 1930 where Jo Fourie's interest in boeremusiek was sparked. She started notating tunes in the late 1930s on farms in the area. After her husband's death in 1939 she returned to Johannesburg where she and three of her children formed a *boere-orke*, Die Vier Fourie's, recording the Marico tunes for Gallo Music. During this time Fourie continued collecting tunes in and around Johannesburg, and the Northern and Western parts of the old Transvaal. When

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<sup>1</sup> The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk is one of the Afrikaans reformed churches, not to be confused with the much larger Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. The Hervormde Kerk was founded in Potchefstroom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is particularly strong in the rural areas of the Northern parts of South Africa and is known for its traditionalism. Peculiarly, it has wedded conservative political viewpoints with liberal theological positions.

visiting her daughter Kintie (in Patensie near Port Elizabeth) and her son Manie (in Babanango in the then Natal), she took the opportunity to seek out boeremusiek in small towns on the way. By 1950 she had collected more than three hundred tunes.

On Good Friday 1952 Fourie was involved in a serious car accident. She spent four months in hospital with severe injuries, which left her one leg shorter than the other. Five months after the accident she took to the road again – against medical advice – on what would become her most extended tour. With a concertina and a ukulele in the trunk of her car in case her informants should not have access to a musical instrument, she visited prospective informants, asked them to play old boeremusiek tunes, and transcribed the melodic lines in staff notation. Supplementing her numerous notebooks of transcriptions, she kept detailed records of the individuals she visited, including date and place of birth, musical background and the social conditions of their involvement with the music. In 1964, at the age of 80, she was forced to abandon her travelling when her children, concerned for her safety, took away her car after she got stranded on a railway track and forgot how to get it going again.

Tracing the possible motivations behind her relentless, almost obsessive collecting drive for boeremusiek – a music which, by her own admission, she initially did not much care for – reveals the competing cultural, racial, political and personal forces at play in an individual's problematic identification with the genre. Fourie's surviving life documents, comprising six diaries, several letters, an unfinished memoir and numerous loose little fragments, point towards a musical attempt to come to terms with her new identity as a South African woman. Although some of the diaries and notebooks seem to have been written soon after the events she described, others were evidently written only some years later.<sup>2</sup> There is also evidence that she reworked and



Figure 10: Jo Fourie, Johannesburg, 1955.

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<sup>2</sup> The Jo Fourie Collection, held at the National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria comprises around one thousand transcriptions, five diaries, twelve notebooks and several folders of personal communication, photographs and fragments. I am grateful to Luana Brewis and Kobus Müller, who facilitated access to this collection.



Figure 11: Jo Fourie next to her car, 1947.

edited passages to form a cohesive narrative. Together with the narrative strategies and the recurring themes that emerge from these texts, this suggests that she was as interested in *constructing* her journey as boeremusiek enthusiast as in the music itself. In other words, the fact that Fourie not only valued the music and its collection, but also threaded the details of her collecting and involvement with boeremusiek into a life history, can to a large extent be understood as an attempt to become part of the local.

By employing biography as interpretive strategy in this chapter, I hope not only to give credence to the personal meanings Fourie assigned to boeremusiek, but also to highlight the uncertain and ambiguous position of the genre within Afrikaner society of the period. Ultimately it was the slipperiness of the genre within Afrikaner nationalist politics that both enabled and thwarted her efforts to draw on boeremusiek as a vehicle for personal growth and social gain. This slipperiness hinges, in this chapter, on the colonial, gendered and racial discourses against which her musical endeavours took shape, and her struggle to make sense of musical rapture from a fundamental position of aesthetic discipline.

### Homely and Unhomely States

[I]n spite of his apparent love for and involvement with Javanese music Kunst, the fervent string-quartet player, never touched a gamelan instrument except for measuring purposes. We can only guess how different *Music in Java* (and perhaps even the field of ethnomusicology itself) might have been if he had. The reason for his attitude, which we find hard to understand nowadays, was the tremendous social barrier that divided colonizer and colonized before Indonesian Independence (1949). In the colonial situation it was unthinkable for a European to play in a Javanese or Balinese gamelan, or even take private lessons.<sup>3</sup>

Ernst Heins

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<sup>3</sup> Ernst Heins, "The Netherlands," in *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*, ed. Helen Myers (New York: Norton, 1993), 110.

In 1919 a young Dutch lawyer and folk music enthusiast set off for Indonesia with two friends. They were to tour the archipelago with a programme of chamber music, fairy tales, animal imitations and living folk music from the Netherlands. Jaap Kunst – violinist and animal imitator – stayed behind when his companions returned to the Netherlands to learn more about the Javanese gamelan music that so fascinated him.<sup>4</sup> His ethnomusicological efforts during those first years culminated in a book called *De Toonkunst van Java (Music in Java)*, published in 1934.<sup>5</sup>

That same year his former compatriot Jo Fourie also visited the island. Unlike Kunst, she knew little about folk music and didn't particularly like it either. But when she was called to listen to a radio broadcast on folk music that featured boeremusiek from South Africa, Jo Fourie found her calling:

In 1934 I had a wonderful experience on the island of Java, then still a Dutch colony. A cousin of mine, who grew up in the same city as I in Holland, lived there. After marrying she moved to what was then still called the Dutch East Indies. She and her family lived in the capital Batavia, since her husband was a member of the *Volksraad* (called thus in imitation of our institution).

One evening, as was his custom, he was working at his writing desk with the radio playing softly. As it was announced that the next item on the programme would be boeremusiek, he called me. I listened in wonderment to what was played by our first *boere-orkeste*, thousand miles from South Africa. In that alien country my ears opened to the charm of our own folk music, our boeremusiek. That was and remains to this day one of the most wonderful moments of my life. And when I later felt dejected, the memory of this moment carried me through.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>5</sup> Jaap Kunst, *De toonkunst van Java* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1934).

<sup>6</sup> "In 1934 het ek nl. 'n wonderlike ondervinding beleef, op die eiland Java, destyds nog nederlandsse kolonie. Daar het toe 'n niggie van my gewoon, wat in dieselfde stad in Holland opgegroeï het as ek. Na haar troue het sy egter verhuis na wat toe nog nederlands Oos-Indië was. Sy en haar gesin het daardie tyd in die hoofstad Batavia gewoon, oor haar man 'n lid van hulle Volksraad was. (so genoem in navolging van ons s'n) Een aand sit hy soos gewoonlik aan die skryftafel en werk, waarby hy dan altyd die draadloos saggies laat speel. Toe daar aangekondig word dat die volg. no. op die program boeremusiek sal wees, laat hy my roep. Ek kom en luister in verrukking na wat deur een van ons eerste boere-orkeste word gespeel, duisende myle van S. Afrika verwyder – daar in die vreemde land het my ore oop gegaan vir die bekoring van ons eie volksmusiek, ons boere-musiek. Dit is en bly een van die wonderlikste momente in my lewe. En as ek later party keer moet verloor het, het die herinnering aan hierdie moment, my baie gehelp om deur te sit." Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, "Die verhaal van my soek en vind van Boere-musiek tussen die jare 1935 en 1954," Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.



By means of an epiphany – the first of many she would experience over the course of the next twenty-five years – Jo Fourie announced her entry into the world of boeremusiek. Her confused notions of what it meant to be a foreigner and a “native” respectively, is one of the most striking aspects of this story she frequently told. Although she had familial and political ties to the Dutch colony of Java, she described it as an “alien country”, while, through her use of the possessive pronoun, she had now accepted Afrikaner symbolism as her own. The role of music in this moment of truth is particularly significant. She explicitly aligned an appreciation for boeremusiek with becoming an Afrikaner. By having her “ears opened to the charm of our own folk music”, she had participated in a rite of passage from outsider to insider. Unlike Kunst, she had gone “native”.

But Fourie’s position of integration was not as clear-cut as it might seem. Although she was a member of the dominant race and married a prominent Afrikaner, she nevertheless occupied a position of subordination in terms of gender and for being an immigrant.

The complex female subjectivities of white women in colonial contexts, and their complicity in colonialism, are increasingly being recognised. In her book *Allegories of Empire* concerning white British women in India, Jenny Sharpe describes white femininity in colonial contexts as “oscillating between a dominant position of race and a subordinate one of gender”. She concludes that the middle-class English woman in India had “restricted access to colonial authority”. For Sharpe women in colonial contexts lived with “precarious and unstable” subjectivities.<sup>7</sup> The “precarious and unstable” nature of female subjectivity is particularly evident in the notion of the *volksmoeder* – a term that defined the roles of white Afrikaner women through a large part of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> According to *volksmoeder* ideology, woman’s God-given calling was not only to be mother to her children, but mother to the *volk* (nation). With the 1938 Great Trek centenary, the notion was expanded,

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<sup>7</sup> Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of the Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>8</sup> E Brink, “Man-Made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the *Volksmoeder*,” *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, 1990, <http://sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/online-books.htm>; Elsje Petronella Büchner, ““Ek het ‘n roeping”: Vrouepredikante se toelating in die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk: ‘n kerk-historiese en prakties-teologiese studie” (D.Div. Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2008); L-M Kruger, “Gender, Community, and Identity: Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the *volksmoeder* Discourse of *Die Boerevrou* (1919-1931)” (M.A. Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1991); L Maritz, “Afrikanervroue se politieke betrokkenheid in historiese perspektief met spesiale verwysing na die *Women’s National Coalition* van 1991-1994” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2004).

transforming Afrikaner women into symbols for the racial purity of the Afrikaner *volk*.<sup>9</sup> By setting up Afrikaner women as progenitors of an indigenous white South African people, the term therefore referenced not only gender but also ethnicity.

The historical connections between the Dutch and the Afrikaners would suggest a seamless basis of comparison between Jo Fourie and white South African women. She arrived in Johannesburg in 1911 at a time when young Afrikaner men studied theology in Holland and Dutch-born men held prominent positions in government and business. However, according to Christina Landman, the experiences of Dutch women at the turn of the nineteenth century were very different to those of their South African counterparts: “Dutch feminist thinking swept across the Netherlands in the latter part of the nineteenth century while the Afrikaans women at that time pined away in concentration camps.”<sup>10</sup> The shared intellectual link between Afrikaner and Dutch men did not extend to their female counterparts.

The combination of junctures and disjunctures between Jo Fourie and Afrikaner women is striking. In many respects she could not have differed more from the Afrikaner women of her time. A seasoned traveller, she was a trained piano tuner who attended finishing school in Switzerland and even broke off an engagement early in the twentieth century. At the same time she occupied the relatively privileged position of *predikantsvrou* and, for all her independence, married an Afrikaner, a representative of the conservative group of men who, according to Landman, would be responsible for the continuation of women’s suppression in twentieth-century South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

### Fourie’s Status as *predikantsvrou*

The fact that Fourie was a woman – and more specifically, wife to a church minister – featured prominently in both her own account of the circumstances that led up to her musical undertakings and in an assessment of her success as

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<sup>9</sup> Büchner, “Ek het ’n roeping.”

<sup>10</sup> Christina Landman, *The Piety of Afrikaans Women* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1994), 9.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note here that Herman Fourie was not particularly conservative. He allowed his daughter to wear pants in an era when such a thing was unheard of and allowed Jo to travel abroad by herself. Yet he was also an important figure in Afrikaner nationalist politics and therefore an implicit supporter of its gender stereotyping.

researcher in an eulogy by Jan Bouws written in 1964. Bouws argued that her marriage to Herman Fourie was integral to this success:

In addition to this unmistakable expertise, Mrs Fourie had the advantage above all other researchers not only of being a *predikantsvrou* (a minister's wife), but, also the spouse of Dr. H.C.M. Fourie, one of the Bible translators.<sup>12</sup>

For Bouws, a Dutch historian of South African music who only visited South Africa for the first time in 1957, Fourie's position as the spouse of a prominent Afrikaner must have been enviable, affording her access to a society not available to researchers from outside. In reality, Fourie's collecting of tunes did not proceed without problems. A woman of advancing age, travelling alone by car, staying over in hotels and boarding houses and sharing gin and tonics with strangers, could not have been a common sight at the time. On several occasions, so she remarked in her diaries, her appearance gave rise to the assumption that she was English – an assumption that must have stung in view of the motivations behind her project.<sup>13</sup> Writing in a strange mix of Dutch and Afrikaans, she spoke with an unmistakable Dutch accent, as is evident from surviving radio interviews with Bosman de Kock.<sup>14</sup> It is therefore remarkable that she gained the degree of access that she did to several hundred Afrikaner homes, especially given the suspicion with which she was often met. According to her diaries, negative reactions to her project almost equalled positive responses. She described a general unwillingness to perform music, with people's reactions sometimes being downright inhospitable: feigning headaches or pretending not to be home.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes this unwillingness to perform music stemmed from financial concerns. Oom Jan Visser from Stellenbosch, for example, refused to play for her because he wanted to make recordings of his playing and “keep all the profit to himself”.<sup>16</sup> Fourie was, however, not a woman who allowed a shut door to stand in her way, and when her knocking on the

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<sup>12</sup> “Behalwe hierdie onmiskenbare kundigheid, het mevrou Fourie die voorsprong bo alle ander navorsers gehad dat sy nie net 'n predikantsvrou was nie, maar daarby die eggenote van dr. H.C.M Fourie, een van die Bybelvertalers.” Jan Bouws, “Mev. Jo Fourie - haar onverganklike glorie,” *Handhaaf*, September 1964.

<sup>13</sup> Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, “Die groot toer van '52,” Jo Fourie Collection, c 1957, 18; 22, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>14</sup> Thank you to Kobus Müller for familiarising me with these interviews. Bosman de Kock's interviews with Jo Fourie are available at the SABC Sound Archives, CAT NO 39/75-76 (52), ACC NO 6882.

<sup>15</sup> Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, “Fragment of Memoirs,” Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., 16, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

front door remained unanswered, she would march right in. Her success can be put down to tenacity, rather than to being a *predikantsvrou*, as Bouws's paternalist remark suggested.

The role of *predikantsvrou* was seen as a particularly important one in mid-twentieth century South Africa. It was often seen as a profession in and of itself.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the wives of Afrikaans ministers were defined primarily in terms of their husbands' calling and they were expected to devote their lives to support their husbands and the church. According to her granddaughter Tinie Malan, Fourie's first port of call in every new town she visited would be the *pastorie* (vicarage). There she would introduce herself as 'Mev Doktor H.C.M. Fourie. You know, widow of dominee Herman Fourie of the Hervormde Kerk and one of the Bible translators'. She would follow this up by asking for the names of musicians living in the area.<sup>18</sup> This introduction was usually enough to secure accommodation at the *pastorie* for the duration of her stay. Even though she used her husband's status to gain access to Afrikaner communities on a practical level, that status only proved useful after her husband's death. Contrary to Bouws's suggestion, Fourie went as far as describing the sad occasion in 1939 as a prerequisite for following her own dreams:

Even though I had not yet, at the time, made a special journey to write down boeremusiek, the wish for such a project came to me. I started to realise that it was necessary and the only way to preserve our music. Little did I know that such an opportunity would arise, because who would have thought that my dear husband would pass away so soon!<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Fourie was by then following her own calling not only complicated her status as *predikantsvrou*, but, with this remark, she crossed the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour of the time.

Jo Fourie's semi-nomadic lifestyle between 1945 and 1964 in search of boeremusiek, was strikingly divergent from the status quo at a time when the home was considered women's central space.<sup>20</sup> She once mentioned in her diaries that she enjoyed returning home to Johannesburg after her travels, but soon after writing

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<sup>17</sup> And, of course, a paternalist society where a woman's standing in society is totally dependent on that of her husband. Büchner, "Ek het 'n roeping."

<sup>18</sup> Tinie Malan, "Re::'n Paar vrae oor julle ouma", 2009.

<sup>19</sup> "Al het ek toe nooit spesiaal 'n reis gemaak om boeremusiek op te skryf nie, die wens het in my daarvoor opgekom. Ek het begin besef dat dit nodig is en die enigste manier om ons musiek te bewaar. Min het ek toe vermoed dat daardie geleentheid vir my sou opdaag want wie kon dink dat my goeie man so gou my sou ontval!?" Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, "Notebook FN," Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., 315/1, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>20</sup> Brink, "Man-Made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the *Volksmoeder*"; Büchner, "Ek het 'n roeping."

this she sold her house (presumably for financial reasons) and took to staying with friends, in boarding houses and alternately with her children. In an interview with Bosman de Kock in 1952 she reacted strongly to the suggestion that her early interest in boeremusiek in the Groot Marico interfered with her home-making duties. Not, as one would expect, by denying it, but by suggesting that the duties of a housewife were not all that important. Evidently, her personal ambitions extended beyond the limits espoused by the *volksmoeder* discourse.

Fourie's alignment with the *volksmoeder* ideology would, however, have been eroded in a more fundamental way than mere divergence from women's God-given calling for nurturing and home-making. Being an immigrant, the ethnic basis for being mother of the Afrikaner *volk* was absent.

Fourie's writings suggest that immigrants found it hard to be accepted in Afrikaner society. In a diary describing her tour of 1952, she tells of a ninety-three year old lady in Kimberley who particularly enjoyed boeremusiek. Her parents left France as newlyweds and she later married an Italian, but "speaks only English and Afrikaans". She once visited Italy but didn't enjoy it much, as she couldn't understand a word. "She feels it deeply when Afrikaners look down on her, because they know her as French or even Italian."<sup>21</sup> In another document she described her meeting with a Dutch couple in Oudtshoorn who were initially very happy in Johannesburg, but found Afrikaners' attitude towards them in the small rural community of Frankfort so unpleasant that they had to leave.<sup>22</sup>

To combat the strong anti-immigration sentiment amongst Afrikaners, the Maatskappy vir Europese Immigrasie (Company for European Immigration or MEI) was founded in 1949 with the aim of recruiting and assisting European immigrants in the naturalisation and assimilation process.<sup>23</sup> Some Afrikaners thought that immigrants would more readily align themselves with the English-speaking sector of the white population, while others felt that Roman Catholic immigrants would eventually undermine the Protestant values of the Afrikaner.<sup>24</sup> Dutch immigrants did not escape this discrimination. In his 1957 doctoral thesis *Die Nederlandse Immigrant in*

<sup>21</sup> Fourie, "Die groot toer van '52," 14.

<sup>22</sup> Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, "Toer van 1 Sept '52: Worcester, Robertson, Babanango," Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., 39, FD3 315/2, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>23</sup> A.B. van N. Herbst, "Positiewe immigrasie," *Handhaaf*, October 1965; Ronald Slater, "Die Maatskappy vir Europese Immigrasie: A Study of the Cultural Assimilation and Naturalisation of European Immigrants to South Africa 1949-1994" (M.A. Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2005), 21.

<sup>24</sup> Slater, "Die maatskappy vir Europese immigrasie," 21.

*Pretoria* (“The Dutch Immigrant in Pretoria”), J.F. Loedolff quoted a Dutch immigrant’s summary of the situation: “You will always remain a ‘Cheese’ even if you are a South African citizen” (“Jy is en bly ’n ‘Kaas’ al is jy ’n Suid-Afrikaanse burger”).<sup>25</sup>

It is within this complex web of associations and disassociations that Jo Fourie’s boeremusiek adventures took shape. The cultural conversion she experienced in Java – not least because of the implied international critical acclaim for the genre – fundamentally influenced her attitude towards boeremusiek. That she would have discovered boeremusiek there, and plainly thought the incident very important in the development of her project, aligns her on some level with the colonial attitudes of early ethnomusicologists. However, Fourie’s position was more complex than Kunst’s, for whom the distinctions between coloniser and colonised were clear-cut. Fourie’s simultaneous Othering of the own (by hearing the music in an unexpected context) and ownership of the Other (by falling under the spell of the music) is an indication of her uncertain social position in South Africa and an attempt to work through it.

### Boeremusiek as National Symbol – A Case of Mistaken Identity

In 1952 Fourie met a woman called Emma Muller, who lived on a farm in the Taaiboschbult area near Potchefstroom. She used to attend dances frequently, but after her son went missing while fighting in Italy during the Second World War, she stopped listening to boeremusiek altogether. The silencing of boeremusiek after the death of a loved one, or some other calamity in the Afrikaans community, is a recurring theme in both Fourie’s descriptions and in the whole of boeremusiek discourse. Jan Bouws, for example, mentions that more *trekkers* strongly opposed dancing after the murder of Piet Retief and that young people only got the opportunity for some fun when the commandant and officers left the laager. Commandant Hans de Lange, also called Hans Dons, once prevented further outlawed dance parties by smashing a violin to pieces with the words: “There is a time for everything, now go pray”.<sup>26</sup> The story of Sakkie van Wyk, told by Piet Bester, is another example. Sakkie’s father, Gert, banned all boeremusiek on his farm after the death of his two young daughters. Sakkie and his brother,

<sup>25</sup> *Kaaskop* (Cheese head) is a derogatory Afrikaans term for a Dutch citizen. Quoted by Ibid., 26.

