

CHAPTER 3

A CULTURAL- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOERS DURING THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, research validated the fact that music is a fundamental human resource, which influences the body, mind and emotions of society. It will, however, be necessary to produce some insider perspectives of the Boer people during the war in order to understand affect and meaning of Boer vocal music. Shepherd and Wicke (1997:7) also argue that it is impossible to isolate the affect and meaning of music “from their embeddedness in social and cultural processes and the everyday lives of people.” This is corroborated by Philip Tagg (1991:144), who states that “a viable understanding of culture requires an understanding of its articulation through music as much as a viable understanding of music requires an understanding of its place in culture.”

This chapter will be from a cultural-historical perspective with the main purpose of leading the research towards analysing affect and meaning in vocal music as a vehicle for understanding the Boer psyche. Understanding of the Boer and his or her experiences during the war will be captured by a thick description, which conceptualises experience.

3.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

The Anglo-Boer War broke out on 11 October 1899 between the a coalition of two former Boer republics, namely the *Oranje-Vrijstaat (OVS)* and the *Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR)*, and Britain. It was a conflict characterised by Afrikaner Nationalism and British Imperialism. A selection of random items regarding the war gives an indication of the wide range of materials available in archival manuscript collections. Diaries, memoirs and letters help to unravel the experiential world of the Boers. Many quotations are used, as it is only by quoting

the exact words of the writers of these sources that one is able to empathise and understand the psyche and experiences of the Boers during the war.

3.2.1 Background history

The Anglo-Boer War was fought by opposing forces, each satisfied that their cause was just and with a determination to win. As a conflict characterised by Boer Nationalism and British Imperialism, it could not be resolved without military confrontation. The Boers were fighting the war for national survival and were fired by genuine patriotism. This is reflected in the words of the *ZAR* Secretary of State F.W. Reitz, “I know the character of the Boers, their stubbornness and desire for independence. They will continue to resist and then a real people’s war will begin for every inch of ground to the last drop of blood” (Izedinova 1977:58).

As England was a respected military power, it was almost unthinkable that two small South African Republics, the *OVS* and the *ZAR*, could have challenged her. The emotion of the Boers regarding the war is poignantly conveyed in the diary of Elsa Levisieur, a well-educated lady from Bloemfontein. She wrote: “We are in the right; we feel that it is a stand Afrikanerdom is making against the Britisher, who little by little is creeping up and trying to take our resources for himself” (Anglo-Boer War Museum Archives [ABWMA] 6032/1). She measured the Boers against the mighty British war machine and alleged that “we are fighting for our independence - we are small and weak ... while England, if she loses, begins her downward career - loses her prestige in Africa, nay in the eyes of the world, as she is the stronger power and yet, if there is a just God, surely her punishment will come!” (ABWMA 6032/1).

The war diary of Alie Badenhorst provides an excellent example of a woman who reacted actively to the challenge of surviving a war. Despite the fact that she was a pacifist, due to religious convictions, she expressed patriotic sentiment: “It is true that I had always been against the war with England, knowing they were a powerful people; still I could not wish to give up our country, loving our freedom as I did” (Badenhorst 1923:79).

3.2.2 Lack of animosity between warring parties

Despite the fact that the two warring parties blamed each other for the war, there is substantial evidence to prove that they were almost sorry they had to fight each other. A newspaper clipping from a British newspaper states “that there is no personal animosity shown by the burghers against their opponents in arms ... [and] they look upon them [the British] as innocent men fighting a bad cause” (Free State Archives Depot [FAD] A296).

Winston Churchill, a British journalist, also highlighted this lack of animosity in a tribute to the Boers who captured him: “[T]hey were not cruel men, these enemies. That was a great surprise to me, for I had read much of the literature of this land of lies, and have fully expected every hardship and indignity” (FAD A155/133/2). When he was deported to another camp he gave two of his captors a slip of paper on which he requested that these people be treated well should the British catch them, as they had shown courtesy and kindness to British prisoners. He wrote: “[W]ith much respect I bade good-bye to this dignified and honourable enemy” (Churchill 1900:124).

Sister Izedinova, a Russian nurse who came out to nurse the Boers during the War, corroborates Churchill’s view: “No one will deny, I think, that the Boers, through their humane and I would add Christian treatment of prisoners, fully demonstrated the correctness of their approach to military behaviour between civilised peoples” (Izedinova 1977:141). She contrasted this to the treatment meted out by the British who, she said, achieved submission through the ill-treatment of the so-called non-combatants, women, children and old people (Izedinova 1977:141).

Sarah Heckford, a British trader, also gave an account of Boer goodwill when she related praise by a fellow Englishman of the Boers who had beaten them at Nooitgedacht. According to her, he stated that “[t]hey treated the wounded well and gave them everything they wanted. There was no ill feeling between us. When we were leaving, I shook hands with them and thanked them. One old fellow

brought us some pumpkins and things and said we hadn't burnt his house so he must give us something" (Allen 1979:218).

The writing of another British war correspondent illuminates the uniqueness of the Boer fighters. They were very hospitable towards him and, on a commandeered train full of Boers and their horses, he witnessed the partings of loved ones and wrote: "It is bad enough to witness when our soldiers go to the front. But these men are not soldiers at all. Each of them come direct from his home or some isolated farm" (FAD A296).

Though there are many accounts of Boer kindness, it is difficult to generalise, and instances of kindness on the British side were evident as well. This can be observed by many cuttings in the British Press denouncing the war and reports of petitions to Queen Victoria regarding the situation in South Africa (FAD A296). Reservations about the merits of the war were also expressed by Winston Churchill, who, on hearing the Boers sing their evening hymns, remarked that "it struck a chill into my heart, so that I thought after all that the war was unjust, that the Boers were better men than we, that Heaven was against us, that Ladysmith, Mafeking, and Kimberley would fall ... So for the time I despaired of the Empire" (Churchill 1900:109).