<sup>26</sup> “Daar is ’n tyd vir alles in die wêreld, gaan bid nou liever.” Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is ... : musiek en musiekmakers in Suid-Afrika (1652-1982)* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1982), 113.

however, managed to acquire a concertina and a guitar in secret and played their instruments in the veld, far away from the farmhouse.<sup>27</sup> In a short story by Hennie Aucamp, *Hoe ry die boere sit-sit so*, one of the female characters promises to give up the concertina – the “devil’s instrument” – if she and her brothers make it home safely after getting lost in the snow.<sup>28</sup>

For a significant part of the Afrikaner community, boeremusiek espoused values that were fundamentally at odds with the form of Calvinist nationalism propagated at the time. Calvinism treated boeremusiek, with its dance associations, as scapegoat for sexual promiscuity or, alternatively, as an unimportant leisure activity that drew one’s attention away from serving God through “real” work. At the same time the genre was still commonly known as *hotnotmusiek* in the 1950s, an indication of its hybrid racial history. Corresponding with the racial abuse the genre suffered, boeremusiek was considered to belong to the Afrikaner lower class – a music emphatically not in line, as I have mentioned earlier, with the intelligentsia’s efforts to develop an Afrikaans *volksmusiek* in line with European standards.

The suppression of boeremusiek is evident in many descriptions of people Fourie visited. In her notes on an interview with Mrs Lenie Lategan of Dewetsdorp in 1952, she recalled the difficulties she had in getting the old lady to speak of boeremusiek. At the start of their interview Mrs Lategan denied knowing any boeremusiek tunes and wouldn’t talk of anything but religious songs. But when the conversation shifted to the dance parties of her youth, she “unconsciously started humming the same tune over and over again”.<sup>29</sup>

As these incidents of walking away from boeremusiek indicate, an allegiance to Christian nationalism implied that one’s connection to the music had to be carefully policed, suppressed or revoked if circumstances required this. Given its controversial status as emblem of Afrikanerness, and its dubious hybrid beginnings, jazz influences, dance practice and associations with the white working class, Fourie’s identification with boeremusiek was at the very least unusual. In many respects her engagement with the genre brought to the fore the tensions between her dominant position of race and subordinate one of gender as well as her entanglement in discourses of

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<sup>27</sup> Stephanus Muller, “Sakkie-sakkie op musiek wat boereharte opvrolik,” *Rapport*, March 14, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Heinrich van der Mescht, “‘Dat ek my boodskap insing in mense se harte’: musiekkunstenars in die kortverhale van Hennie Aucamp,” *Stilet* 18, no. 1 (March 2006): 175.

<sup>29</sup> Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, “Beskrywings van persone besoek insake Boeremusiek oor tydperk Sep - Dec 1952,” Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., 22, FB4 315/147, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

colonialism. As I will show, she clearly viewed her participation in and collection of boeremusiek as acts of nationalism that would have advanced her integration into the local. At other times, through a colonialist impulse, her attempts at disciplining boeremusiek (which I show in the next section) were attempts to align the genre with Western notions of art. In addition, coming from the background that she did, she failed to recognise that women's place in Afrikaner nationalism was limited to the material world. Care of the symbolic world of cultural artefacts remained in the hands of men. What is more, she seemed not to have taken seriously the tenuous connection between associating with boeremusiek and being considered a true Afrikaner. Ironically, therefore, her nationalist project of collecting boeremusiek tunes resulted in unconventional behaviour in terms of the *volksmoeder* discourse, thereby undermining her status as Afrikaner.

Part of trying to make sense of her strange attachment to the music is the unclear definition of the genre during her collecting years. In 1953 the Music Commission of the FAK, in a consideration of the "quality of boeremusiek", concluded that:

... [t]here is no clarity as to what "Boeremusiek" and a "*Boere-orke*" really means. Originally, the bands now called "*Boere-orkeste*" used to accompany dances, later they also featured at Boere events, where the term "*Boere-orke*" seemed to originate. The problem of the SABC [South African Broadcasting Corporation] is that listeners are asking for more "Boeremusiek".<sup>30</sup>

During the period 1930-1950 the term referred to at least three different musical styles employing vastly different instrumental settings and performance practices. The *Stellenbosch Boerorkes* (sic), formed in 1934 by Pietie le Roux as a National Party propaganda vehicle, served as model for the founding of *boere-orkeste* around the country in the build-up to the 1938 celebrations of the Great Trek. These kinds of *boere-orkeste* (which I will identify with "A") easily consisted of thirty or more members and the instrumentation probably depended on the respective town's available instrumentalists. A photograph of the *Suikerbosrandse Boere-orke* taken in 1938 shows thirty-two members, including eight accordions, a banjo, a cello, several violinists and guitarists and even a drum kit.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Uit besprekings blyk dit dat daar geen helderheid bestaan oor wat 'Boeremusiek' en 'n 'Boere-orke' werklik beteken nie.

Oorspronklik was die orkeste wat vandag as Boere-orkeste bestempel word, orkeste wat die begeleiding op danspartye verskaf het, later is hulle ook by geleentheid by Boerefunksies gebruik, vandaar die naam "Boere-orkeste". Die S.A.U.K se probleem is dat die luisteraars om meer 'Boeremusiek' vra." Muller, "Boeremusiek," 191.

<sup>31</sup> *Die Transvaler*, October 4, 1938.



These orchestras were formed specifically for the 1938 celebrations and their performances took the form of variety concerts and usually featured no dancing, as André Botha, a former member of the *Stellenbosch Boerorkes* explains.<sup>32</sup>

“*Boere-orkes*” was also a term adopted by bands of professional musicians who made a living by doing live radio broadcasts, hosting variety concerts and formal dance parties in South Africa’s larger cities (the so-called *Koffiehuiskonserte*) and touring the country to perform in small rural towns. The best-known bands of this kind, (which I identify here with “B”) were those of Hendrik Susan and Arnout Malherbe.<sup>33</sup>

The adoption of the term by such dance bands was widely decried as a cheap marketing strategy when the demand for Afrikaner memorabilia reached its pinnacle in 1938. Although these bands did indeed include what could pass as boeremusiek in its repertoire, it was but one element in a line-up of popular jazz forms largely driven by commercial concerns and heavily influenced by British dance band music. This tradition would in later years be called “*ligte Afrikaanse musiek*” (light Afrikaans music) and even be described by Anton Hartman, as we have seen, as an “Afrikaans Tin Pan Alley”.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, many of the legendary concertina players were apprenticed in the orchestras of Hendrik Susan: Manie Bodenstein, Fanie Bosch and Neels Steyn, to name but a few.

A third type of *boere-orkes* (C) emerges from sound recordings made in the 1930s by groups like Die Vyf Vastrappers, Die Vier Transvalers, Die Vyf Takhare and Die Naglopers. These groups consisted of fewer musicians – three to six players – and usually featured the concertina as lead instrument accompanied by a combination of the guitar, banjo, accordion, piano or double bass. These groups of musicians probably resembled the impromptu gatherings of musicians at traditional *boeredanse*, when celebrating a wedding or the New Year. Often financially strapped, working-class musicians with bad habits and a plain disregard for the growing racial ideology of the day, they did not conform to establishment Afrikaner cultural ideals.

A confusion between these types of *boere-orkeste* and their cultural meanings is evident in Fourie’s writings. In the series of epiphanies describing her transformation from cultural sceptic to boeremusiek enthusiast, competing images of the genre emerge. When in 1930 the Fourie’s moved to the Groot Marico, their three sons

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<sup>32</sup> André Botha, interview by W Froneman, December 4, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Chapter 4 takes up the discussion of boeremusiek as commercial endeavour.

<sup>34</sup> Hartman, “Waarheen boeremusiek?”.

remained in Johannesburg to continue their studies. Hugo, her second son who would later assist her in collecting tunes, took cello lessons during this time and initially made good progress, but later seemed to lose interest. Instead, he took to sitting in front of the piano playing “boeremusiek”. In a fragment entitled *Die verhaal van my soek en vind van Boere-musiek tussen die jare 1935 en 1954* (The story of my search and discovery of Boere-musiek between 1935 and 1954), Fourie describes her son’s newfound pastime as a struggle “to play all sorts of unimportant tunes”.<sup>35</sup> Frustrated by her son’s lack of interest in “good” music she suggested that he study jazz – “at least that is something, not nothing like the tunes you struggle with.” Hugo responded that there was more to the music than she thought. “Only later, after this conversation”, she wrote, “did I slowly become acquainted with boeremusiek.” Her differentiation between boeremusiek and jazz suggests that the music Hugo played was of the third kind (C) – simple folk melodies.

On the other hand Fourie wrote that she decided to form the Groot Marico Boere-orke in 1937, after reading Oom Pietie le Roux’s appeal in *Die Transvaler* for the founding of bands to raise awareness and funds for the 1938 celebrations and the construction of the Voortrekker Monument. It was this use of the term “*boere-orke*” (A) that left its mark on Fourie. In this sense, “*boere-orke*” denoted an orchestra made up of Boere, i.e. supporters of Afrikaner nationalism, rather than a band playing boeremusiek. That she took to the nationalist definition of boeremusiek is particularly evident in her musing on the concertina, which she described as a “primitive” instrument; an instrument she initially found “unbearable” due to its “screeching sound”.<sup>36</sup>

The concertina seemingly presented Fourie with all kinds of difficulties. Significantly, there was no concertina player in the Groot Marico Boere-orke, which comprised five violins, two guitars, a mandolin, two harmonicas, a cello, two kazoos and a ukulele. Fourie was vexed about the question: “Is it possible that a *volk*, who claims to belong to the Western-European civilization, can be so attached to a third or fourth class instrument?”<sup>37</sup>

She solved this dilemma by finding parallels with the Scottish bagpipes. “It is an encouraging thought”, she wrote, “that we are not the only *volk* in the Western-European civilisation to give expression to its national feeling

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<sup>35</sup> Fourie, “Die verhaal van my soek en vind van Boere-musiek tussen die jare 1935 en 1954.”

<sup>36</sup> Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, “Lezing oor Boeremusiek,” Jo Fourie Collection, c 1949, 3, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>37</sup> Fourie, “Notebook FN.”

through a stupid instrument”.<sup>38</sup> “To have a lesser opinion of the bagpipes”, she continued elsewhere, “only proves one’s ignorance. During World War I it was shown that soldiers performed best on an extended and difficult task, with the tones of that primitive instrument”.<sup>39</sup> So convinced was Fourie by the link between the concertina and the bagpipes that she suggested, in a letter to the Minister of Defence, Mr Frans Erasmus, that the concertina could have a similar influence on Afrikaner troops.<sup>40</sup> In her letter to him she even included three marches and a couple of *vastrappe* for his perusal.

Her letter portrayed the disciplinary potential of the concertina as the deciding factor in her changed opinion of the instrument. In this respect she saw the potential for a form of social discipline. Her writings on boeremusiek provide an interesting counterpoint to Grant Olwage’s work on discipline and choralism.<sup>41</sup> Olwage argues that the disciplinary ideals of Victorian choral singing to subdue and civilize the masses – ideals that were operationalised through the tonic sol-fa system, voice blending and the certificate – also found a home in the Cape Colony.<sup>42</sup> “The difference was”, according to Olwage, “that choralism’s working-class subjects were now the mission’s black convert”.<sup>43</sup> It was not so much the genre of boeremusiek that interested Fourie, but the possibility of bringing it into line with Western aesthetics. With Pietie le Roux’s format for a *boere-orke* (A) this increasingly looked like a feasible option to her. Within the environment of a town orchestra, her musical skills, acquired in the Netherlands, would have made her the obvious candidate for musical director. By a colonial realignment of boeremusiek with European notions of art, Fourie could not only remedy her own inferior position as immigrant and woman, but also afford boeremusiek a new status in an Afrikaner nationalist environment.

It is this strange juncture that reveals her lack of understanding of the impact that boeremusiek’s other meanings at the time (B and C) had on its position within the Afrikaner establishment. Her vision for the concertina

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Fourie, “Lezing oor Boeremusiek.”

<sup>40</sup> Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, “Letter to Minister of Defence, Frans Erasmus,” Jo Fourie Collection, September 14, 1954, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>41</sup> Grant Olwage, “Discipline and Choralism: The Birth of Musical Colonialism,” in *Music, Power, and Politics*, ed. Annie J. Randall, 2005, 25-46.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

as a national military instrument must have been received with both derision and unease.<sup>44</sup> Even though Afrikaner symbols were very important in the 1950s and 60s, it was invented traditions or the sanitised versions of Afrikaner cultural symbols that gained acceptance in institutional contexts: *volkspele*, for example, but also the Afrikaans art song movement and the translated folk songs collected in the FAK songbook.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the Calvinist branch of the Afrikaner project convinced ordinary people, especially women, to disown boeremusiek and to discipline their own involvement in leisure activities. Jo Fourie, as I am arguing here, felt attracted *towards* boeremusiek in order to establish herself as an Afrikaner woman, even though the genre would not have been a suitable symbol of white Afrikaner superiority.

### Disciplining Boeremusiek

In an interview with Bosman de Kock for the South African Broadcasting Corporation in 1952, Jo Fourie describes her role as musical director of the Groot Marico Boere-orke as follows (she would later reiterate this view in a notebook on the Marico years): “The members would bring their own instruments and would ‘know’ the music. I would have to ensure that it is in tune [literally translated: pure] and in time.” In her description of the early days in the Marico, Fourie’s aesthetic self-confidence in a genre she knew little about at the time, borders on imperialism: she would, as a foreigner, “temper” the attempts of the local practitioners. Her use of the word *suiwer* (pure) can be interpreted on a musical, aesthetic and moral-political level: she would ensure that the *boere-orke* plays in tune, but she would also purify boeremusiek from modern influences, like jazz, which for many people at the time represented the black Other. Under the aesthetic of “purity”, playing boeremusiek the “modern” way became tantamount to immorality – an act of religious and civil disobedience – thereby resonating with the racial politics of the period.

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<sup>44</sup> In fact, there is some “evidence” of the concertina having the opposite effect in military contexts. An Irish soldier involved in the siege of Mafeking from 1899-1900 wrote in his diary that “[t]he Cape Boys shot a Boer today ... The former were playing a concertina, jigging and singing and shouting to the Boers to send over some of their [women], as they wanted dancing partners. One of the Boers looked over the fort wall and was immediately shot dead by our riflemen. Ruse of War.” Quoted by Worrall, *The Anglo-German Concertina*, 2:14.

<sup>45</sup> *Volkspele* (folk games) is considered to be a form of Afrikaans folk dance, but was only introduced in South Africa in 1914, after Dr S.H. Pelissier visited Sweden and became acquainted with European traditions of folk dance.



Figure 12: Jo Fourie's transcription of Pollie Witvoet mazurka.

In Fourie's proposed educational system, boeremusiek was clearly conceived of as a conduit for both musical and social discipline. For the beginner a large *boere-orke* with a conductor was prescribed "to get him into the spirit, the conventions and the skill ... [H]is mistakes are not easily heard and he is pulled into the rhythm." It is not long before he becomes "one of them".<sup>46</sup> More experienced players developed faster in a smaller orchestra, but its discipline was no less strict. Instead of following the lead of a conductor, the accompanists now had to pay heed to the whims of the leader of the orchestra who played the tune. Although individuality had its place in the *boere-orke*, it had to be carefully regulated and freedom was only afforded to him who could prove that he was "one of them". Through her pedagogical vision, Jo Fourie reaffirmed the hierarchical nature of both

Afrikaner and colonial society. Knowledge, creativity and individuality were reserved for leaders, while followers had to submit to this authority in order to ensure an acceptable musical product.

Read in this light her collection of boeremusiek takes on some ominous meanings. When the SABC launched a campaign to source old and forgotten boeremusiek tunes in 1950, it provided new momentum to Fourie's endeavours. The initiators of the SABC campaign were left speechless when she announced herself with more than three hundred collected tunes. In the SABC's report of 1952 it is stated that her transcriptions had been copied, distributed to all the corporation's libraries and made available to *boere-orkeste* around the country. The

<sup>46</sup> Fourie, "Notebook FN."

fact that hardly any boeremusiek musician, past or present, is able to read staff notation, did not seem to occur to the project managers at the SABC.

Fourie's manuscript books of transcribed tunes reveal their own form of discipline. In the collection tunes are not only classified according to dance form, but catalogued in terms of origin and intended audience. So, for example, there are notebooks containing *Naturelle-musiek* (Native music) *Kleurling- en naturelledjies* (Coloured and native songs) and *Kinderliedjies* (Children's songs).<sup>47</sup> As Figure 12 indicates, her transcriptions were neatly written, providing the melodic outline and some harmonic indications, but no stylistic suggestions.

Anton Hartman's vision for what was to become of this collection is evident in the minutes of a meeting of the FAK's Music Committee of 14 November 1953. He apparently supported the publication of a selection from Fourie's collection of "old-fashioned boeremusiek" – "provided that they were arranged for piano, without violating the melodies or their distinctive character".<sup>48</sup> In a similar project, Fourie secured copyright to a collection of songs entitled *Liedjies uit Sonnige Suid-Afrika* (Songs from Sunny South Africa) in 1955. Control of the rights to these songs, collected during her travels, suggests that her project could be regarded as part of the larger colonial pursuit of material and cultural capital. The act of transcription bestowed on Fourie the power to decide on an authoritative version of a particular piece of music. In so doing orality was portrayed as an inadequate mode of memory, thereby creating a market for written music. By selling authoritative versions of boeremusiek tunes back to the people she collected them from in the first place, she was obstructing the dominant feature of the musical tradition she wished to conserve – that of orality. Controlling the mnemonic archive by written means, she was in effect rendering the music unintelligible to its own practitioners. By transcribing the music she heard, she was creating artefacts that could be owned and policed in various ways to her own financial, social and political benefit.

Unlike other ethnomusicologists of her time for whom the foreigner/native divide was more clear-cut, Fourie participated in boeremusiek, yet never mastered the concertina (that "primitive" instrument) and preferred

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<sup>47</sup> Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, "Naturelle-musiek," Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., FL7 315/614, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria; Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, "Kleurling- en naturelledjies," Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., FL6 315/163, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria; Joanna Everharda La Rivière Fourie, "Kinderliedjies," Jo Fourie Collection, n.d., 315/160, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Pretoria.

<sup>48</sup> "Minutes of a meeting of the Music Committee of the FAK" (Johannesburg, November 14, 1953), INCH, University of the Free State.

the role of musical director. There is, however, indication in her writings that she conceived of this distance between her and the music as an essential prerequisite in understanding the “true” meaning of boeremusiek.

For example, in 1938 Fourie met a young Norwegian in the Marico from whom she learnt several pieces. He was working on the Marico dam and regularly socialised with Afrikaners. “He plays [the *Kalfiewals* (Calf’s waltz) and *Hessie se witperd* (Hessie’s White Horse)] much better than and different from the way one hears it on the radio”, she wrote, “and naturally, as a foreigner, he felt the beauty and truth of our music before anyone else did”.<sup>49</sup> It is fair to assume that Fourie saw herself as a similar foreign visionary; one who possessed the requisite distance from boeremusiek in order truly to appreciate it. This idea recalls Edward Bullough’s concept of “psychical distance” – a reworking of Kant’s notion of “disinterested interest” – as a condition for experiencing the sublime.<sup>50</sup>

By appealing to the notion of objectivity, Jo Fourie was doing more than remedying her subordinate position of power as an immigrant and a woman. By appealing to aesthetic distance she articulated not only what she considered to be the proper nature of the object of aesthetic reflection, but also the proper way of appreciating it – a view that was fundamentally at odds with boeremusiek practice. Fourie’s vision for boeremusiek as art in the Kantian tradition is apparent in her description of her meeting with a certain Mr Prins, Mr van der Merwe and Mr Bleeker near Ceres:

The following morning I lay in bed, thinking about Mr Bleeker’s exceptional playing. Only he and that young Prins near Ceres interpreted boeremusiek in such a way that my soul was moved. It might sound odd or sentimental etc. but there is something so extraordinary in that music, that when I hear it, I am taken aback and disappointed when I look over the notes and hear it in my mind, to see what ordinary pieces they are ... One can compare it to very delicate glass work or lace. The way the two main musicians played, I had never experienced before. This is boeremusiek – NOT how it is supposed to be, but how it CAN be in the hands of born artists. Here the simplicity of folk music crystallised into true art. Not once did the thought of *lekker* (fun) dance music cross my mind, such as had been the case at other times, it sounded much too delicate and soft.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Fourie, “Notebook FN.”

<sup>50</sup> Edward Bullough, “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle,” *British Journal of Psychology* 5 (1912): 87-117.

<sup>51</sup> “Die volgende more lê ek en dink oor die uitsonderlike goeie spel van mnr Bleeker, alleen daardie jonge Prins by Ceres en hy het boeremusiek so vertolk, dat my hele siel daarvan tril. Dit klink dalk verspot of sentimenteel ens. maar daar is so-iets besonders in daardie musiek, as ek dit hoor, dat ek ontnugter en teleurgestel is, as ek die note oorkyk, en in gedagte dan hoor, om te sien watter doodgewone

Through her reflections on this occasion, she transformed boeremusiek from *lekker* (fun) dance music into art. Boeremusiek now entered the loftier domain of touching the soul, rather than the body. Thus Fourie found an aesthetic motivation, supporting existing politico-religious reasons, for disciplining the dancing body.

Or, at least, that is one possible interpretation of her assessment of Prins and Bleeker's playing. Equally pertinent in this passage is not so much her realisation of the limitations of Western notational systems, but the tension in her mind between the demands of Western aesthetics and that of boeremusiek. What moved her soul in its sentimentality, simplicity and delicacy, became merely "ordinary" when considered through the objectivity of staff notation. Here her notion of boeremusiek as discipline starts to unravel.

### Between Discipline and Rapture

The earliest indication of an uneasy marriage of Western socio-aesthetic norms and the norms of her adopted country, is apparent in Fourie's description of the disastrous ending to the Groot Marico Boere-orke's participation in a boeremusiek competition in the Johannesburg City Hall:

Early in 1938 we returned to Johannesburg for the second competition in the Town Hall. We lost completely, primarily because of our "strange apparel", the sailor uniforms that actually looked very neat. Judged by the applause and calls from the audience, their opinion differed from that of the jury.

After that we changed the uniform to Voortrekker dress and gave 12 or 13 performances on farms around Groot Marico during the last 6 weeks before the 1938



Figure 13: Jo Fourie in Voortrekker dress, Groot Marico, 1938.

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stukkies dit is. . . Mens kan dit vergelyk met baie fyne glaswerk of kant. Soos die twee hoofpersone gespeel het, is enig in my ondervinding. Dit is boere-musiek – NIE soos dit behoort te wees nie, maar soos dit KAN wees, in die hande van gebore kunstenaars. Die eenvoud van volkmusiek kristalliseer hier tot ware kuns. Daar het ook nie eenmaal die gedagte van 'lekker dansmusiek' by my opgekom nie, soos anders wel gebeur het, daarvoor het dit te fyn en sag geklink. Fourie, "Fragment of Memoirs," 34.



centenary – mainly to raise awareness for the festival.<sup>52</sup>

The experiences of Anna Linde (born Olsen) shows several similarities with that of Jo Fourie, and illustrates how the acceptance of perceived national symbols could function in strengthening a sense of belonging amongst immigrants. Born in Chicago in 1901, Anna married Hannes Linde in 1932 and followed her new husband – a minister in the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk – to South Africa. Although she held the same qualifications as her husband, women were not allowed to be legitimated in this denomination at the time. Without any apparent bitterness, Anna quickly assumed the role of *predikantsvrou* and went out of her way to fit into her new cultural surroundings, even accepting the postulates of Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>53</sup> By refusing to speak English, she eventually mastered Afrikaans to such an extent that she once gave the keynote speech at a Dingane’s Day festival.<sup>54</sup> In Voortrekker dress she addressed the crowd with the following words:

You probably wonder what right I, an American woman, have to address you on this, your own day? Well, let me tell you this: I think I might have even more right than you do, because you are Afrikaners by birth, but I am an Afrikaner by choice. I can choose! And I have made your wonderful sweet sounding language my own.<sup>55</sup>

Anna Linde equated being an Afrikaner not only with being able to speak Afrikaans, but with choosing it as an adopted tongue. She portrayed her entry into Afrikanerdom as an active choice whereby she gave up speaking

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<sup>52</sup> “In 1938 (vroeg) het ons weer na Johannesburg gegaan vir die 2de wedstryd toe in die Stadsaal. Ons het totaal verloor hoofsaaklik om ons "vreemde drag", die matroos-uniform, wat egter baie netjies gelyk het. Na die applous en uitroepe van die toehoorders te oordeel was hul opinie anders van die jury. Ons het toe egter die uniform verander en voortrekkerdrag aangeskaf en die laaste 6 weke voor die eeufees, 12 of 13 uitvoerings op plase rondom Groot Marico gegee - veral om stemming vir die fees te wek.” Fourie, “Notebook FN.”

<sup>53</sup> Büchner, “Ek het ’n roeping.”

<sup>54</sup> “Dingane’s Day” was the colloquial name for the Day of the Vow – a religious public holiday in South Africa until 1994 – commemorating the Boer victory over the Zulu King Dingane at the battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838. In the week preceding the battle, the beleaguered Boers made a vow that if God granted the men victory, they and their descendants would commemorate the day of battle and would build a church. According to Giliomee (2003, 165), “Afrikaner nationalists of the next century considered Blood River the battle that ‘saved’ the trek and secured the victory of Christianity and ‘civilization’”. The day was renamed Day of Reconciliation in 1994.

<sup>55</sup> “U wonder seker watter reg ek, ’n Amerikaanse vrou, het om u op hierdie, u eie volksdag, te kom toespreek? Wel, laat my u sê: Ek dink ek het amper meer reg as u, want sien, u is Afrikaners van geboorte, ek is ’n Afrikaner uit vrye keuse. Ek mag kies! En u pragtige soetklinkende taal het ek ook my taal gemaak.” Sophie Meiring quoted by Büchner, “Ek het ’n roeping.”

English and being American. This symbolic rebirth is accentuated by appearing in Voortrekker dress, another national symbol.

Fourie's defiant tone about the jury's decision shows a much less acquiescent woman than Anna Linde. At the time she considered the orchestra's uniform to be an aesthetic matter – a question of neatness. In Zwolle, Fourie had taken music lessons and trained as a piano tuner. This incident, however, illustrates the inadequacy of her solid musical training in enabling appropriate aesthetic decisions in her new country. This sartorial miscalculation emphasizes her culturally hybrid position. The sailor suits that would have been *de rigueur* in her country of birth, were an anomaly both in the Groot Marico and in wider boeremusiek circles.<sup>56</sup> The decision to appear in sailor suits cannot but be read in line with her efforts to temper boeremusiek into an art form on par with European standards.

Yet her account of the events that followed shows a sudden departure from aesthetic concerns to the instrumental ones of political action. After the Groot Marico Boere-orke had adopted Voortrekker dress as their uniform, they fervently continued to raise awareness for the 1938 festival on farms in the area. The orchestra was even amplified on the day of the festival so that the music could be heard, according to Fourie, from a distance of more than twenty miles.<sup>57</sup>

It is my contention that the sudden shift between aesthetic and political concerns in the sailor suit passage is not to be understood in chronological fashion. From details of her collecting tours, Fourie seems to have written the notebook from which this description is taken in the 1950s – at least ten years after the events she described. The slipperiness of meaning therefore does not describe a radical departure from a Eurocentric politico-aesthetic philosophy to an Afrikaner one, but a subjective uncertainty about her attitudes towards boeremusiek and its socio-cultural meanings.

The same sort of slippage is evident in another epiphany about the concertina also quoted elsewhere in this thesis and written around 1949, several years before her letter to the Minister of Defence of 1954:

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<sup>56</sup> To this day many European boys' choirs wear sailor suits (matrozenpakjes) for non-religious performances. The Hague Matrozenkoor, for example, wears authentic sailor suit uniforms "giving an [sic] Dutch national touch to the boys' performance. The sailor suits recall Holland's long maritime history. Little Holland once had the most powerful navy in Europe – rivaling that of England itself". "Individual Dutch Choirs," *Historical Boys' Clothing*, 2006, <http://histclo.com/act/choir/nat/net/cn-ind.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Fourie, "Notebook FN."

For a long time I found the screeching sound of the concertina unbearable, until I heard it from a distance of half a mile one evening as I was sitting on the stoep in near darkness. And then I heard it. From that moment on my opinion about the thing changed and it is as if I relive that evening's sensation every time I hear it. I think we should adopt it as our national instrument like the bagpipes of the Scots.<sup>58</sup>

Here her link between the concertina and national discipline is preceded by a much more irrational connection with the music. What she was describing was a moment of musical rapture on par with her experience of Prins and Bleeker's playing.<sup>59</sup> She wrote of an even more significant moment of cultural conversion in a description of the night she started liking the song *Suikerbossie*:

In the time of the orchestra, the song *Suikerbossie* became popular. I thought little of it, common, belonging to the *volkies* [a common term for "non-white" farm labourers] and wouldn't include it in our programme. When we broke off evening practice for tea, a few would immediately sit to one side – only playing *Suikerbossie*. I endured it, but my opinion remained unchanged. Until one pleasurable evening – a birthday or some such thing with only the orchestra attending. I let go of my reserved attitude and started to play myself! And there the thing grabbed me and I came under the enchantment of the mesmerizing tune. From that day we included it, words and all, in our programmes.<sup>60</sup>

Both the concertina and the *Suikerbossie* epiphany follow the same pattern: a strong initial dislike for an aesthetic reason, on the one hand, and reasons of race and class, on the other; coming under the spell of the music, despite these strong (rational) concerns; and the channelling of an acutely emotional response to the artlessness of the folk into a nationalist discourse, by including *Suikerbossie* in their programme at 1938 celebrations or appealing for the

<sup>58</sup> "Lank was die [konsertina] vir my stuitlik deur sy skreeuerige geluid tot ek een skemeraand dit op 'n halwe myl afstand hoor speel terwyl ek op die stoep gesit het, en toe hoor ek dit. Vanaf daardie oomblik het ek 'n ander opinie oor die ding gekry, dis of ek al deur opnuut daardie aand se sensasie beleef as ek dit hoor. Vir my part kan ons dit maar aanneem as ons nasionale instrument soos die Skotte hul bagpipes." Fourie, "Lezing oor Boeremusiek," 3.

<sup>59</sup> See chapter 2 for an interpretation of this passage in another context.

<sup>60</sup> "Terwyl die orkes bestaan begin 'Suikerbossie' in die mode te kom. Ek het dit gering geag, plat, van die volkies, en wou dit nie in ons program opneem nie. As ons verdaag vir die oefenaande vir tee, dan sit 'n paar dadelik eenkant en speel net Suikerbossie. Ek verdra dit, maar bly nog van my eerste opinie. Tot ons op 'n plesieraandjie, 'n verjaardag of so van die orkes alleen, my strakke houding laat vaar en begin saamspeel! En dáár pak die ding my, ek kom onder die bekoring van die meeslepende wysie. Van toe af het ons dit met woorde en al in ons programma's opgeneem, o.a. die deel 'sy kon nie pap maak nie' ens, en dit gespeel op al die konserte voor die eeufees, tot groot vermaak en bijval van die gehore, my man ingesluit. Hy het die laaste deel self toegevoeg 'wat maak 'n mens met so 'n vrou', ons was onseker daaroor." Fourie, "Notebook FN." See chapter 1 for a discussion of the opposition of *Suikerbossie* to Afrikaner establishment ideals.

concertina as national instrument. Despite all her disciplining of the music, enchantment stood at the centre of these epiphanies and of her connection with the music – an enchantment she did not always know how to deal with, but returned to time and time again.

## Conclusions

It is tempting to interpret Jo Fourie's collection of boeremusiek as a politicised, disciplined, misinterpreted colonial appropriation of an indigenous musical culture. But, despite the power imbalances in Fourie's ethnomusicological endeavours, she was progressive for her time: she challenged the social barriers between ethnographer and native, took a practical interest in performing the music, and conducted her interviews by initiating real, human contact. Jo Fourie's involvement with boeremusiek does not represent a corruption of an authentic musical culture. Rather, it shows the fluidity of musical meaning in the damaged and anxious white spaces of the colony.

Jo Fourie's complicity in colonial power structures should not erase or simplify the complex position of authority of a female European immigrant in a paternalist and racially charged environment. Recognition of this complexity not only enables a glimpse of individual human agency in the theories that underpin historiography, but also the ambivalent relationship between boeremusiek and Afrikaner nationalism. Although her disciplinary aims for boeremusiek can be read as an attempt to become part of the local, her fundamentally emotional identification with a genre of dubious social stature, and the fact that she transgressed the boundaries of femininity by her musical involvement, prevented her ethnomusicological endeavours from affording her the level of integration she sought. Her disciplining of boeremusiek is therefore better understood as an attempt to channel an enchantment with the music that defied the rational in the only way she knew how – transcribing, cataloguing, and publishing her collection of music.

Even if she danced to the tune of colonialism and its signifying narratives, she still danced – intuitively, spontaneously, irrepressibly – in her own remarkable way:

By chance I was alone that evening and listened to a broadcast of “Uit die jaar vroeg” [“From years of yore”, a radio programme broadcast by the SABC based on the tunes she had collected] which I enjoyed immensely. In my own

way I danced to the music, I simply could not sit still. This happened in the guest room of Mr and Mrs Rontgen's home, where I boarded at the time.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>"Toevallig was ek daardie aand alleen, en het ingeluister na die uitsending van 'Uit die jaar vroeg' en dit baie geniet. Op my eie manier het ek daarby gedans, ek kon eenvoudig nie stil bly sit nie. Dit was in die spaarkamer van mnr. en mev. Rontgen se huis, waar ek toe geloseer het." Fourie, "Fragment of Memoirs," 11.



## An Itch for Boerekitsch

Working through the personal archive of Piet Bester, the author of three commemorative albums on boeremusiek legends, I one day came across a pile of funeral pamphlets between files containing photographs of boeremusiek musicians, completed questionnaires and newspaper clippings on boeremusiek. In Afrikaans these pamphlets are called *begrafnisbriewe*, “funeral letters”. As the word suggests, *begrafnisbriewe* are intended as a last ode to the dead, an expression of a family’s appreciation for a life now lost. But a *begrafnisbrief* is also a painful, and often kitsch, souvenir. Its front cover often features a photograph of the deceased, fuzzy around the edges, or an image of hands folded in prayer. One is compelled to keep a *begrafnisbrief* even when one doesn’t quite grasp its function; it feels heretical to throw it away. I was moved by the presence of these souvenirs of the dead amidst Bester’s collection of boeremusiek documents. But, not knowing what to do with them, I set the pile aside together with Bester’s photographs of a more personal nature of which several featured him with a beloved dog. Yet, these pamphlets continued to haunt me. What were they doing in-between a carefully organised collection of boeremusiek documents? And why was I so moved by them?

Rather than viewing the *begrafnisbriewe* as addenda to Bester’s archive or as documents that found their way into the collection by mistake, I have come to think of them as essentially meaningful – not only in the context of a personal archive, but in the context of boeremusiek reception in general. It strikes me that boeremusiek reception as a whole is akin to my sentimental feelings towards these disembodied “funeral letters” dedicated to people I’ve never met. I was reminded of a description of the personal sentiments evoked by the concertina’s sound I had stumbled upon earlier:

“Of sommer net die huil en hyg van oorle Oupa se Engelse konsertina wat my soos ’n weggooi-brak in die maanskyn hartverskeurend wil laat tjank uit pure verlange na iets – geen mens weet wat nie.”<sup>1</sup>

“Or simply the crying and wheezing of Grandpa’s English concertina, which makes me want to howl like a stray dog in the moonlight out of sheer longing for something – who knows what.”

I found the banality of this description of the concertina’s sound unbearable, especially the predictable metaphors of respiration connected to the power of music to “stir the heart”. Yet I had to concede a certain similarity between the author’s reaction to boeremusiek and mine to the *begrafnisbriewe*: we were both wallowing in nostalgic kitsch.

The Afrikaner version of nostalgic kitsch, sometimes called “boerekitsch”, refers, amongst other things, to the Afrikaner paraphernalia unleashed by the re-enactment of the Great Trek in 1938 as well as their ironic deployment in contemporary retro design aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> One can also find boerekitsch in the notion of *boerekos* (boer food) – “traditional” Afrikaner food like *koeksisters*, *boerewors*, *boeretroos* – often invoked in the same breath as boeremusiek as tokens of real Afrikanerness. As has been the case with other aspects of Afrikaner culture, the standard interpretation of boerekitsch, past and present, situates even the sentimental pleasures of the everyday firmly within the influence of nationalist politics.<sup>3</sup> While this might be a tempting interpretation of Great Trek memorabilia, the underlying (negative) view of kitsch as pre-empting expression, of making “easy what should be difficult” and cancelling “the possibilities of real emotion”, as Roger Scruton argues, is to my mind an untenable position.<sup>4</sup> In resorting to the term “kitsch” my intention is not to enforce a distinction between “good” and “bad” music or “good” and “bad” taste. Rather, I wish not only to register the ways in which boeremusiek appreciation has fossilised into predictable clichés, but the comforting domestication of experience that accompanies the process of mourning a lost reality. This domestication of shared experience in resorting to the tried-and-tested is to my

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<sup>1</sup> Jo van Rooyen, “Hartskatte,” *Die Vroueblad*, August 2, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Carla Potgieter, “Reading Rubbish: Pre-Apartheid to Post-Apartheid South African Kitsch” (M.A. Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2009), <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/1782>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-75.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 480.



mind a central feature of boeremusiek reception. Although kitsch manifests in boeremusiek in a variety of ways – one witnesses kitsch, for example, in the collecting of boeremusiek objects that forms a key part of many aficionados’ relationship with the genre and in the aesthetic of replication that accompanies notions of musical and social authenticity – my focus here is the kitsch tropes of boeremusiek reception. Audiences’ responses to boeremusiek have, to a certain degree, become automated (but not meaningless) repetitions of the boeremusiek cultural collective. These tropes situate boeremusiek as evoking “tears of joy”, as inducing “itchy feet” and as being conducive of “innocent fun”. I pause here to display instances of these tropes and to suggest the cultural work they accomplish.



Strange as it might sound, kitsch implies its own notions of aesthetic distance; a temporal distance as Adorno’s definition suggests:

Kitsch is the precipitate of devalued forms and empty ornaments from a formal world that has become remote from its immediate context. Things that were part of that art of a former time and are undertaken today must be reckoned as kitsch. On the other hand, the objectivity of kitsch is the source of its justification. For kitsch precisely sustains the memory, distorted and as mere illusion, of a formal objectivity that has passed away.<sup>5</sup>

Here kitsch is closely linked to nostalgia: both rely on stock representations as triggers of shared sentimentality; both are celebrations of the familiar; both mourn lost innocence while trying to regain it. The notion of kitsch, understood in the sense of “aesthetic time travel”, as Emily Dolan puts it, provides a different angle to the unreality of boeremusiek. Boeremusiek is unreal. But it is also kitsch, precisely because it has lost its connection with the present, because it is defined, received and perpetuated primarily as a vessel for an imagined past.<sup>6</sup>

In South African popular culture boeremusiek, and especially the concertina, functions as instantly recognisable markers of nostalgic Afrikaner kitsch. The shared symbolism of boeremusiek centres on the sentimental Afrikaner everyday of the by-gone *boereplaas* (boer farm).<sup>7</sup> Nostalgic kitsch is particularly evident in

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<sup>5</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 501.

<sup>6</sup> Emily I. Dolan, “...This Little Ukulele Tells the Truth’: Indie Pop and Kitsch Authenticity,” *Popular Music* 29, no. 3 (2010): 463.

<sup>7</sup> The musical stereotypes described in Minors I are applicable here too.

the use of the concertina in Afrikaans popular songs. In Laurika Rauch's songs *Die Gang* (The Corridor) the concertina accompanies the nostalgic yearning for springtime on a farm without electricity.<sup>8</sup> Steve Hofmeyr's enormously popular *DKW* recalls finding love in the "old Transvaal" – a reference to Boer republic geography and the Afrikaans folk song *Sarie Marais*.<sup>9</sup> The concertina threads through the nostalgic imagery of the song, replete with classic cars, outdoor picnics and inopportune mentions of oxwagons to guarantee mass appeal. More ironic is the idyllic farm imagery in Radio Kalahari Orkes's *Heuningland* (Land of Honey), where Manie Bodenstein's concertina enters on the refrain:

Someraand o soete geur  
bloureën stort oor die sinkdak neer  
geur hang swaar in die avondlug  
plaasdam glim in sterreilig  
in die landerye staan die mielies reeds so  
daar's volop boontjies in die ou klipstoor  
tollies sug van lekkerkry  
in die soet groen veld waar hulle in vrede wei

*o die lekker lewe  
in melk en heuningland  
my sondes nou vergewe  
my veglus uitgebrand  
heuningland, o heuningland*<sup>10</sup>

The sweet smell of a summer eve  
as wisteria falls on the tin roof  
perfume hangs heavy in the evening breeze  
the dam in the starlight gleams  
in the fields the corn stands high  
an abundance of beans in the old stone barn  
young oxen sigh contented  
in the sweet green grass they peacefully graze

*oh the joys of living  
in the land of milk and honey  
my sins pardoned  
my will to fight spent  
land of honey, oh land of honey*

These instances of concertina kitsch play into the "tears of joy" trope of boeremusiek reception. While there is obvious pleasure in indulging in the commonplace imagery of the farm, it is a pleasure contingent on loss. The sound of the concertina, crying and wheezing, is framed in exactly the same way. The instrument is habitually

<sup>8</sup> Laurika Rauch, *Die Gang* (Laurika SELBCD 169, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Hofmeyr, *Duisend en een*.

<sup>10</sup> Radio Kalahari Orkes, *Heuningland* (Rhythm Records RR110, 2009).

described as mournful or melancholic, indicative of loss, even though it evidently accompanies dancing and having fun:

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| <p>“’n Konsertina is in sy wese ’n hartseerinstrument. Selfs op sy joligste is daar ’n jammerlike geween in sy klank wat ’n soort weemoedigheid oproep en ’n vreemde verlange skep na wat ons was: mense wat deur swaarkry sukkel, smart, dood en graf gelouter is. Daarom is konsertinamusiek so mooi, dit maak eintlik seer.”<sup>11</sup></p> | <p><i>“The concertina is in essence a sad instrument. Even at its jolliest, there is a lamenting cry in its sound which evokes a sort of melancholy and a strange longing for what we were: people who have been tested by suffering, hardship, grief, death and grave. This is why concertina music is so beautiful it hurts.”</i></p> |
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Many interpretations of the “tears of joy” trope in boeremusiek are possible. It is possible to read the trope as steeped in the constructed Afrikaner past of heroic suffering, for example, or as sentimental political escapism, as Pat Hopkins has read the unfolding of Afrikaans popular music, or as a symptom of present political pressures.<sup>12</sup> Yet, it is important to note that “tears of joy” are essential to a more universal experience of kitsch:

Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: how nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.<sup>13</sup>

For Milan Kundera, here, kitsch is the experience not only of laughing and crying simultaneously but of a common sociality. Although boeremusiek is steeped in metaphors with local meanings, the tendency to form emotional attachments to objects that remind one of the past is not limited to white Afrikaner experience. Following Adorno, Emily Dolan argues that “[g]ood bad music”, read: kitsch music, “preserves a living memory of a dead art, making no pretence that it is anything other than dead.”<sup>14</sup> More than anything else the “tears of joy” response to

<sup>11</sup> Johan van Wyk, “Boeremusiek,” *Landbouweekblad*, December 1, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Pat Hopkins et al., *Voëlvry: The Movement that Rocked South Africa* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Milan Kundera quoted by Tomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Dolan, “...This Little Ukulele Tells the Truth’: Indie Pop and Kitsch Authenticity,” 464.

boeremusiek positions the genre on the level of the souvenir: a loved object and a token of personal sentiment, but, for those reasons, of limited use-value in the present.

■ ■ ■

“Making the feet itch”. This description of boeremusiek’s ability to induce dancing has become deeply entrenched in the language of boeremusiek, featuring in many a cursory glance towards the genre (see Figure 14 and Figure 15).

# Grey se boereorkes beste in SA

*Seuns laat  
landwyd  
voete jeuk*

Figure 14: “Grey’s [Grey College, a boys’ school in Bloemfontein] *boere-orke*s best in South Africa: Boys make the feet itch all over the country”, *Die Volksblad*, October 18, 2008, 3.

“Itchy feet”, as one can deduce from a google search, is an uncomfortable but surprisingly common physical ailment. That an embarrassing physical condition stands as metaphor for the urge to dance to boeremusiek is not a coincidence given the uneasy relationship of official Afrikaner culture to the materiality of the body. Because it

represents an automated discursive response to the music and not really a reaction to the music itself (i.e. a desire to dance) the trope of “itchy feet” serves a more pressing rhetorical function in boeremusiek discourse.



Figure 15: “Can’t wait for Saturday evening! We’re going to throw a big party and won’t miss out on a single dance!! *Lekker braai* (barbecue), *lekker* friends and the right boere-orke! André Victor and his men really makes the feet itch! Good luck guys!” Comment on the Facebook page of the 2011 Boeremusiek competition *Varstrap* on the Afrikaans television channel kykNET.

On the one hand referring to itchy feet is a way of drawing attention to fun, to putting it on display, as it were. By referring to itchy feet one derives joy from the shared experience of boeremusiek, rather than in an individual response to the music’s rhythmic capacities. When referring to dancing in this way, one derives pleasure from the possibility of dancing and from the collective memories that are evoked when speaking about dancing to boeremusiek. “Itchy feet” is, therefore, a nostalgic reference to the lost possibilities of the past.

On the other hand, there is the sense that the itchy feet serve as a betrayal of suppressed physical responses to music. Having itchy feet betrays a secret desire to dance – an impulse one doesn’t necessarily have to act upon. The notion of itchy feet as embarrassing betrayal is particularly evident in a letter to the presenters of the radio programme *Nog’n draai* (Another swirl) that aired in the 1990s:

Your broadcasts reminded me of a joke told by the late dominee Jan du Rand. Ouma [Grandma] was a deep Christian and her granddaughter, San, played the harmonium. When San started playing jolly music Ouma said: “San, San, that music of yours!”, to which San responded, “But Ouma, it’s religious”. “It definitely isn’t”, Ouma said, “I can feel it in my feet”.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> “Julle uitsendings laat my dink aan ’n grap wat wyle ds. Jan du Rand vertel het. Ouma was ’n diep Kristen, en haar kleinkind San het die

The “itchy feet” trope points towards the intimate domesticity of boeremusiek – an intimacy that is at times embarrassing. Yet the safety of falling back on an expressive stereotype transforms itchy feet from a personal condition to an expression of community, in the same way a rude joke relies for its humorous impact on the existence of societal norms that oppose it.

In many ways the “itchy feet” trope relies on the broader discursive context of “innocent fun”. Boeremusiek is emblematic of the less stern social world of the Afrikaner often embodied by the saying derived from the *volkspele* song *Afrikaners is plesierig* (Afrikaners make merry). The Springbok Radio advertisement in Figure 16 illustrates some of the activities and sentiments that spring to mind when the saying is heard:

Young and old are making merry on the lawn ... singing voices fill the air ... happy couples whirl to the swing of the music! Thus our ancestors played their games. Thus they are still played wherever Afrikaners gather – at home in the *voorkamer* [front room], in our town halls and in the free open air. *This* is Afrikaner entertainment, as pure and clean as the language we speak.

“Innocent fun” is a defensive phrase, a phrase one adopts when standing accused of crossing a line. The euphemistic references to dancing in the 1953 advertisement are understandable within the politico-religious context of the time. What makes contemporary notions of boeremusiek as “innocent fun” kitsch is the fact that the moral categories towards which it stands as a defence have become redundant. The photograph included in



Figure 16: Springbok Radio advertisement, *SAUK Bulletin*, May 17, 1953.

traporrel gespeel. Toe San vrolik speel, sê Ouma: ‘San, San, daardie musiek van jou!’, waarop San antwoord: ‘Ouma dis geestelik’. ‘San dit is glad nie’, het Ouma geantwoord, ‘ek kan dit aan my voete voel.’ Letter by Miemie de Clercq to the presenters of *Nog ’n draai*, March 26, 1994. Part of Piet Bester’s personal archive in the possession of the author.



Figure 17: Photograph and caption in the programme of the Boeremusiekgilde's twenty-first anniversary festival, October 8-9, 2010.

the programme of the BMG's twenty-first anniversary festival (the caption reads: "Doesn't that look like fun? Remember, you can dance to the beat of lively boeremusiek at any time...", see Figure 17) is kitsch because of its constructed "oldness", but also because it implies the "innocent fun" defence for dancing when no accusations are made to the contrary. The photograph is kitsch because in the Web 2.0 era it really does seem innocent and because it references a conception of fun that belongs to a previous age.

When I consider it, the festival programme from which this photograph is taken is not dissimilar to a *begravningsbrief*: a kitsch souvenir that boeremusiek enthusiasts will treasure, a sentimental reminder of what has been lost. Boeremusiek as a form of boerekitsch satisfies existing expressive needs rather than creating new ones.<sup>16</sup> The contemporary employment of the "tears of joy", "itchy feet" and "innocent fun" tropes likewise retains the form of a past aesthetic, but without the function it formerly served.

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<sup>16</sup> Kulka, *Kitsch and Art*, 27.





# Chapter 4

## The Commercialisation of Boeremusiek and the Pragmatic Politics of Hendrik Susan and Nico Carstens

### Introduction

Taken on the set of one of the first Afrikaans musicals, *Hier's ons weer* (Here we are again), the photograph in Figure 18 depicts the orchestra of Hendrik Susan.<sup>1</sup> Susan, an imposing figure with silvery-gray hair, dark brows and immaculately dressed in a tuxedo, dominated the popular Afrikaans music scene since the inception of his first *boere-orke*s in 1937 until well into the 1950s. The accordionist at the back, a young Nico Carstens, was to become one of South Africa's leading commercial artists in the twentieth century after breaking away to form his own band in December 1950, selling more than a million records in the period from 1953 to 1957 alone.

The differences between Susan's sleek set-up and the guitar and concertina combinations of the 1930s couldn't be more obvious. Far from an impromptu combination, there is a clear hierarchy in Susan's orchestra. There is no doubt about his status as band-leader as he stands with his violin in front of the orchestra giving musical direction with his bow, taking over the role of the concertinist. Indeed, Susan had received wide acclaim for elevating boeremusiek from the *misvloer* (dung floor) and injecting the genre with a new image of sophistication – a recurring theme in appraisals of his life in music.<sup>2</sup> The sparse writings on Susan focus on his universally recognised status as musical pioneer that earned him the title “Father of *Ligte Afrikaanse Musiek*”.

*Ligte Afrikaanse musiek* (light Afrikaans music) was a term that emerged in the 1940s as an increasing differentiation between traditional boeremusiek and more “modern” developments became apparent. “Modern” encapsulated the use of rhythms besides those of the traditional boeremusiek dances, expanded repertoires, more space for improvisations following British and American dance bands, and novel instrumentation. According to

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<sup>1</sup> Hyman Kirstein, *Hier's ons weer* (African Film Productions, 1950).

<sup>2</sup> Koos Van der Merwe, “Hendrik Susan - Hy het Boeremusiek van die misvloer gelig”, n.d.

Rob Allingham – former archivist at Gallo Music – this differentiation, a result of the “growing nationalist fervour of Afrikanerdom after World War I”, revealed “a class-based musical faultline”:

The audience that preferred concertina dances ... was agrarian and urban working class. In contrast, most Afrikaner nationalists came from a more educated, middle-class background, with musical prejudices fashioned by European culture. Traditional melodies were championed as the true voice of the “volk” but were acceptable only if rendered in “serious” performance.<sup>3</sup>

While much can be said for this distinction, the relationship between boeremusiek and *ligte Afrikaanse musiek* is, however, more complicated than Allingham’s agrarian/urban, politically innocent/politically conscious binary oppositions would suggest.

On the one hand, *ligte Afrikaanse musiek* resonated with the Afrikaner nationalist obsession with progress and “being on par” with “European standards”. In this sense it represented the socially sanctioned cleaned-up version of boeremusiek to which middle-class audiences, dressed in eveningwear during a “sophisticated night out”, could relate. On the other hand, the boeremusiek debates of the 1950s show that no consensus existed about the value of a boeremusiek that departed from tradition. In fact, a strong (nationalist) faction was vocal against the commercial values and “outlandish”



Figure 18: Hendrik Susan and his orchestra on the set of *Hier's ons weer*. The accordionist at the back is a young Nico Carstens.

<sup>3</sup> Rob Allingham, “South Africa - Popular Music: Nation of Voice,” in *World Music: The Rough Guide. Africa, Europe and the Middle East*, ed. Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham, and Richard Trillo, vol. 1 (London: Rough Guides, 1999), 651.

sounds of *ligte Afrikaanse musiek*. So, for example, Jan Bouws lamented the fact that all Afrikaans folk music was being dismissed for being shallow when, in fact, it was only “*amusementorkeste*” (amusement orchestras) that misused the term “boeremusiek”.<sup>4</sup> He drew a distinction between *geestelike volksmusiek* (spiritual volksmusiek) and music aimed primarily at making money. One is hard-pressed to find public defences for the new kind of boeremusiek, which was decried for its “alien” musical influences that corrupted real boeremusiek and its connection with the South African soil. Often, the motivation for detractors of Susan’s type of boeremusiek was based on racial musical stereotyping – they referred to it, for example, as *hotnotsmusiek* – but more often negative attitudes were based on the fact that for many Afrikaners the term “boeremusiek” simply could not accommodate the use of Hawaiian guitars, yodelling and the like.<sup>5</sup>

The first mention of the term in the SABC’s annual reports points to the slippery nature of definitions of “boeremusiek” and “ligte Afrikaanse musiek” at the time. In the 1940 report it is mentioned that “typical *ligte Afrikaanse musiek*, not necessarily of the *vastrap* type”, was successfully presented by Hendrik Susan and his “*Boere-orke*”.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the term “*boere-orke*” had evolved beyond describing the concertina and guitar combinations of the 1930s.

For Freddie Luyt – a founding member of Susan’s first *boere-orke* who later formed his own band – the term “boeremusiek” became increasingly irrelevant during the 1940s:

When I first broadcast, they announced “Freddie Luyt en sy Boere-orke”. I immediately objected. I spoke to Gideon Roos, who was then secretary of the SABC, and said “I disagree with this. This stuff I’m doing is modern. We’re getting beyond the stage of three or four chords. The harmonies have changed, therefore the name of the music must change. I’d like to hear the announcement, Freddie Luyt en sy Orke speel ligte Afrikaanse musiek”.<sup>7</sup>

Despite sharing Luyt’s sentiments about the changed musical content of the boeremusiek of the 1940s, an association with the term remained important to the reception of Hendrik Susan and, later on, to that of Nico Carstens. It is the confusion around the term, whether it referred to “traditional” melodies that represented the soul

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<sup>4</sup> Jan Bouws, “Die Afrikaner en musiek”, *Die Transvaler*, April 6, 1955, 7.

<sup>5</sup> The examples cited in Chapter 1 and 2 from *Die Transvaler* of 1955 are relevant here.

<sup>6</sup> South African Broadcasting Corporation, *SABC Annual Report: 1940* (Johannesburg: SABC, 1941).

<sup>7</sup> Trehwela, *Song Safari*, 53.

of the *volk*, or solely to commercial developments, that opens up an alternative view on the relationship between white popular cultural and political ideology under apartheid.

The relationship between popular music and political hegemony in South Africa has been theorised primarily in terms of the oppression/resistance binary that haunts the public sphere on so many levels.<sup>8</sup> These studies, mostly examining black popular musics, situate popular music within a context of confrontational political action – a space of resistance, opposition and struggle against a political and economic status quo.<sup>9</sup> Where white popular music is concerned, academia has been disproportionately interested in musical instances that support the confrontational political action paradigm – those instances either of white anti-apartheid musical protest or white musical protest against the current political regime.<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising – given the meta-narrative of South African history – that Afrikaans white mainstream popular music has historically been seen as an uncomplicated extension of Afrikaner nationalist ideology. These perceived co-optations of the popular by the political are evident in the following appraisal of the Afrikaans music scene of the 1950s and 60s by journalist Lin Sampson:

The history of *ligte musiek* [light music] in South Africa is intimately connected to the rise of nationalist politics in the country. The Afrikaans nationalist establishment, exemplified culturally by the SABC, but politically by the Stellenbosch intellectuals, who wanting something that would fit in with the rising sense of identity of the Afrikaner, discovered Carstens who played a type of boere jazz.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ansell, *Soweto Blues*; Coplan, *In Township Tonight!*; Veit Erlmann, *Nightsong: Performance, Power, and Practice in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> See Mark Mattern, "Cajun Music, Cultural Revival: Theorizing Political Action in Popular Music," *Popular Music and Society* 22, no. 2 (1998): 33.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Grundlingh, "'Rocking the Boat' in South Africa? Voëlvry Music and Afrikaans Anti-Apartheid Social Protest in the 1980s," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 483-514; Andries Bezuidenhout, "From Voëlvry to De la Rey: Popular Music, Afrikaner Nationalism and Lost Irony" (Department of History Seminar, Stellenbosch University, 2007), [http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/Departemente1/geskiedenis/docs/a\\_bezuidenhout.pdf](http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/Departemente1/geskiedenis/docs/a_bezuidenhout.pdf); Carol Lotter, "'The De la Rey Phenomenon' – More than a Song?," *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* 7, no. 2 (July 1, 2007), <https://voices.no/index.php/voices/article/view/490>; Gary Baines, "De La Rey Rides (Yet) Again: Afrikaner Identity Politics and Nostalgia in Post-Apartheid South Africa" (IASPM Conference, Liverpool, 2009); Hopkins et al., *Voëlvry*; Ross Truscott, "National Melancholia and Afrikaner Self-Parody in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 16, no. 1 (April 2011): 90-106; Lizabé Lambrechts and Johann Visagie, "De la Rey, De la Rey, sal jy die Boere kom lei?," *Litnet Akademies* 6, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>11</sup> Lin Sampson, "Accordion Times," *Sunday Times*, May 7, 2006.

There is little, if anything, in the documents and archives of the Music Committee of the FAK, the SABC and various nationalist newspapers to support Sampson's claim. In fact, the only real musical ideologue of the time, Anton Hartman, while supporting "traditional" boeremusiek, sharply criticised *ligte Afrikaanse musiek* – a genre he saw as a cheap commercialisation of *volksmusiek*.<sup>12</sup> Although it is indisputable that the new genre had indirectly benefitted from Afrikaner nationalist political ideology in various ways, there is no evidence to suggest that the apartheid government or any of the Afrikaner establishment cultural agencies took any active interest whatsoever in *ligte Afrikaanse musiek*. Nonetheless, even though Susan never openly identified his projects with the politics of the day, appraisals from within the Afrikaans-speaking community, too, have repeatedly framed his efforts in nationalist terms. So, for example, Danie Pretorius, in his collection of biographies of important figures in the Afrikaans music industry, wrote that "Hendrik Susan was a life-long advocate for Afrikaans music; an advocate for his language, his culture and his *volk*. He continuously campaigned for the advancement of *ligte Afrikaanse musiek*."<sup>13</sup>

In this chapter I suggest an alternative understanding of Afrikaans white popular culture under apartheid. Rather than viewing the ideological machine of the apartheid establishment as an overarching system that regulated every aspect of life, I suggest that the music of Hendrik Susan and Nico Carstens – the two leading Afrikaans musical entrepreneurs of the twentieth century – was driven primarily by commercial rather than ideological concerns. Based largely on historical and personal interviews, I construct biographical sketches of Susan and Carstens that focus on their respective collaborations with two musical entrepreneurs eponymously named De Waal and the importance of money to both these musicians. I illustrate the commercial pragmatism of their political stances, and how such positioning was calculated to cash in on public sentiments and symbols of nationalism. In this sense it can also be argued that *ligte Afrikaanse musiek* was, as Lara Allen has convincingly argued for the intersections of politics and popular culture in black urban jive, neither "panacea nor cultural weapon, neither ... pure resistance nor complete acquiescence".<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hartman, "Waarheen boeremusiek?"; Jan Bouws, "Die Afrikaner en sy musiek," in *Die kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*, ed. P. de V. Pienaar (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1968), 372.

<sup>13</sup> "Hendrik Susan was sy lewe lank 'n stroewe [sic] vegter vir Afrikaanse musiek; 'n vegter vir sy taal, sy kultuur en sy volk. Hy het hom voortdurend beywer vir die bevordering van ligte Afrikaanse musiek." Pretorius, *Musieksterre van gister en vandag*, 223.

<sup>14</sup> Lara Allen, "Commerce, Politics, and Musical Hybridity: Vocalizing Urban Black South African Identity during the 1950s,"

## Hendrik Susan – The Father of *ligte Afrikaanse musiek*

As our Afrikaans literature and poetry was born out of a national need in the last quarter of the previous century, so a call for help could be heard from the *volk* for *ligte Afrikaanse musiek* on the eve of the Centenary celebrations [of the Great Trek] in 1937.

With these words an author of a series of newspapers articles on the pioneers of Afrikaans music summarised the driving force behind the founding of Hendrik Susan's first *boere-orke*.<sup>15</sup> Although the public demand for Afrikaans music is portrayed in this article as a symptom of the growing nationalist sentiment of the *volk* – “more than a desire for mere rhythm and melody” but a longing for a musical form developing “from our own soil” – one is struck by the degree of public enthusiasm for the 1938 celebrations. However, I am less interested here in the political motivations behind the Afrikaner origin myths re-enacted by these celebrations, than in the new market the event created for every imaginable form of Afrikaner memorabilia. Newspapers of 1938 carried advertisements for goods not dissimilar to British Royal Wedding memorabilia: commemorative albums, stamps, stationary, crockery, sugar spoons and furniture embedded with oxwagon wheels. In the lead-up to the main event in December 1938 it was fashionable for men to grow beards and for men, women and children to wear Voortrekker dress at public events. This spawned a new market for “traditional” fabrics and clothing patterns. Record companies were not far behind the market trend. The recording company Gallo, for example, marketed a series under the Singer label as special “Voortrekker-*Eeufees*” editions. The founding of Susan's *boere-orke*, therefore, came at an opportune time to capitalise on Afrikaans culture.

According to Susan, he founded his first *boere-orke* in 1937 on the insistence of Pieter de Waal.<sup>16</sup> The formation of an SABC *boere-orke* has repeatedly been framed as the first sign of ideological interest in generating Afrikaans culture.<sup>17</sup> Yet, according to an agreement between the SABC and Gallo, Susan's orchestra was to make

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*Ethnomusicology* 47, no. 2 (2003): 243.

<sup>15</sup> The article from which these words are taken, part of Piet Bester's personal archive on boeremusiek, is of unknown origin. Van der Merwe, “Hendrik Susan - Hy het Boeremusiek van die misvloer gelig.”

<sup>16</sup> “Jan Crafford in gesprek met Hendrik Susan”, November 19, 1954, CATNO 56/65-66(54), SABC Sound Archives, Johannesburg.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Hamm, “‘The Constant Companion of Man’: Separate Development, Radio Bantu and Music,” *Popular Music* 10, no. 2 (1991): 155-156; Graham Hayman and Ruth Tomaselli, “Ideology and Technology in the Growth of South African Broadcasting, 1924-1971,” in *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa*, ed. Ruth Tomaselli, Keyan Tomaselli, and Johan Muller (Bellville: Anthropos, 1989), 39.

both transcription *and* commercial recordings in the SABC's studios. These recordings were released under the Gallo label with special ABC numbers.<sup>18</sup> The role of the SABC in the dissemination of commercial culture should therefore not be underestimated.

Susan, born in 1902 in Pretoria, started out as a professional musician at the age of nineteen. After a holiday in Lourenço Marques (today Maputo) in 1921, during which he occasionally performed at a hotel during dinner, he became so popular that he stayed on in the city for three years (in the process deserting his job as an accountant in a cigarette factory). "In LM", André Roux writes in predictable nationalist language, "Susan played amongst others with Vic Davis and Joe Fritelli ... in a gambling hall – still far removed from his calling as groundbreaker of organised Afrikaanse ligte musiek."<sup>19</sup>

Susan would only find this "calling" when, desperate for a job after having been fired from Lou Joppe's orchestra for his inability to play without musical notation, he approached pianist Michael de Villiers. Together they met with Pieter de Waal, who suggested the formation of a *boere-orke*s (playing only Afrikaans music) for radio broadcasting.<sup>20</sup> De Waal saw a "gap in the cultural life of the Afrikaner that could be filled by an orchestra playing *volksliedjies* [folk songs] and other tunes".<sup>21</sup> Many other musicians at the time tried to dissuade Susan from this course of action because they were extremely sceptical about the possibilities of making a living from boeremusiek.<sup>22</sup> Susan's financial predicament, although he evidently preferred not to speak about it, left him with no choice but to agree to De Waal's suggestion. It seems that Susan linked the growing demand for Afrikaans music to the increasing airtime Afrikaans-language programmes enjoyed at the SABC at the time.<sup>23</sup>

Setting up the orchestra did not proceed without problems. When, at the time, people spoke of "boeremusiek", they referred to the familiar concertina and guitar combinations.<sup>24</sup> "By means of experiment", however, Susan created a new boeremusiek sound by adding to these key instruments the violin, double bass,

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<sup>18</sup> André Roux, "Hendrik Susan," in *Hendrik Susan*, So het hulle gespeel 1 (Gallo CDTGE 6, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Esmé Euvrard, "Hendrik Susan: sy aandag is verdeel tussen stad en plaas," *SAUK Bulletin*, December 15, 1952.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Crafford, "Jan Crafford in gesprek met Hendrik Susan."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

accordion and piano and, more frequently than was usual, a singer.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, according to the accordionist Ollie Viljoen, Susan's importance can be put down to the fact that he "bridged the gap between boeremusiek and *Ligte Afrikaanse musiek*".<sup>26</sup> Susan had significant difficulty in recruiting musicians for his new venture, however, whether as a result of the unusualness of the instrumental setting among Afrikaans musicians or, as André Roux has suggested, because Susan required musicians who were able to read musical notation. After several unsuccessful advertisements in Afrikaans newspapers, the accordionist and concertinist Sam Petzer joined the team in response to an appeal in an English paper. Although by 1950 the members of Susan's orchestra were known as the "sons of the *volk*",<sup>27</sup> only three of the original band members were Afrikaans, according to Freddie Luyt:

So we changed the names of the others so the listeners wouldn't say, "Oh, this is just a lot of Rooinekke [Red necks] playing." Les Kelly, for instance, became Les Meintjies, and so on. Chris Lessing was the vocalist. Sam Petzer was on piano accordion. He used to waggie the concertina as well, so as to satisfy the traditionalists.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that political ideology influenced the assembly of the orchestra, but not merely in the sense of harnessing popular culture as propaganda, through which boeremusiek could serve as a trigger of "national consciousness".<sup>29</sup> Rather, there are signs that these musical entrepreneurs exploited the growing nationalist feelings among Afrikaners with the profit principle firmly in mind.

The man behind the commercial vision for a *boere-orke*s, Pieter de Waal, was an extremely popular radio announcer and producer at the SABC at the time. He has been described as "without a doubt one of the most colourful radio personalities of South Africa".<sup>30</sup> The story is told that, if South Africa had become a republic in the 1930s, De Waal would have been chosen as the first State President, so popular was he with the Afrikaner public. His charisma and influence over people were legendary and he had the habit of walking through a crowd of supporters "gracefully accepting the adulations of the public, like an Eastern Prince", according to Jan Schutte.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ollie Viljoen, interview by W Froneman, November 26, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> "Boeremusiek, die volgende afgesant na die vreemde," *Weekblad*, December 3, 1950.

<sup>28</sup> Trewhela, *Song Safari*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Hamm, "The Constant Companion of Man': Seperate Development, Radio Bantu and Music," 156.

<sup>30</sup> J.H.L. Pretorius, "De Waal, Pieter Willem," *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Pretoria: Butterworth for the Human Sciences Research Council, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> Gideon Roos, Pieter Naude, and Jan Harm Thomas Schutte, "Gesprekke oor Pieter de Waal", October 8, 1982, CATNO T82/674, SABC



Both De Waal and Susan's fame was directly related to their involvement in the 1938 celebrations. Their *boere-orkes* joined one of the troupes of oxwagons on their way to Pretoria for the stone-laying ceremony of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria in 1938. De Waal was responsible for some of the first external broadcasts of the SABC. He would give live descriptive commentary as the procession made its way through every town, while the orchestra would broadcast live every evening.<sup>32</sup> The oxwagon parties were received as heroes wherever they went and soon the Susan orchestra became famous throughout the country. As a result of their involvement in the 1938 celebrations, the orchestra became known as crusaders for the National Party.<sup>33</sup> The orchestra's political ambitions, however, quickly evaporated when it threatened the commercial success of the venture. Rumours started circulating that Jan Smuts's supporters – members of the pro-British South African Party – were being discouraged from attending Susan's concerts. After only a handful of patrons attended a concert in a particular Smuts stronghold, Susan reportedly confronted the local church minister and demanded that he contact the local National Party representatives for reimbursement for all the "Sappe" that had stayed away.<sup>34</sup>

This tension between ideology and commerce is also evident in the life of De Waal. Although he was hailed after his death in 1962 as a "champion for the preservation of Afrikaans", a man who "believed in the dormant talent among Afrikaners and did his utmost to discover, encourage and bring it into the open",<sup>35</sup> he was not averse to doing so profitably.

Apart from his duties at the SABC, he had several financial schemes on the side. One of these was the immensely popular *koffiehuiskonserte* (coffee house concerts), a new format of variety concert conceptualised by De Waal, which became popular in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein and was frequently broadcast on the SABC's Afrikaans service too.<sup>36</sup> The recipe for the *koffiehuiskonsert* was simple enough: a fortnightly concert featuring a *boere-orke*, one or two comedians and Pieter de Waal himself – the star of the show

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Sound Archives, Johannesburg.

<sup>32</sup> Roux, "Hendrik Susan."

<sup>33</sup> Trehwela, *Song Safari*, 51.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> M.P.O Burgers, "Huldeblyk aan Pieter de Waal", April 30, 1962, CATNO T62/50, SABC Sound Archives, Johannesburg.

<sup>36</sup> Pretorius, "De Waal, Pieter Willem."

and the main attraction.<sup>37</sup> Apart from the fact that the *koffiehuiskonserte* provided for the increasing need for Afrikaans material suitable for broadcasting, it generated a second stream of income through the charging of entrance fees, from which De Waal no doubt profited. Concertinist Neels Steyn, who joined Susan's orchestra in the 1950s, also recalled how the audience had to pay twice at these *koffiehuiskonserte* – once for attending the concert itself, and a second time to attend the dance that followed.<sup>38</sup>

In the same building where the original *koffiehuiskonserte* took place in Cape Town, De Waal owned – unbeknownst to the SABC management – two hairdressing businesses. Pieter Naudé remembered how, on one occasion, De Waal managed to get someone to sponsor him on a trip to the Far East. Not only did he sell all the souvenirs acquired on the trip upon his return but, as luck would have it, he was asked to present an educational radio programme on his experiences. Without thinking twice, he proceeded to advertise on air a presentation of his photographic slides for an entrance fee and showed his slides to a sold-out hall that Friday evening.<sup>39</sup> According to Jan Schutte, De Waal was always looking for an opportunity to make money – whether it was by forgetting his wallet at home when going out for coffee or lunch, by collecting leftover food from Johannesburg hotels to fatten his pigs for the market, or by betting on the horses.<sup>40</sup> Given De Waal's affinity for money, it is not unreasonable to assume that his partnership with Susan was primarily intended as another money-making scheme.

Susan's financial affairs were no less interesting. His gambling addiction has been glossed over by euphemistic mentions of his “generosity”,<sup>41</sup> or has at the most received the briefest of mentions in eulogies:

He had in fact confirmed on more than one occasion that he struggled throughout his life with a desire to gamble. Even his friends say that oom Hendrik had the talent of betting his money on slow horses.

But Hendrik Susan's worth has nothing to do with material things. He was a talented giant who stepped up to serve at a critical point in the history of his people.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Roos, Naude, and Schutte, “Gesprekke oor Pieter de Waal.”

<sup>38</sup> Neels Steyn, interview by W Froneman, December 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Roos, Naude, and Schutte, “Gesprekke oor Pieter de Waal.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Pretorius, *Musieksterre van gister en vandag*, 223; Roux, “Hendrik Susan.”

<sup>42</sup> “Hy het wel meer as een keer erken dat ’n begeerte om te dobbel lewenslank sy swak was. Tot sy vriende sê oom Hendrik had ’n talent om sy geld op stadige perde te verwed. Maar Hendrik Susan se verdienste het allermins met die stoflike te doen. Hy was ’n begaafde kolos wat op ’n kritieke tyd in die geskiedenis van sy mense na vore getree het om diens te lewer.” Van der Merwe, “Hendrik Susan - Hy

The possibility that Susan was in the business of music primarily for financial benefit, is a view that would have challenged the standard celebratory consideration of Susan as “having devoted his life to *ligte Afrikaanse musiek*”, a man whose “work was born out of love – love for his fellow man and love for the art of Afrikaans music”.<sup>43</sup>

In an interview with Jan Crafford for the SABC, the theme that emerged most strongly was the tension in Susan’s life between his love for the farm and his career in music – a story that had financial concerns at its centre. From the outset, Susan’s musical endeavours were characterised by pragmatism. When he and pianist Dan Bothma left to play in a night club in Salisbury in the then Southern Rhodesia in the 1920s, he learned to play the saxophone because, as Nico Carstens recalled, the “front-line” of a dance band was required to play both saxophone and violin at the time.<sup>44</sup> It seems that the saxophone was a prerequisite for commercial dance bands not only because the instrument “carried” better, but because it appealed to the predominantly English-speaking audiences that frequented Rhodesian dance clubs during the 1920s.<sup>45</sup> After a brief stint in South Africa to marry Mabel Bothma in 1926, he returned with his wife to Bulawayo. When their first son was about a year old, Susan decided to return to the family farm near Piet Retief in South Africa, because for the time being he had “had enough of music”.<sup>46</sup>

Susan had more success at music than at farming and when the economic depression struck he had no choice but to return to Rhodesia twenty months later. For Susan – never the most talented musician – the period of musical inactivity adversely affected his technique and his musical form elicited much derision from his colleagues at the time. In a regretful tone, Susan talked about his longing for the farm and the fact that, despite several claims that he was going “finally to lay down the bow”, he needed the income from his music to turn this dream into reality.<sup>47</sup> With no option but to press on, he committed himself to regaining his musical competence. Four months

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het Boeremusiek van die misvloer gelig.”

<sup>43</sup> Pretorius, *Musieksterre van gister en vandag*, 226.

<sup>44</sup> Nico Carstens, “Stene vir ’n stad,” interview by Fanus Rautenbach, April 25, 1986, CATNO TM 1432(86), SABC Sound Archives, Johannesburg.

<sup>45</sup> Arnout Malherbe, “Johannes van der Walt in gesprek met Arnout Malherbe,” interview by Johannes Van der Walt, October 18, 1989, CATNO TM 1790(89), SABC Sound Archives, Johannesburg.

<sup>46</sup> Crafford, “Jan Crafford in gesprek met Hendrik Susan.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

later he was back in Johannesburg. This unfolding of events would become a recurring pattern in his life – vows of giving up music to return to the farm, only to re-enter the world of music when money was tight.

Although most of his commentators are united in their opinion that Susan wasn't an exceptional musician, his awe-inspiring stage presence was a key ingredient of his commercial success. Since founding his first professional orchestra in 1934 – playing popular (English) dance music – he demanded that his players be dressed in black tie. Thus he started fashioning the Susan brand. Susan was a strict disciplinarian and demanded professional behaviour from the musicians in his service, who were expected to behave and dress impeccably at all times. Still, they had, without exception, the utmost respect for the man they addressed as “Chief” – even when he borrowed money from them and only repaid them years later, or not at all.<sup>48</sup> Despite all the money the band must have earned, their finances were often in shambles, whether as a result of Susan's talent for betting on slow horses or his “generosity”. On one occasion Susan couldn't afford to fill their petrol tanks to travel to their next gig and some of their instruments had to be pawned until they had been paid and could buy them back.<sup>49</sup> Apart from the joint ventures with De Waal and regular concert tours, Susan opened his own dance club, the Werda club, in Johannesburg before the outbreak of World War II. At first the Werda club wasn't particularly successful as some of the patrons were annoyed that only Afrikaans music was played and accused Susan of playing *hotnotsmusiek*.<sup>50</sup>

It is hard to typify Susan's music, which ranged from translated cowboy-songs like *Huis op die plaas* (Home on the Range), to *In Stellenbosch vloei daar 'n waterstroom* (A Stream Flows through Stellenbosch), an Afrikaans version of the German song *In München stadt ein Hofbrauhaus*. On one end of the repertoire spectrum the band played Susan's own compositions, of which *Huisie in die berge* (Little House in the Mountains), is probably best known. When Susan's orchestra started broadcasting for the SABC they soon ran into a serious problem: a severe lack of notated Afrikaans music. Since Susan's music-making was dependent on notation, their major resource was the FAK songbook. But with their daily broadcasts during the 1938 celebrations the orchestra soon exhausted this limited repertoire. As Susan later remembered in an interview, the orchestra was busy broadcasting a *koffiehuiskonsert* when the news came that the SABC would no longer broadcast any songs from the FAK songbook and, since the orchestra was to broadcast live the following evening, there was no alternative but to

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<sup>48</sup> Bodenstein, interview; Steyn, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Steyn, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Crafford, “Jan Crafford in gesprek met Hendrik Susan.”

compose a few songs of his own. He reportedly sat down and, with the help of Pieter de Waal, wrote four songs that were broadcast live the following day.

Both the farm/music theme and the commercialisation of nationalist sentiments are evident in the lyrics of the song. Its serene domesticity, set off against nature, would have resonated perfectly with nationalist sentiments of the time:

Huisie in die berge

*Little House in the Mountains*

'n Huisie so klein  
en alles so rein,  
is al wat ek verlang.

*A dear little house  
all perfect and pure  
is all my heart desires.*

Waar soet windjies fluister  
en ek altyd luister  
na die voëltjies se gesang.

*Where sweet breezes whisper  
and I always listen  
to little birds' song.*

Dierbaar ou huis in die berge.  
Daar in die ou Transvaal.  
Dierbaar ou huis in die berge.  
Daar wil ek woon en dwaal.  
Huis van vriendskap en vreugde.  
Hier besing in my moedertaal.

*Dear little house in the mountains.  
There in the old Transvaal.  
Dear little house in the mountains.  
There I will wander and dwell.  
House of friendship and wonder.  
Praised be in me mother tongue.*

Dierbaar ou huis in die berge.  
Daar wil ek woon en dwaal.

*Dear little house in the mountains.  
There I will wander and dwell.*

At the other end of the spectrum, much of the band's repertoire reflected an affinity with the sweeter strand of British and American 1930s dance band music. The standard orchestral setting (violin, guitar, piano, accordion), was sometimes supplemented with novelty instruments like the saw or the Hawaiian guitar. It is clear that Susan cast his musical net as wide as possible to ensure mass appeal. Yet the distinction between boeremusiek and other

musical genres remained relatively clear with the use of the concertina and banjo and an adherence to the standard boeremusiek form of two supplementary themes and minors. Although the influence of popular jazz forms are evident in, for example, the 1949 recording of the *Kliprivierpolka* featuring Neels Steyn on the concertina, boeremusiek elements rarely crept into this repertory.<sup>51</sup> Although the band was called a *boere-orke*, boeremusiek was but a part of a line-up of different styles of music. The accusation that Susan supposedly “played *hotnotsmusiek*” shows that audiences still reacted sensitively to boeremusiek because of racial stereotypes adhering to its origins.

Neels Steyn recalls the precarious relationship audiences had with boeremusiek at the time. He often arrived to play at a widely publicised dance, only to be asked by the organisers not to play boeremusiek that evening as there were some important people attending. As the evening wore on, however, the band would pick up on the audience’s restlessness – for they had come to hear Neels Steyn play the concertina. And after the first concertina number, everyone would be on the dance floor, even the most important guests.<sup>52</sup>

The reception of boeremusiek was about to change, however, as Susan’s orchestra landed a contract with African Film Productions on the eve of their departure on a tour of North America.<sup>53</sup> Susan accepted the contract, cancelled the tour and the band featured eponymously in several Afrikaans films, including *Kom saam vanaand* (Join us tonight), *Hier’s ons weer* (Here we are again) and *Altyd in my drome* (Always in my dreams).<sup>54</sup> The contract also included the recording of LPs and concerts in film theatres around the country. Susan remembered one of these pre-film concerts in Durban. The orchestra was contracted to play a 40-minute programme before the start of the movie. They once had a week-long run playing every evening in movie theatres in the predominantly English-speaking city of Durban, and there was not a single open seat at these concerts featuring only Afrikaans music.<sup>55</sup>

*Kom saam vanaand* gives an indication of what a typical Susan concert was like. Widely hailed as the first Afrikaans musical, the plot is incidental to the variety concert featuring Susan’s orchestra, up-and-coming opera

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<sup>51</sup> See Hendrik Susan and his orchestra, *Hendrik Susan: Die veelsydige meester*, vol. 1, So het hulle gespeel (Gallo CDTGE 6, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Neels Steyn, 1976, CATNO TM 2826 (76), SABC Sound Archives, Johannesburg.

<sup>53</sup> Crafford, “Jan Crafford in gesprek met Hendrik Susan”; Roux, “Hendrik Susan.”

<sup>54</sup> Pierre de Wet, *Kom saam vanaand* (African Film Productions, 1949); Kirstein, *Hier’s ons weer*.

<sup>55</sup> Crafford, “Jan Crafford in gesprek met Hendrik Susan.”

singers, and the Afrikaans Laurel and Hardy team, Al Debbo and Frederik Burgers. A promising young opera singer loses the use of her legs when a piano falls on her as her family is moving house due to financial pressures. Her only hope is an expensive operation abroad, which her father can't afford. Her sister's suitor decides to organise a benefit concert to help finance the operation. This, then, provides the conceit for Hendrik Susan's musical contributions. What could pass as boeremusiek, features only rarely between predominantly trite vocal numbers. Towards the end of the film, the backdrop on stage changes from random notes on a G clef to one that depicts a gigantic springbok. Although the springbok was (and still is) a South African national emblem, the stance of the animal, captured in mid-air, suggests more convincingly the emblem of South Africa's national rugby team. Disproportionately small, an oxwagon ostensibly inspired by the Great Trek, is depicted to the right of the springbok. The stage is backlit and the orchestra fades in. One expects to hear a traditional song of some kind, but instead there follows a medley of sentimental tunes. First a light-hearted love song sung by Jurie Ferreira with the lyrics *poem-pa-doem klop my hart* (poom-pa-doom beats my heart), the sound of which is rather predictably imitated on various instruments in the band. Then follows a tune featuring, of all things, suspended hand-played chimes. The medley ends with one of the few boeremusiek numbers in the film, where the minors section is employed to feature the primary instrumentalists in a farewell of sorts.

The dissonance between the banal rugby iconography, serious political emblem, and sentimental music, is striking. It is a dissonance that not only characterises *Kom saam vanaand*, but also Susan's entire musical undertaking and his partnership with Pieter de Waal. Both De Waal and Susan's financial inclinations support the argument that the relationship between politics and popular culture in white Afrikaans twentieth-century South Africa was more complex than merely one of co-optation by the political. Under the influence of De Waal – who, as noted earlier, had a keen eye for commercial opportunities – *ligte Afrikaanse musiek* commercially exploited nationalist sentiments. The role of boeremusiek in this commercial venture cannot be underestimated. Susan's orchestra – going by the name of *boere-orke*s – helped audiences tap into a nationalist message of boeremusiek, but in such a way that all the “unsavoury” connotations of the genre could be put aside. Dressed in sophisticated eveningwear, boeremusiek was not only tucked away between more urbane musical numbers in an act of legitimisation, but, on par with the slapstick humour of Debbo and Burgers, could simultaneously be appreciated as a curiosity of Afrikaner culture rather than as a mode of expression.

## Nico Carstens – The King of Boeremusiek

Nico Carstens loves Cadillacs, he has been married seven times (twice to two of his five wives) and he despises being called the “King of Boeremusiek”. These are some of the most oft-encountered commonplaces about Nico Carstens in the popular press. Today it is difficult to comprehend Carstens’s enormous local fame and commercial success as a composer and accordionist during the 1950s and 60s. Before he broke away from Susan’s orchestra in December 1950 he earned around one thousand pounds a year – a top salary at the time. In the first year on his own his earnings had skyrocketed to fifteen thousand pounds a year.<sup>56</sup> Although he sold more than two million records over the course of his career, and Eddie Calvert’s cover version of his hit *Zambesi* reached number 13 on the UK hit parade in 1956, his music has all but disappeared from the South African commercial music market.<sup>57</sup>

To many of his former colleagues his disassociation with the genre of boeremusiek in later years came as a surprise. According to pianist Taffy Kikillus, who played with Carstens in Susan’s orchestra, he had “made name for himself” as a boeremusiek musician. They often played boeremusiek together and it was evident that Carstens had enjoyed it. His opinions of boeremusiek also remained a mystery to his first wife, Elise, since boeremusiek was their “bread and butter” at the time.<sup>58</sup> Asked why he made so many records that could be described as boeremusiek, yet came out so strongly against the genre, his response to me was simple: at the time “it was an easy way to make money”.<sup>59</sup>

Were it not for the efforts of another entrepreneur by the name of De Waal – Anton de Waal – Carstens might never have cashed in on the Afrikaans market. Anton de Waal and Carstens met around 1951. De Waal was, according to Ralph Trehwela, “quiet and conservatively dressed” and “looked exactly what he had been trained to be – a conscientious accountant”, yet he had a “shrewd assessment of the world around him”.<sup>60</sup> De Waal described his recipe for success in South Africa “to be born a Jew, have an Afrikaans name, and go to an English-language private school”.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ollie Viljoen, *Nico Carstens: Kunstenaar en Mens*, n.d.

<sup>57</sup> “UK Top 40 Hit Database”, n.d., <http://www.everyhit.com/>.

<sup>58</sup> Viljoen, *Nico Carstens: Kunstenaar en Mens*.

<sup>59</sup> Nico Carstens, interview by W Froneman and Stephanus Muller, March 19, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Trehwela, *Song Safari*, 58.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



Although he made a career as an Afrikaans lyricist and music publisher, De Waal's real name was George Gunn. In the early 1930s he worked with Danie Bosman, and together they composed in excess of one hundred songs with English lyrics.<sup>62</sup> This partnership ended in failure when De Waal returned empty-handed from a trip to England. Music publishers there showed no interest in the songs and his attempts to approach band leaders Billy Mayerl, Jack Hylton and Henry Hall were unsuccessful. Hylton reportedly pre-empted Gunn's sales pitch with the words "Don't even bother if it is music you want to show me. I have more than enough."<sup>63</sup> It was only when Gunn decided to focus his efforts on the untapped Afrikaans market, that he changed his name.<sup>64</sup>

Carstens has given several slightly different versions of how the two men met. De Waal was a director at the publishing house Trutone when he phoned Carstens one day. Carstens, who had just returned from a gig and a night of partying, was dead tired, but De Waal convinced him to go down to the Trutone offices, for he had written lyrics he wanted Carstens to set to music. According to De Waal the lyrics were rather stupid and it would either be extremely successful, or a complete flop. "I tended to agree with him – they were just stupid", remembered Carstens.<sup>65</sup> Although the lyrics weren't Carstens's cup of tea, a tune came into his head, which he jotted down quickly while De Waal took a phone call. That was how the hit *Hasie* (Bunny) was created. Al Debbo's version eventually sold more than 100 000 copies.<sup>66</sup>

The publishing house De Waal-Carstens was born out of this initial collaboration. After the success of *Hasie* came other hits like *Ek ry met die trein* (I'm on the train) and *Rickshaw boy*. De Waal provided the lyrics and titles for most of these songs, after which Carstens would compose the music.<sup>67</sup> "I would never have composed so many tunes if De Waal hadn't forced me", said Carstens. "He would literally stand behind me and say 'Write!' and I would write".<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Jan Pohl, "Ontmoet die sanger wat sing van 'My ryperd, my brakkie, en ek'," *SAUK Bulletin*, January 3, 1953.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> In a photograph of the Transvaal Provincial Audit Staff taken in the early 1930s, he still appeared under the name Gunn. See Trehwela, *Song Safari*, 55-56.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>66</sup> Carstens, "Stene vir 'n stad."

<sup>67</sup> Nico Carstens, interview by Kosie Landman and Andries Cornelius, June 25, 1963, CATNO RM 517(63), SABC Sound Archives, Johannesburg.

<sup>68</sup> Carstens, "Stene vir 'n stad."

Unlike Hendrik Susan, Carstens had no inclination for gambling. But, while De Waal managed the financial side of the business, Carstens squandered away his share on a hedonistic lifestyle of cars, parties and women. Stories abound about his recklessness with money. He gave his nightclub to his wife Tosca as a wedding gift in a marriage he described as a “four-year long lost weekend”. He would ask her: “What will we do today? Watch a movie or buy a new car?”<sup>69</sup> He only drove a car “until its ash-tray was full”.<sup>70</sup> Once he bought an expensive hunting rifle for a one-day Bushveld shoot, only to abandon it in his hotel room the next day.<sup>71</sup> When asked why he never pursued an international career, his answer was “Oh, I don’t know. Perhaps I wanted to take a blonde in a Cadillac down to Durban“. “He is a terrible businessman”, said his former wife Anne.<sup>72</sup>

Today Carstens lives in a two-room flat at the back of a house in the Cape Town suburb of Bellville. He doesn’t seem to have any income from royalties, due to disastrous business decisions in the past, and relies on the goodwill of his friends for survival.

It is in the context of his partnership with De Waal – a man with clear commercial savvy – that a connection between the astounding amount of money Carstens made (and squandered on his extravagant lifestyle) and his acclaim as “King of Boeremusiek” is to be understood. Regardless of the fact that he never called his band a *boere-orke*, the titles and cover art on many of the 1950s and 60s record sleeves show a clear predilection for boeremusiek iconography and nationalist symbolism, even though the musical content sometimes differed quite substantially from the expectations created by the sleeves. His album *Wisseldans* depicted dancers in Voortrekker dress in the background, when, at the time, the costume was only donned on days of special significance and functioned largely as political emblem.<sup>73</sup> Titles like *Koffiehuiskonsert* and *Ons hou braaivleisaand* (We’re having a barbecue evening), recalled the traditions constructed by Pieter de Waal and Hendrik Susan. The sleeve of *Lief en leed* (Love and sorrow) with singer Jurie Ferreira is replete with oxwagon, Cape-Dutch homestead and young Afrikaner lovers. *Boere Wisseldans* featured sketches of a concertina, accordion, banjo, guitar, piano and drum set – a clear allusion to a *boere-orke*.

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<sup>69</sup> Viljoen, *Nico Carstens: Kunstenaar en Mens*.

<sup>70</sup> Carstens, “Stene vir ’n stad.”

<sup>71</sup> Trewhela, *Song Safari*, 60.

<sup>72</sup> Viljoen, *Nico Carstens: Kunstenaar en Mens*.

<sup>73</sup> The sleeves and discographical information of the albums mentioned here can be viewed at <http://www.rock.co.za/legends/nicocarstens/index.html>

A most interesting example is *Authentic South African Boeremusiek by Nico Carstens and his Orchestra*, an album recorded in 1957 in the “most modern studios on the African continent” and released by Capitol in the USA.<sup>74</sup> The front cover shows dancers, predictably enough in Voortrekker dress, set against a Cape-Dutch building and described in the sleeve notes as an “attractive ... photograph, actually taken in South Africa and superbly authentic in showing the costuming of the good folk who regularly dance to boeremusiek”. This image is a far cry from a typical Carstens dance in Lin Sampson’s description:

The Carstens Caravan with its backing band and often two or three vocalists, would tool into a small Karoo town in a cortege of swanky Cadillacs. They would set the place on fire. Farmers would rattle into town with their wives in big earrings and Toni home perms sitting beside them in the bakkies [pick-up trucks].<sup>75</sup>

The back cover depicted a series of monuments to Afrikaner achievement: the monolithic building of the dominant electricity provider, Escom, a Witwatersrand gold mine, the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, the Voortrekker Church in Pietermaritzburg, and the National Anglo-Boer War Memorial in Pretoria.

With *Springbokland* (Springbok Country) De Waal and Carstens prefigured what would later become the money-spinning genre of the rugby album. The springbok on the cover was supplemented with tracks that referenced images associated with rugby: *Springboklied* (Springbok song), *Boerewors en koffie* (Boer sausage and coffee) and *Pale-toe* (a term referencing the act of scoring a try).

Released in 1966 – the year of apartheid architect Hendrik Verwoerd’s assassination – the sleeve of *Dis feestyd* (It’s festival time) featured a *volkspele* troupe waving two (old) South African flags. Tracks recalled traditional life on the farm: *Blikaspaai* (a traditional Afrikaner children’s game), *Uit die outyd* (From olden times), Susan’s *Huisie in die berge*, *Kersvet en konfetti* (Candle wax and confetti), and rather counterintuitively, *Boere ruk-en-pluk* (Boere rock-and-roll) and *Meerkat samba* – hardly music that would have accompanied *volkspele*.

The multiple commercial recordings Carstens made with well-known concertinists like Rassie Erasmus, Neels Steyn and Nic Potgieter (despite insisting in later years that the concertina is his least favourite instrument), are further testament to the De Waal/Carstens enterprise’s cornering of the boeremusiek market.

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<sup>74</sup> Album information viewed on September 17, 2011 at <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/b005jt9klw/mitrasites-20>

<sup>75</sup> Sampson, “Accordion Times.”

Part of the explanation for Carstens's resistance to boeremusiek, despite his evident dabbling in the genre, must be sought in his rather extraordinary musical sensibilities that evidently exceeded that of mainstream Afrikanerdom of the time. From a very young age, while his parents were listening to Afrikaans crooner Chris Blynnaut, he was fascinated by Dave Brubeck, Benny Goodman and the big band sound.<sup>76</sup> When Carstens started playing for Susan in 1945 he described himself as being "jazz crazy". He and Taffy Kikillus frequented the jazz nightclubs of Johannesburg. In comparison with these clubs – the Bal Tabarin, His Majesty's and Ciro's – Hendrik Susan's Werda club didn't even qualify as a nightclub in Carstens's eyes.<sup>77</sup> Rather than being merely a rented premises where Afrikaners would dance on a Saturday evening, the nightclubs featured the "groot kokkedore" (big guns) of the jazz scene, playing every night from 10 pm until the last customer left. "The 'nightclub boys' looked down on us Afrikaans musicians", Carstens remembered.<sup>78</sup>

The rift between the English and Afrikaans music market in the 1950s and 60s is evident in the frequency with which people in the music industry changed their names. While De Waal adopted an Afrikaans name, many Afrikaans musicians anglicised their names in order to make it in the predominantly English-speaking jazz world. Jannie Fourie who started out with Susan and Carstens, for example, later played in London and became the renowned jazz guitarist Johnny Fourie. Carstens's entrenchment in the Afrikaans market, and the fact that he loved the limelight and hardly ever collaborated with famous musicians, made a shift to the jazz world unlikely. The downside of relying on the Afrikaans market was that, as time wore on, Carstens felt severely restricted in his musical expression. He complained, for example, that his music, despite being largely instrumental, was only ever played on the Afrikaans radio stations, and never on the English ones.<sup>79</sup>

Carstens's most well-known boeremusiek numbers, including *Jampotpolka*, (Jam Pot Polka), *Warmpatat* (Hot Sweet Potato) and the less locally infused *Klokkiewals* (Little Bell waltz), reveal little of his affinity for progressive jazz. Despite being improvisatory and atmospheric and speaking of seemingly infinite articulative and ornamental resources, the overall formal and harmonic structures of these numbers are contained and formulaic. In

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<sup>76</sup> Viljoen, *Nico Carstens: Kunstenaar en Mens*.

<sup>77</sup> Carstens, "Stene vir 'n stad."

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Lisel Krige, "Nico Carstens verander sy deuntjie," *De Kat*, February 1993.

Carstens's composition of boeremusiek numbers, including several *vastrappe*, *walse*, *setiese* and polkas, he employed the basic boeremusiek structure of two complementary themes with minors.

The up-beat *Jampot polka* and *Warmpatat* follow the boeremusiek recipe almost to the letter – *Warmpatat* usually inclusive of the minors – yet Carstens infuses it with rhythmic sophistication and vitality. In many of Carstens's renditions he contrasts instrumental techniques prevalent in boeremusiek concertina playing – octave unison playing, downward-sliding major sixth tremolos, and the octave tremolo *skommel* movement – with his most distinctive, and much copied, musical gesture: a rapid and loud movement of the hand down the keyboard utilised as rhythmic-textural excursion.

Even when the accordion steps back and plays a supportive role, Carstens is a master at filling in harmonic gaps and adding syncopative rhythmic interest with bursts of rapid staccato chords. Hearing him weave his magic, one comprehends how he got away with choosing female vocalists based on their looks and little else and often went touring with second-rate musicians: “as long as they knew how to hold their instruments, it was fine”.<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand the slow *Klokkiewals* is testament to Carstens's inimitable legato playing and voicing on the accordion. In one version the waltz starts out with a simple descending melody, sensitively accentuated with little appoggiaturas and grace notes (see Figure 19). After the second statement of the theme, featuring increasing ornamentation, the accordion swells out chordally with the ballooning and deflating loudness of Carstens's masterful phrasing. He then further complicates the main theme, introducing another voice by holding on to the first note of each measure.

Although Carstens's virtuosity shines through despite the imposed boundaries of the boeremusiek standard, the commercial demands on his compositional efforts was clearly a source of frustration:

I have been branded the King of Boeremusiek and been limited in my compositions for far too long. I do play and compose that type of music, which is wonderful for dancing. But it is not all I can or want to do.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Carstens, interview.

<sup>81</sup> “Ek is te lank bestempel as die boeremusiek-koning en beperk in my komposisies. Ek speel en skryf wel daardie soort musiek, baie lekker vir dans. Maar dis nie al wat ek wil of kan doen nie.” Marina Möller, “Nico Carstens: hy laat voete steeds jeuk,” *Sarie*, July 19, 1995.

## Klokkiewals

Carstens/De Waal

Figure 19: Transcription by the author of Carstens's rendition of *Klokkiewals*.

Part of his obsession with the latest Cadillac, which he described as a “*lekker* prestige car”, can be understood as a reaction to this frustration. He remembered with some glee the story of jazz saxophonist Stan Murray’s surprise when he picked him up in a pearly white two-door, hard-top Cadillac convertible. They were to play at the inauguration of the town hall in the rural settlement of Kuruman in the Northern Cape. Murray couldn’t believe, so he later told his nightclub buddies, that there he was travelling in an expensive Cadillac to play in front of a small Afrikaans farming community with an Afrikaans band – and that while he himself usually got around in a small Singer.<sup>82</sup>

Despite all his claims to the contrary, Carstens competed in boeremusiek competitions as late as 1992. When asked why he did this, his response was that he competed tongue in cheek only to “make a statement”.<sup>83</sup> Competing with an accordion instead of a concertina, he already made a musical statement, but in a heavily critical article on his participation in a boeremusiek competition, the TBK suggested that Carstens questioned the white origins of boeremusiek:

<sup>82</sup> Carstens, “Stene vir ’n stad.”

<sup>83</sup> Krige, “Nico Carstens verander sy deuntjie.”

For a while now, since 1984 to be precise, the renowned accordionist Nico Carstens has been running away from the boeremusiek ghost that haunts him. In that year he stated in *Huisgenoot* that the hoarse screaming of the concertina sounds just like someone suffering from laryngitis! ... In 1989 he took the project of denigration further and reportedly said that “if you have heard one concertina, you have heard them all ... Boeremusiek is nót boere-musiek. Boeremusiek comes from blacks!” According to Nico boeremusiek only employs two chords and he is adamant that he has never played boeremusiek. What nonsense such statements are! ... Now, in 1992, we hear that he has been chosen to compete in TV1’s boeremusiek competition. We anxiously await the true facts behind this suspenseful serial, because we don’t believe he forgot about the boeremusiek ghost merely for the R25 000 prize money.<sup>84</sup>

The mutual respect between Carstens and Stan Murray, alluded to above, was born of their shared interest in the rhythms of the Cape – presumable that of the *vastrap*. “I like the boeremusiek as I knew it in the Cape ... with a *gammat* beat”, Carstens has said on occasion.<sup>85</sup> He relates:

I spent a lot of my youth on farms, and on every farm you’ll find labourers who take out their guitars after work or on weekends. They taught me the basic chords and the strumming of that particular Cape Coloured beat, which I could never find in the Transvaal. The only people who could do it were people like Stan Murray who also grew up in Cape Town. That’s why Stan and I fitted in so well in those old recordings like “Outa in die Langpad”. Eddie Wyngaardt, also from the Cape, is another.<sup>86</sup>

When he was asked to describe his style his response was:

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<sup>84</sup> Vir ’n geruime tyd, sedert 1984 om presies te wees, is die vermaarde trekklaavierspeler, Nico Carstens, besig om van ’n boeremusiekspook wat hom agtervolg, weg te hardloop. In daer jaar verklaar hy in die *Huisgenoot* o.a. dat die hees geskreue van ’n konsertina net soos laringitis klink! In 1989 voer hy die aftakelingswerk verder, en hy sou gesê het “As jy een konsertina gehoor het, het jy hulle almal gehoor ... die ossewa en konsertina het seker hulle plek ... boeremusiek is nié boeremusiek nie ... boeremusiek kom van die swarte af!” Volgens Nico maak boeremusiek van slegs twee akkoorde gebruik, en hy sê omomwonde dat hy nog nooit boeremusiek gespeel het nie! Die loutere onsin van sulke stellings! Nou in 1992, verneem ons dat hierdie einste Nico Carstens gekeur is om aan TV1 se boeremusiekkompetisie deel te neem. ... Ons wag in spanning op die ware feite agter hierdie spannende vervolgv verhaal, want ons glo nie dat dit net die R25 000 se prysgeld is wat vir Nico van sy vrees vir boeremusiekspoke laat vergeet het nie!

Opskommel, “Die draai van die wiel,” *Opskommel*, August 1992, 2.

<sup>85</sup> *Gammat* is a racist term referring to a “coloured”, chiefly male person, especially from the Western Cape. Krige, “Nico Carstens verander sy deuntjie.”

<sup>86</sup> *Outa in die langpad* is a popular boeremusiek standard composed by concertinist Neels Steyn. The title translates as “outa on a long journey”. *Outa* is an archaic racist term referring to an older coloured or black man. Trehwela, *Song Safari*, 56.

I didn't follow anybody's style ... but I grew up in Bellville South, a very poor area of the Cape, where I came in contact with many Cape Coloureds. I got the movement and everything from them.<sup>87</sup>

Born in 1926, Carstens's interracial musical childhood would have occurred before the "forced removals" of the late 1950s tore the mixed communities of Cape Town apart. Rumours have persisted that Carstens's first wife and childhood sweetheart, Elise, is in fact "coloured" and that Carstens himself, despite being classified "white", had a coloured mother. In a recent interview, however, Carstens was careful to stress that his parents were of Dutch descent and identified himself and his family growing up as "ordinary churchgoing Afrikaners".<sup>88</sup> Be that as it may, the term "boeremusiek" clearly had different meanings in Cape Town than in the northern parts of the country, and perhaps this was what Carstens was trying to impress on boeremusiek audiences by participating in the competition. On the other hand, the boeremusiek competitions broadcast on SABC television channels during the 1980s and 90s might merely have provided rare opportunities for Carstens to remain in the public eye, since his style of music has seen a steady commercial decline after the heyday of his band in the 1960s.

Only a handful of Carstens's vast number of recordings are available in the mainstream music market today. A DVD of a nostalgic evening with friends such as Flippie van Vuuren (who has passed away since) supplement the sparse visual material of this giant of Afrikaans music.<sup>89</sup> The DVD, recorded in 2009, bears ample testimony of Carstens's genius, even long past his prime.

Carstens's life has been that of a rock star: a hedonistic lifestyle of fast cars and beautiful women, a cross-dressing son and a conversion in later life to the Eastern spiritual philosophy of Sant Mat. None of these facets of his life would have qualified him as poster boy for Afrikaner nationalism. His relationship with boeremusiek and his relationship with money are intimately connected: he didn't care much for either and easily disposed of both. Today he continues to compose at his keyboard every day, this time the music he really likes, in the hope of leaving something behind for his children.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Carstens, interview.

<sup>89</sup> Encore Music and Ingrid Promos, *Encore! Herleef 'n goue era*, vol. 1, 2009.



## Conclusions

Cultural life in South Africa had been of political significance ever since the Nationalists gained power in 1948, during which time there was a conscious effort to bolster their legitimacy by actively encouraging and sanctioning aspects of the arts that were commensurate with their ideology. What the National Party (NP) needed were some seriously minded artists, writers, and composers who would be willing to incorporate NP ideology into their works ... Cultural colonialism was a propaganda tool to support the fascist ideals of the NP, who in turn used all possible means to legitimise their claim to racial superiority. To this end, the cultural apparatchiks set about finding and promoting white talent.

Thus South African-born composer David Hönigsberg described the all-encompassing, all-controlling “cultural scheme of Grand Apartheid”.<sup>90</sup> Although Hönigsberg wrote about his experiences as a composer of art music, Afrikaans popular music, too, has been read predominantly as facile extension of the apartheid propaganda machine. In describing Susan’s and Carstens’s collaborations with the business savvy entrepreneurs Pieter and Anton de Waal, a more mundane premise behind their involvement with boeremusiek comes to light below the nationalist ideals suggested by the honorary titles “Father of *ligte Afrikaanse musiek*” and “King of boeremusiek”. Boeremusiek made money.<sup>91</sup>

That is not to say that their efforts represented mere recreation or an “innocent time-out from political pressures”. Rather, mostly under the influence of their collaborators, they tapped into the commercial market for Afrikaner symbols created from an awakened nationalist consciousness. For Susan the promotion of boeremusiek corresponded with the enthusiasm – both political and commercial – provoked by the 1938 celebrations of the Great Trek. Nico Carstens, under the influence of his business partner Anton de Waal, channelled his indisputable musical genius towards the Afrikaans music industry and spun out compositions and records that, when not frivolously politically escapist, made liberal use of nationalist metaphors. The circumstances behind their turn to boeremusiek and their personal relationships with money – Susan the notorious gambler and Carstens the big spender – further challenges the view that their music-making was regulated by the “cultural apparatchiks” of the National Party.

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<sup>90</sup> David Hönigsberg, “Chamber Symphony 1998,” *Current Musicology* (Fall 1999): 140-141.

<sup>91</sup> Stephanus Muller has challenged Hönigsberg’s claims on different but related grounds, see Stephanus Muller, “To the Editor,” *Current Musicology* 74 (Fall 2002): 251-254.

Whereas one could argue that “traditional boeremusiek” was constructed around ideas of Afrikaner nationalism, commercial boeremusiek was made with profit as motive. In this way, Afrikaans popular culture exploited in commercial ways the growing nationalist sentiments amongst Afrikaners since 1938.

## Outsourcing Ethnomusicological “Experience”: On the Role of Theory and the Ethics of Collaboration

In 1971 Marcia Herndon defined the musical occasion as “an expression of the shared cognitive forms and values of a society, which includes not only music itself but also the totality of associated behaviour and underlying concepts”.<sup>1</sup> Herndon’s definition not only assumed that societies function as shared systems of thought and action, but also that music is code for these communal “cognitive forms and values”. In other words, Herndon proposed that one study the musical event as a microcosm where the musical and social relations within the event pointed towards larger societal structures.

What strikes me when I attend boeremusiek events is just the opposite of what Herndon proposed: if not the absence of shared ideas, then at least its deconstruction in moments of intense personal expression. I wanted to study the boeremusiek event not as a code that needed to be deciphered, but as a musical way of being. While the rest of this thesis aims at situating boeremusiek within a range of broad historical and contemporary social, political, literary and discursive contexts, I was interested in writing a chapter on the inner logic of the event. I was seeking to describe the minutiae of the contemporary boeremusiek occasion – who attended, what they wore, what they ate, what they talked about, what the expressions on their faces were, how they related to the music, what activities they engaged in. I wanted to free musical expression, and expression made possible by music, from its external contexts – at least momentarily. In the contemporary South African environment in which I live and work, where even the most private moment is imbued with political meaning and where history is habitually reduced to moments of oppression or resistance, I was trying to take seriously the idea of music as entertainment, music as escape and to focus on the moments that defy our embroilment in larger socio-political contexts. I was looking to write a poetics of a boeremusiek event – who did the event allow people to be and how did it allow them to behave?

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia Herndon, “The Cherokee Ballgame Cycle: An Ethnomusicologist’s View,” *Ethnomusicology* 15, no. 3 (1971): 340.

In 2009 my family and I joined members of the Boeremusiekgilde on a twenty-four-hour train journey from Johannesburg to Cape Town to attend the organisation's national competition. I considered this a trial run for the "event anthropology" I was attempting. While being a totally unforgettable experience, I returned from the weekend even more confused than when I set out. My journal contained a bundle of written snapshots: a group of so-called "coloured" people on the platform in Kimberley dancing exuberantly to the sound of the concertina and banjo; the infantile jokes of fully grown men – one in particular insisted on blowing a conductor's whistle at each stop (and there were many) with the words "The next station is the police station"; one of the female musicians in the dining car typing away furiously on her Blackberry to sort out some crisis at the office; my eyes brimming with tears at seeing a group of ten-year olds play their instruments with singular energy and vitality; kids soaked and covered with foam on a slippery slide; a woman with the scars of a hard life etched on her face, swaying unselfconsciously to the music, cigarette in hand. I had no idea what to make of these impressions. They did not translate into the sort of systematic narrative I had expected to emerge from fieldwork, certainly not anything enabling of an "anthropology". Yet I found these impressions deeply meaningful and emotional.

#### Exhibit A: An e-mail from my supervisor, Stephanus Muller, dated 8 October 2009

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*Dear Willemien*

*I had to conduct an interview for the EOAN group on Monday and chatted with Aryan Kaganof (the filmmaker) about Saturday and your project. Today he sent me a very interesting e-mail, suggesting that these events are wonderful opportunities to get some image documentation and suggesting a friend of his who might be interested in working with you. We have to talk about the possibilities of this. There is something about these events (of which I have attended but one) that can possibly best be shown in photographs, perhaps accompanied by a form of deconstructive descriptive discourse. Aryan's comment that you might be uncomfortable with such an arrangement arises from me mentioning that these events pose challenges to you that are quite different from intellectual ones.*

*Best, Stephanus*

The source of my discomfort was the hunch that what I found meaningful, moving, and upsetting at these events could not be harnessed or systematized within disciplinary understandings of methodological propriety and rigour. It seemed to me that the disciplinary language of ethnomusicology could not accommodate the intimate moments of personal expression that, for me, stood at the centre of boeremusiek events.

For these reasons I was immediately drawn to the possibilities of extending Kaganof's idea of visual documentation into a visual anthropology of a boeremusiek event. Outsourcing the photography was another matter altogether. I was deeply troubled by the thought that, while I would attend the particular event, and had built up a sense of what was going on by attending many others, the photographs would not be the result of my personal experience. I experienced it as a loss of control. Employing a professional photographer would entail a substantial, and risky, financial investment.<sup>2</sup> I would have to trust someone else to realise my vision. Simultaneously, and perhaps ironically, I also worried about the impact this sort of outsourcing would have on the methodological credibility of my research within an ethnomusicological disciplinary context.

My work, like that of many other South African music researchers, is situated in an intellectual climate where the boundaries between musicology and ethnomusicology have largely fallen away due to a host of institutional and political reasons. The disciplinary indeterminacy of South African music studies makes international dialogue very difficult. Yet, this challenge to disciplinary boundaries is perhaps South African music studies' greatest potential contribution to international discourses. After 1994, the existence of separate societies for ethnomusicologists, studying black music, and musicologists, studying white music, resonated badly with the apartheid policy of separate development. As a result, the Symposium on Ethnomusicology and the South African Society of Musicology merged in 2006 to form The South African Society for Research in Music with a journal accommodating all research on music: *The South African Journal of Music Studies*. South Africans, quite simply, could not afford to hold on to the premises separating musicology and ethnomusicology. One of these premises is that fieldwork experience should stand at the centre of ethnomusicological knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful for the financial assistance of the Documentation Centre for Music (Domus) at Stellenbosch University that enabled this project.

First-hand face-to-face experience in the field is still considered the bedrock of contemporary ethnomusicology.<sup>3</sup> My apprehension about outsourcing the photography is explainable in light of Barz and Cooley's claim that "fieldwork is experience, and the experience of people making music is at the core of ethnomusicological method and theory",<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between technological mediation and face-to-face field experience has best been articulated in the context of ethnomusicological film, where the latter is considered an outcome of experience in the field. Hence John Baily's evident pride at being the "lone operator" in producing his fieldwork movies, responsible for the shooting, sound and editing.<sup>5</sup> Despite Simone Krüger's suggestion that ethnomusicological film is concerned with "depictions of reality" where the aim is "documentation, rather than fiction, and thus reporting, not inventing, whatever is in the world", the proponents of ethnomusicological film rely implicitly on the fact that film is not an "invisible" medium.<sup>6</sup> Baily and others' films are, as a rule, accompanied by a study guide offering detailed explanations of editing decisions. In fact, the recognition of film as a medium is one of ethnomusicological film's saving graces. It is not film's "depictions of reality" that assure its authenticity; rather, it is the fact that film is determined by personal experience, assumed as the basis for ethnographic understanding. Viewed this way, fieldwork experience itself, and its translation into film, are seen as separate activities. In John Baily's words, the "fieldwork movie ... is an adjunct to anthropological or ethnomusicological fieldwork. The camera is used as a research tool (replacing to a large extent the audio recorder), and some of the footage is in due course edited into a film, which becomes a kind of research report".<sup>7</sup> It is still experience gained in the field that is ultimately seen as governing the decisions that inevitably need to be made when shooting and editing film. It is the ethnographic authority of the fieldworker *behind* the film that lends the film its authenticity, its realism, and its ability to mediate experience for its audiences by letting them imagine that they were there themselves. While the suspension of

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<sup>3</sup> Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14; Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Barz and Cooley, *Shadows in the Field*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> John Baily, "The Art of the 'Fieldwork Movie': 35 Years of Making Ethnomusicological Films," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18, no. 1 (June 2009): 60.

<sup>6</sup> Simone Krüger, *Experiencing Ethnomusicology* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 196.

<sup>7</sup> Baily, "The Art of the 'Fieldwork Movie'," 59.

disbelief experienced by the audience in audio-visual formats is perhaps greater, the function of the fieldwork movie is not much different from that of the written fieldwork report.

What I was proposing to do was to change the dynamics of fieldwork experience altogether. By employing a photographer I removed myself as the ethnographic authority “behind” the photographs – an authority based on experience. By employing photography instead of film I was deliberately inviting an abstract and less determined relationship to develop between the photographs and “reality” itself – moving beyond disciplinary sanctioned forms of mediation. These photographs would not serve as documents of my fieldwork experience.

### Theory in Ethnomusicology

Experience in the field is important in current ethnomusicology because it forms the foundation of its epistemology. This is particularly evident in the call and response section of a recent issue of *Ethnomusicology* dealing with the role of theory in the discipline. Timothy Rice, taking the topic of music and identity as example, expresses his regret at the fact that, while individual “gems” have appeared in the journal, there has been little attempt by authors to engage with each other, or with perspectives on identity from outside the field. As a result, the discipline of ethnomusicology has not developed its own disciplinary-specific theory on identity.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the obvious differences between the responses Rice’s call elicited, the underlying consensus is that, at least in the current state of the discipline, theory-building is, and should be, a data-driven inductive process. For Kofi Agawu, theory “is dependent on the findings of area studies”, and it remains unclear why a theory of identity “developed from, say, a study of urban musicians in Ibadan ought to form the basis of a study of Powwows in North Carolina”.<sup>9</sup>

Suzel Ann Reily and Ellen Koskoff see the making of “grand theories” as an inherently difficult and even avoidable task. For Reily “the best we can hope for, in our search for ‘partial truths’, is to contribute one small piece of the massive global puzzle”.<sup>10</sup> Koskoff feels that “we should be spending our time honoring the differentness and integrity of the smaller gems of our ethnomusicological inquiries, while at the same time searching for the

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy Rice, “Disciplining Ethnomusicology:,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 318-325.

<sup>9</sup> Kofi Agawu, “Response to Rice,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 327.

<sup>10</sup> Suzel Ana Reily, “Discipline or Dialogue? (A Response to Timothy Rice),” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 332.

most appropriate and useful levels of discourse in which to use theories/settings that perhaps work for more than one gem at a time, but that can be discarded or reformed at will”.<sup>11</sup>

Her call for a disciplinary theory that can be “discarded or reformed at will” is echoed by Mark Slobin who argues that “we should be rigorous and respectful as we add bricks to the wall of consensus. But the pieces need to be more lego-like, unsnappable and resnappable in new combinations as our field changes, often more quickly than do our minds and methods”.<sup>12</sup>

T.M Scruggs views the demand of the book publishing industry for readable ethnomusicologies as one of the reasons why theoretical discourse has sometimes not received the attention it should. Yet, a deep scepticism for theory belies his comments. He writes, for example, that one way of foiling the academic presses’ view of theory as alienating audiences is “not to bury our insights in unnecessary ‘academese’ writing. ... Convoluting, excessively dense writing is most often a foil for lack of insight ... Rather than real engagement, our interactions are often reduced to a cursory dropping of citations”.<sup>13</sup>

The reason for these ethnomusicologists’ wariness of theory, and their inability to see its formation as anything other than by inductive process, is that theory potentially challenges one of the most ingrained premises of postcolonial ethnomusicological endeavour, namely that ethnomusicologists should negotiate the field from a position of uncompromised openness to potential field-specific experiences. I would argue that such openness is construed not only as a methodological dictum, but as an ethical imperative. While ethnomusicology has engaged with the associated problematic of an “emic” perspective and has grappled with the notion of “original experience” and the possibility of its translation, it has not yet considered the potential of a more creative engagement with theory.

Martin Stokes and Jane Sugarman hint at a different understanding of the relationship between theory and fieldwork: that fieldwork is itself steeped in theory and theoretical premises that mostly go unexamined.<sup>14</sup> Theory,

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen Koskoff, “Response to Rice:,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 331.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Slobin, “Rice’s ‘Crisis’,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 338.

<sup>13</sup> T. M. Scruggs, “Response to Rice,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 334-335.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Stokes, “Response to Rice,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 339; Jane C. Sugarman, “Building and Teaching Theory in Ethnomusicology:,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 343.



in other words, does not only enter ethnomusicology inductively; experience in the field is deeply mediated by theory, whether acknowledged or not.

If we define ethnomusicology as the study of “people making music” or “music in/as culture”, surely there are many more potential sources of information and avenues of likely insight than human informants and first-hand experience in the field alone. Organised groups of musicians or listeners increasingly represent *themselves* in and through various media, instead of waiting on the ethnomusicologist to do the work for them. There are no obvious reasons why the trusted methods of studying the Venda or the BaAka or the Cherokee should extend to studying post-industrial music scenes like contemporary boeremusiek.

Exhibit B: The national chairman of the Boeremusiekgilde, Willie Mynhardt, being interviewed by the crew of the Afrikaans television channel kykNET. He usually wears glasses, but has removed them for the occasion.



Figure 20: The national chairman of the Boeremusiekgilde, Willie Mynhardt, being interviewed by the crew of the Afrikaans television channel kykNET.

Not only do contemporary boeremusiek enthusiasts enact their own strategies of documentation and preservation, but the boeremusiek scene is awash in discourses of its own making – a Facebook group of more than a thousand members, regular newsletters, commemorative publications, and monuments. In addition, the events themselves are heavily mediated, recorded onto DVDs and sold, captured on private camcorders, broadcast on TV, viewed through viewfinders, posted and commented upon on Facebook. Technological mediation makes explicit that there is no such thing as “original” experience. Just as the human subjects we study change their behaviour when a camera is pointed at them, so our experience in the field is mediated and shaped by processes of abstraction – even if they seem as irresistibly real as a film or photograph. The question here is: what is the role of the ethnomusicologist when a music-culture is more than able to represent itself, when “experiencing” the field increasingly means looking at other people’s abstractions, when “experience” becomes, as it were, auxiliary? When does the ethnomusicologist become no more than only the music researcher?

My project as a music researcher departs from the fiction of the ethnomusicologist as an uncompromised agent. My research embraces theoretical mediation – not in the form of testing hypotheses provided by general theories of culture and cultural activities – but by using theory pragmatically to create new avenues for interpretation. My turn towards explicit theoretical mediation was necessitated by a host of practical concerns: having, for example, to fit “fieldwork” in around being mother to two young children, my limited equipment and photography skills, and, given my financial investment in the project and the fact that this was a once-off event, having to come up with a specific brief to ensure that I end up with useable images. Theoretically framing the event, as I demonstrate elsewhere in my research, was more than a practical concern: it was an interpretative act. An act where the border between creating and documenting, inventing and reporting on reality is blurred. In this sense, my project is an aesthetic ethnography that, in the words of Robin Patric Clair, explores the role of the scholar as artist “who both renders and creates an image which both reflects and creates a reality where the artist is part of both the creation and the audience”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Robin Patric Clair, *Expressions of Ethnography: Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 90.

In other words, I approach theory playfully to create new situations for analyses and interpretation. My aim in embracing theoretical mediation is not the construction of a brick wall of consensus – even if it is constructed of lego blocks as Mark Slobin would have it. Theory, as I see it, creates virtual worlds in which reality “as it is” becomes embodied. No one can escape this process. But embracing theoretical mediation opens up opportunities for creative activity – for scholarly play.

The meanings of musical events are not “out there to be uncovered”. And even if they were, mediated music-cultures increasingly represent their own music-making in articulate ways, rendering the services of the ethnomusicologist obsolete. We need to rethink our roles as scholars of music and the barriers that a politically correct postcolonial ethics have imposed on our sense of play. This is the new crisis of representation: not that our technologies of representation mediate reality in obvious ways, but that representation itself, based on experience and rooted in the desire to tell the story of music from the perspective of the other, has become a mass produced commodity. What, then, can the ethnomusicologist bring to the table that the average iPhone user can’t? Interpretations that shed new and surprising light on musical events. Interpretations that do not necessarily correspond to the views of the insider. Interpretations that hinge on the ability to compel, rather than the ability to depict the truth.

## Postscript

With outsourcing the photography came the proviso of relinquishing some control on how the images are used beyond the scope of the project. This caused some tension between Zimmer and I as he prepared some of the images for his exhibition *Kotiljons* that was shown at iArt gallery in Cape Town during May and June 2011. Our disagreement centred on the selection of images, the combination of text and image at the exhibition and the conflicting demands of an academic project and an art project. In the end the images were exhibited without any text.

Despite this conflict, or indeed because of it, my interactions with Zimmer and Jacqueline Nurse at iArt gallery had a profound impact on my own selection of images for the purposes of the photo-essay in Chapter 5 and the text that accompanies it. Yet, it also highlighted the problems that can arise from collaboration.



# Chapter 5

## Duty and Pleasure:

### A Visual Ethnography of a Contemporary Boeremusiek Event

Photography by Niklas Zimmer

#### Orientation

The Boeremusiekgilde's calendar is punctuated by an annual competition in October, when, after a series of rigorous local knock-out rounds, the best bands from all over the country compete in different categories. In 2010 the competition made way for a two-day festival on 8 and 9 October in celebration of the organisation's twenty-first anniversary. The festival took place at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria – a much stigmatised site in post-apartheid South Africa representing “the foundational myth of exclusive Afrikaner power”.<sup>1</sup>

The photographs that form the content of this chapter were commissioned from photographer Niklas Zimmer specifically for the purpose of creating a visual ethnography of this event in the form of a photographic essay. Zimmer accompanied a group of musicians and supporters on a twenty-hour bus journey from Cape Town and followed their preparations for and participation in the event. The theoretical concept behind the creation of the images was the Bakhtinian notion of the “carnavalesque”. In communicating my vision to the photographer, I relied heavily on Angela Mitchell's exposition of Bakhtin's ideas and highlighted phrases I thought would be of particular significance in the context of the boeremusiek event.<sup>2</sup> I have incorporated these keywords in the word art on the first page of the photo-essay.

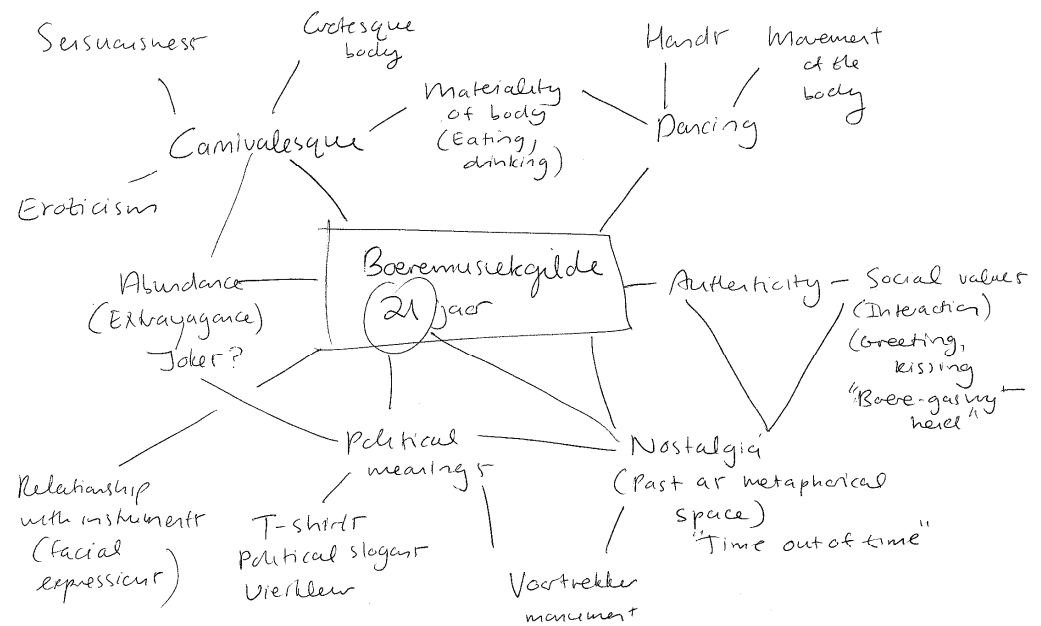
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<sup>1</sup> Albert Grundlingh, “A Cultural Conundrum? Old Monuments and New Regimes: The Voortrekker Monument as Symbol of Afrikaner Power in a Postapartheid South Africa,” *Radical History Review* 2001, no. 81 (October 2001): 96.

<sup>2</sup> Angela Mitchell, “Carnavalesque”, 2004, <http://www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/carnival01bk.htm>.

Earlier in this thesis I discussed the mechanisms of subjunctive pleasure in boeremusiek discourse. With the photo-essay I wanted to overturn the balance between the discursive and the affective, or at least, show the converse tension that frames of pleasure exert on frames of duty at contemporary boeremusiek events. I wanted to take seriously the emotional and mundane meanings of current boeremusiek and how, from the perspective of pleasure, the discursive space of duty takes on a dimension of irony, mockery and parody. Further to highlight the distinctive spaces of pleasure and duty, images depicting duty were taken in black and white film as an additional aesthetic intervention. In the shadow of the Voortrekker Monument, looming over Pretoria like the legacy of apartheid looms over whiteness in South Africa, I wanted to attempt the impossible. I wanted to explore the possibility of white expression disentangled from political associations. I conceived of the carnival space of the boeremusiek event as a space of *personal* expression, with the main focus on the materiality of the body and its intimate relationship with the music. As the outline of my ideas, written two months before the event, indicates, this necessarily had to fail (see Figure 21).

Nevertheless, I hope to have achieved a sense of the dialogic – to use Bakhtin’s word. How the event was a space of both laughter and seriousness, disorder and order, immediacy and transcendence, bingeing and economy, lust and chastity, madness and reason, impulse and calculation.<sup>3</sup>



17 Aug 2010

Figure 21: Outline of ideas on the project, August 17, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> List of oppositions taken from Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Verso, 2002), 386.

## Permission and the Ethics of Representation

The project at hand raises several ethical concerns, some of which have been dealt with earlier. Perhaps the most pressing matter is the issue of “permission”. Permission for visual representation differs from situation to situation and has to be understood in a socially and culturally appropriate context.<sup>4</sup> Since the photographer took more than 2400 photographs over the course of three days, it was impossible to obtain written consent from everyone involved.<sup>5</sup> At the time the photographs were taken, I had, however, obtained institutional consent for the project from the chairman of the Boeremusiekilde, Willie Mynhardt. In any event, I would argue that in the densely mediatised context of the boeremusiek event, public photography was freely permitted and accepted. In addition, my presence as researcher at the festival as well as that of the photographer in my service was announced from the stage at the start of the main event on Saturday 9 October 2010. Some of the people pictured in the photographs included in the essay formed part of the group travelling from Cape Town with the photographer, got to know him on the long journey, and were familiar with the aims of the project. Zimmer’s style of photography, as I observed, was overt, rather than covert, and therefore offered participants the possibility of refusing to be photographed, should they have wanted to.

Turning to the issue of representation, Marcus Banks has argued that questions regarding social researchers’ right to represent those they work with are not confined to visual representations, but that they are questions that impact on social research in general.<sup>6</sup> In this sense there is no conceptual difference between disseminating representations of others visually or by written means. The theories that underpin one’s approach to representation then play an integral role in one’s ethical stance.

I fully accept that the stories I am telling with these photographs are my own, and by extension, partial and subjective and that they are, in addition, mediated by Zimmer’s interpretation of my brief. Nevertheless, I hope to have taken advantage of the mystery that is photography – a mystery so eloquently described by renowned South African photographer David Goldblatt:

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<sup>4</sup> Marcus Banks, *Visual Methods in Social Research* (London: Sage, 2001), 131; Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, Second Edition. (London: Sage, 2006), 40-42.

<sup>5</sup> For a consideration of the ethics of photography at public events see Rose Wiles et al., “Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research,” Monograph, October 2008, <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/421/>.

<sup>6</sup> Banks, *Visual Methods in Social Research*, 129.

This is what intrigues me [about photography]. That this exchange takes place – this physical, chemical, optical interchange between two events in space and time, with the mediation of the photographer. And that mediation is obviously critical. It's an extraordinarily intriguing process. I couldn't have put it in those terms at the time, but I think this is what attracted me from the beginning. The ability to go out and find and hold bits of the world outside, fragments of life, and reveal them in a way that was both of that reality and different from it; the fact that the photograph is irrefutably a physical part of reality and yet is not that reality but an abstraction from it.<sup>7</sup>

The practical difference between written and visual representation is, of course, the matter of anonymity. While one can use pseudonyms to hide the identity of informants when writing, it is not always possible to protect the identities of individuals when employing visual representation. In mitigating this issue I have been led by the notion of harm to individuals. According to Sarah Pink there exists no single method of preventing harm to individuals engaged in visual ethnography; rather, “in order to prevent harm being caused, a researcher needs a good understanding of local notions of harm and anxiety, how these may be experienced, and how they relate to images”.<sup>8</sup> I have to the best of my abilities tried to consider notions of harm as I selected the images and wrote the text for the photo-essay. I believe that, should some of the images be considered controversial, they would only be so within the institutional context of the BMG – concerned as the organisation is with its image to the outside world – and that they could not be construed as harmful to the individuals concerned. Furthermore, the visual representations in this chapter should not be read apart from the other materials and perspectives represented in this thesis. Read together, I believe that the benefits of including these images with their explanatory richness override the risks of including them here.<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> Okwui Enwezor, “Matter and Consciousness: An Insistent Gaze from a not Disinterested Photographer,” in *Fifty-One Years David Goldblatt* (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona and Actar, 2001), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank Niklas Zimmer for suggesting “Saturday Morning Fever” as accompanying text to the shoe images.







“Thank you that we may still start off the day with a reading from the Bible and prayer – as it befits our *Boerevolk*”, Sandra Mynhardt, secretary of the Boeremusiekilde, comments on the pro forma ritual of theological justification. The reading is from Psalm 150: “...praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals ... Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” The verb form “let us praise” hovers uncomfortably between accommodated exuberance and subjunctive pleasure.



A time for excess. Bare feet, *braai* and boeremusiek on the evening before the main event. “I like this photograph”, a member of the organisation’s Facebook page comments on a similar image. “It is clean, wholesome, family fun. Young and old with their musical instruments inside the fragrant cloud of a *boereworsbraai*. Oh, how I miss this!”





Beyond the hazy images of dancers, the Boer bows over his concertina from the Voortrekker pulpit as if in prayer.



The oxwagon wheel behind the band and a banner to the right of the stage proclaim the festival theme: “We have to know where we come from, in order to know where we are going.” The location of the festival is imbued with special subjunctive significance. “I believe our ancestors would have wanted us to perform boeremusiek here at the Monument”, it is declared.



I come across a Chinese couple walking around these deflatable monuments to fun, cameras flashing. What do they make of the randomness of their surroundings? This interplay of mirth and monolith?











A distinguished member of the Boeremusiekgilde stands guard over insignia, trophies, lifetime achievement awards, institutional paper work, implied hierarchical chains of command and disposable plates.



Boardroom boredom at the annual general meeting.







Families camp out under the trees outside the hall. Mothers butter sandwiches from plastic tubs of margarine. The stalls around the periphery sell fake Playboy tattoos, flags of the old Transvaal Boer republic, Bafana Bafana T-shirts, home-made jams. Here one might acquire a hat from a Nigerian or a belly piercing.









A series of lengthy speeches by boeremusiek dignitaries follow. The speakers are struggling to make themselves heard over the din emanating from outside. The chairman seems nervous. A letter from honorary president Pierre Retief is read to the increasingly disinterested audience. “Just as the tree of the Biblical parable carrying no fruit runs the risk of being cut down, so it is our duty frequently to water and fertilise the tree of boeremusiek.” The reader puts up his index finger in an aside: “*Water*”, he emphasises, “to *water* it.” The two trousers of tradition.

As if lounging around a *braaivleisvuur*, camping chairs and plastic furniture, beer and banjo highlight the intimate domesticity of male leisure. Boeremusiek off duty.










The joys of indulging in nostalgia.





Oddly masculine the “Member for Life” badge sits with lace and perfume. Organic metaphors abound in the Boeremusiekgilde’s organisational thinking. “It was [one of the] principles of the Guild in those days to apply people according to their particular talents”, Gerhardt Olckers says in a reflection on the organisation’s history. “You didn’t necessarily have to play music. We applied people that could organise and people that could lay tables and sweep floors (that was usually my job!) ... Everyone had a particular duty.” He continues to expound the particular role women have played in building the organisation. “This just goes to show that if you want to set something into motion, maintain it and move it forward, put a woman in charge.”



BOEREMUSIEKGILDE

LEWENSLANGE LID

PATRYS





These members of Die Kaapse Affodille Dames Boereorke (The Cape Daffodils Ladies Boere Band), pictured on the left, are the undisputed princesses of the boeremusiek world. They are favourite acts at arts festivals and gloss magazine pages as the new faces of boeremusiek. Their latest album is entitled *Jy sal dit nie glo nie* (You won't believe it), because who would have thought that a ladies band could sound that good. They bask in their gothic sexuality.



The *volksmoeder* of the foundational myth of Afrikanerdom depicted on a frieze inside the Voortrekker Monument.







A group of young teenagers treated tourists to *boeredanse* at the Voortrekker Monument, when the sound of boeremusiek lured them down to the event below to show off their wares – a special surprise to mark the occasion. There are not enough boys to go around and, as a result, some of the girls assume the role of male dancers dressed in jeans. After performing a couple of sets to recorded music, they invite onlookers to join them in their dance. Girls in matronly bodices turning their paces with post middle-aged men; pre-pubescent boy with menopausal woman. After the dance has finished, the wife of one of the older men takes a picture of her husband and his young dancing partner.





pleasure, /pleɪzə/, □ n. 1 The distortion of the face in what could pass as ecstasy. 2 A crazy wig catching every ray of light. □ v. To press together bodies in movement.





There is poetry to the hands of dancers variously entwined, of old marriages still tactile.  
“A man’s thumb is his steering rod”, one woman jokingly observes.







Saturday Morning Fever.



Pleasure beyond the call of duty?











## Pleasure Beyond the Call of Duty: Boeremusiek as “Low-Other”

The interaction between pleasure and duty, between the affective and the discursive meanings of boeremusiek, defines the genre on various levels. This interaction is not of the same kind one would expect to find in general considerations of musical cultures, but constitutes an opposition that is deeply embedded in the local. The very notion of a common Afrikaner sociality – the Afrikaner everyday boeremusiek recalls in its imagery, metaphors, linguistic clichés, origin myths, and performance practice – is an uncomfortable topic in post-apartheid South Africa. Amidst the forces of “globalization and fashion and political correctness”, as Rian Malan has described his affinity for the music, boeremusiek is “somewhat subversive”.<sup>1</sup> It evades the “stark rhetoric of power”; the “spectacular terms of oppression and revolution”.<sup>2</sup> Against the highly charged political context of Afrikaans culture, past and present, boeremusiek emerges as a space of contestation, featuring instances of both resistance and surrender to dominant notions of Afrikanerdom. In this respect, the contemporary postcolonial context compellingly illustrates that the popular is, in Eric Lott’s words, neither “some unfettered time-out from political pressures, a space of mere ‘leisure’”, nor a “wholly administered and determined” form of “dominant-culture reinforcement”.<sup>3</sup> Rather, the meanings of boeremusiek develop in the space between these two extremes – a space of subjunctivity.

The photograph in Figure 22 encapsulates for me the mechanisms of subjunctivity at work in boeremusiek discourse. “Oom Piet’s heirloom, which was restored by Flippie Steyn. The guitar is now *so* beautiful that he had to have a glass box made for it”, the caption reads. As this image illustrates, the actual pleasure of music is subjunctivised according to three different strategies: defence, discipline and display.

By framing notions of pleasure within discourses of nationalist duty as in the rhetorical question: “Who said boeremusiek can’t be fun?!” the glass box protects its contents from the outside world. It is as a form of self-

<sup>1</sup> Rian Malan and Ilza Roggeband, “Die afgrond se rand,” *Beeld*, November 28, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> These phrases are taken from Shaun de Waal, “Mosaics of Melancholia,” *Mail and Guardian*, December 10, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Lott, “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture,” 6.

preservation that the various strands of conservation and the musical and social authenticities the boeremusiek world leans towards, need to be understood. Yet my focus in this thesis was not to explore notions of authenticity solely as means of affirming social identities, but to consider the impact of these discourses on the experience of actual pleasure at boeremusiek events. Hence, in Chapter 1 I argue that the subjunctivising of reality at boeremusiek events can be understood as a form of cultural mourning; a symptom of the uncomfortable position of whiteness in contemporary South Africa. In this sense the rhetorical question above serves as reminder of the impossibility of playing at notions of Afrikaner nationalism innocently.

Dwelling in the spaces of the potential rather than the actual is also a strategy of discipline. At the safe distance of the museum cabinet, the (potentially) pleasurable contents are carefully named, catalogued and captioned. The racialised raptures of dance and music have been circumnavigated by similar means in the origin myths that situate boeremusiek as an extension of European culture. These myths, elaborated on in Chapter 2, represent an attempt to distance boeremusiek by rational means from the affective experiences of the body. At the same time, the hybrid origins of the genre have determined significant parts of the genre's ontology, not least the "tears of joy" trope.

The disciplining of boeremusiek is particularly evident in Chapter 3, where Jo Fourie's engagement with the genre and her attempts to notate boeremusiek tunes and classify them according to genre and even, at times, according to race, is described. Yet what emerges from her diaries is, in the end, a continuous struggle for ascendancy between the discursive and the affective meanings of boeremusiek.

But the glass box is also a display, reminiscent of the glass cabinets filled with mass-produced trinkets and china that are "too good" for everyday use at the dinner table, which adorned many an Afrikaner home of a previous generation. In this context the pleasures of boeremusiek is an extension of nostalgic Afrikaner kitsch. It is



Oom Piet se erfstuk wat Flippie Snyman ook restoreer het. Die kitaar is nou só mooi dat hy 'n glaskas daarvoor moes laat maak!

Figure 22: Oom Piet's heirloom, *Die Vastrapper*, November 1997, 7.

not so much the actual pleasures of boeremusiek that one relishes, but the fact that it provides an avenue for indulging in the stereotypical collective imagery of the Afrikaner. In this sense boeremusiek is a souvenir of the past, a sentimental reminder of days gone by.

Just as the tension between duty and pleasure dominates the boeremusiek scene, duty and pleasure dominate the metanarratives of these perspectives, retrospectives and speculations on boeremusiek. Rereading the Ernst Heins quote I used to frame Jo Fourie's ethnomusicological adventures, I was struck by the fact that Heins's implied criticism of Kunst might equally well apply to this thesis:

[I]n spite of his apparent love for and involvement with Javanese music Kunst, the fervent string-quartet player, never touched a gamelan instrument except for measuring purposes. We can only guess how different *Music in Java* (and perhaps even the field of ethnomusicology itself) might have been if he had. The reason for his attitude, which we find hard to understand nowadays, was the tremendous social barrier that divided colonizer and colonized before Indonesian Independence (1949). In the colonial situation it was unthinkable for a European to play in a Javanese or Balinese gamelan, or even take private lessons.<sup>4</sup>

I have not taken the route of learning to play the concertina in order to situate myself as an insider. In fact, I have chosen to proceed primarily from the discourses around boeremusiek rather than from "the music itself". "The music itself" is kept at a distance in this thesis, much like it has been kept at a distance in boeremusiek discourse.

Writing "around" boeremusiek is, however, not to be understood as evading the notion of musical affect. Writing against the silent imperative of inscribing boeremusiek in an uncomplicated complicity with apartheid, I have actively sought out situations where not only the effects of duty on pleasure are revealed, but also the converse: the effects of pleasure on duty. The notion of boeremusiek kitsch and the commercial exploitations of Afrikaner iconography in the boeremusiek of the 1950s and 1960s, occupy the middle ground between discursive and affective interpretations of the boeremusiek scene. Boeremusiek kitsch and the pragmatic politics of Hendrik Susan and Nico Carstens illustrate how politics can become the means to apolitical ends. While buying into Afrikaner nationalist iconography, Chapter 4 shows how the Afrikaans music industry was at times driven by interests that in actual fact challenged the values of official Afrikanerdom. It is in the attempt to witness the two-way interaction between pleasure and duty that the photo-essay included in Chapter 5 becomes a crucial element of my argument.

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<sup>4</sup> Heins, "The Netherlands," 110.

Considering possible intellectual precedents for understanding the interaction of pleasure and duty in boeremusiek discourse and practice, one thinks here first of Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque. "As opposed to the official feast", Bakhtin explains,

one might say that carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of the time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and complete.<sup>5</sup>

Bakhtin's vision of carnival is unashamedly utopian. He sees carnival as an anti-authoritarian force that could mobilise groups against official culture, where a "new mode of interrelationship between individuals ... who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers" could be established.<sup>6</sup>

Others have been more sceptical of carnival's revolutionary capacities. For Terry Eagleton the weakness of Bakhtin's celebratory view of the carnival is blatantly obvious:

Indeed carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare's Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed fool.<sup>7</sup>

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White note the links between Bakhtin's carnivalesque and the development of symbolic anthropology some thirty years later, the second intellectual precedent for the pleasure/duty juxtaposition.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is not difficult to note the similarities with, for example, Victor Turner's liminal moment, where the inversion of social categories creates a sense of *communitas* between members partaking in a ritual of hierarchical reversal.

In my view, both the models of carnival and ritual fail to explain the interaction between pleasure and duty in boeremusiek discourse and practice. Despite talk of a "wealth tax" to be imposed on all white South Africans as reparation for apartheid and controversies over the struggle song "Shoot the boer", boeremusiek gatherings are not

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<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

about the development of a political white consciousness.<sup>9</sup> And even if they were, it is difficult to see how such cohesion would translate into political action.

Although there are many points of connection between the carnival of Bakhtin's description and a typical boeremusiek event, there are also some obvious differences. Perhaps the most important difference is that the official displays of order at boeremusiek events are not coterminous with political power, but rather refer to injected layers of institutional hierarchies. In other words, symbols of power and order at these events do not reflect, mimic or even parody power structures that have a life outside of the event. The institutional paraphernalia of the Boeremusiekgilde, its constitution, mission and vision, annual general meeting, institutional chains of command and disciplinary codes, surely are not prerequisites for musical gatherings to take place. The question is: what do these displays of order accomplish, even when they are, at times, blatantly opposed or irrelevant to what is happening unofficially?

More than merely addressing the inner logic of the boeremusiek event, this question impacts on the understanding of boeremusiek more broadly. In all of its history, boeremusiek has been constructed as the "low-Other", connected with the nether regions of the body, the lower classes of society, the rock-bottom of musical taste. The construct that is boeremusiek emerged from decades of defending the genre, its performance practice, its racial history and its moral legitimacy against the opposing ideals of Afrikaner nationalism. Yet, as with all low-Others, there is a

striking ambivalence to the representations of the lower strata ... in which they are both reviled and desired. Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a *political* imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing "low" conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other.<sup>10</sup>

The wild and weird charm of boeremusiek and its suppression is mutually dependent. In the absence of external discourses of subjugation in contemporary South Africa, the boeremusiek world manufactures or at least upholds them from within. Beyond reading discourses of duty as the subjunctivising of pleasure, it is possible to read the displays of order, and not the displays of festivity, as the donning of a mask. Submitting oneself to outdated

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<sup>9</sup> See Murray Williams, "Tutu Calls for Wealth Tax for Whites," *Cape Argus*, August 12, 2011, <http://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/tutu-calls-for-wealth-tax-for-whites-1.1116617>. "ANC granted leave to appeal 'shoot the boer' ruling," *Mail and Guardian*, September 22, 2011, <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-22-anc-granted-leave-to-appeal-shoot-the-boer-ruling>.

<sup>10</sup> Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 4-5.

patriarchal hierarchies dedicated to nationalist duty, wearing name badges and uniforms, considering boeremusiek to be forever vanishing, reverting to rhetorical questions like “Who said boeremusiek can’t be fun?!” or statements like “We are so proud of boeremusiek” create an implied presupposition of hostility towards the genre, a subjunctive space of opposition. Read in this way, pleasure emerges at boeremusiek events precisely because the presence of official discourses renders it somewhat illicit. Boeremusiek represents an “underground” Afrikaner self; an underground self that can only emerge in the aesthetic, racial, moral, and social polarities of “high” and “low”.

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