It is, however, not the purpose of this study to apportion blame to either the British or the Boer, or to compare their strategies, but merely to see the war through Boer experience. The situations of combatants, non-combatants, and prisoners will be discussed to gain insight into the Boer psyche.

3.3 BOER COMBATANTS

The majority of Boer combatants were the men and boys who fought on Commando. Isolated incidents are selected to give an insight into their experiential world.

3.3.1 Call-up system

In terms of the Commando laws of the ZAR and the OVS, male citizens were liable for military service from the age of sixteen. This did not, however, deter teenagers younger than sixteen from joining the Commandos. Deneys Reitz, who joined a Commando at the age of seventeen, echoed the thoughts of many teenagers when he explained “I looked on the prospect of war and adventure with the eyes of youth, seeing only glamour, but knowing nothing of the horror and the misery” (Reitz 1933:19). It was, however, especially in the later stages, the so-called guerrilla phase when Boers fought mainly in their own districts, that young boys fought beside their fathers and older brothers. According to Sister Izedinova (1977:180), many young boys were prepared to fight due to the patriotic character of education introduced during the fifteen years prior to the war by the ZAR Superintendent of Education, Mr Mansveldt.

The call-up system was not without fault and gave rise to many problems. The result was that all the foreign medical personnel spoke at one time or another of patients feigning sickness to obtain home leave. Izedinova (1977:148) states: “I was frequently irritated by strong, healthy men, presenting themselves to the doctor with an imaginary *hoofpein, maagpein, pyn in die rug, pyn in die been.*” This lack of discipline in many Commandos led to “a military organization peculiar to the Boers, with the absence of real discipline and sense of responsibility in their ranks” (Izedinova 1977:111).

3.3.2 Life on Commando

One British war correspondent supplied a clear description of his perception of the Boer on Commando. According to him, these Boers were brave and able to make good plans but they were always twenty-four hours late. He wrote that there was no uniform in the Boer Army and the Boers rode on Commando with a Mauser, a kind of magazine rifle, and full cartridge belt over the shoulder or around the waist. Their only distinguishing feature was the broad-brimmed grey or brown soft hat they all wore. “It is generally very stained and dirty, and invariably a rusty crepe

band is wound around the crown. For the Boer, like the English poorer classes, has large quantities of relations, and one of them is always dying” (FAD A296).

The uniqueness of the Boer fighter on Commando was not limited to his unusual dress but also to fighting tactics. This was highlighted in a letter to a British newspaper written by a Canadian officer fighting in South Africa. According to him, the Boers had no planned strategy. They were attached to Commandos, some with two hundred and others with thousands of men, who were independent of one another “so that it is impossible to strike a blow so as to injure the whole” (FAD A155/133/2). He went on to explain how each Commando split up into parties between ten to a hundred men and wandered all over the country. He wrote that “they are fast, know the country, and never fight, but content themselves with a few shots at our outposts” (FAD A155/133/2).

Many documents reflect conditions of the Boer fighter on Commando. Generally speaking, they had a continual struggle for existence. The Commando camp was called a *laager* and from there the Boers proceeded on horseback to take up positions and carry out military activity. In the *laager*, they busied themselves with daily tasks, and passed leisure and recreation time. They produced decorative articles, beautiful carvings from wood and bone, played card games, chess, draughts, held debating societies, held mock courts, literate Boers read newspapers, periodicals and books, and they also sang. There are many accounts, some contradictory, of how Boers spent their time sleeping or reading Bibles when they were not involved in skirmishes. Every Boer had a Bible and a hymnbook in his possession and an observant Boer noted that the main reading matter of the Boers was their Bible (Pretorius 1999:122).

Alie Badenhorst’s diary includes letters from her husband on Commando. They give readers an insight into the hardship of Commando life and the firm belief that the Boers had in God. In one of his letters about a fearful night in the open veld, he wrote: “If the Lord does not give us strength, I know not what will become of us or how we shall hold out. There is much to do so that we barely find time to rest” (Badenhorst 1923:78).

3.3.3 Boer faith and nationalism on Commando

There are many accounts of Dutch Reformed ministers who left their congregations to go on Commando and they provided strong leadership in the religious sphere. According to Pretorius (1999:172), “the war deepened many burghers’ spiritual lives, and progressively more so as the struggle continued. It not only strengthened the faith of the pious, but also touched the indifferent ones.”

The importance of prayer to the Boer is reflected in a report on the Battle of Elandslaagte by a British war correspondent. He wrote about how he nearly trod on the face of the Commandant of the Boer Commando, who was lying quite still with a kind of dignity. The Commandant told him that during the battle he had not fought but read the Bible and prayed instead, so that God could take over the role of Commandant (FAD A296).

Day-to-day records of the sieges of Mafeking, Kimberley and Ladysmith reveal that the Boers did not fight on Sundays as they had religious services. During the siege of Mafeking, Sol Plaatje wrote in his diary of a letter of warning written by a General Snyman, “notifying us for the last time with regard to the Sunday, as he sees that so far from worshipping we use it as a day of building forts, [and] chopping wood” (Comaroff & Willan 1973:121). Plaatje clearly heeded the warning issued by Snyman as he withdrew the pony he had entered for a run in a gymkhana on a Sunday, “lest [he] be guilty of blatant sacrilege and thereby further imperil [his] already dangerous condition” (Comaroff & Willan 1973:131). Plaatje, however, gives examples where Boers broke the Sunday truce. In one example, he humorously stated that “[t]he Boers must be getting some nasty knocks somewhere, for they now don’t care a hang about worshipping their God on Sundays” (Comaroff & Willan 1973:130).

By March 1900 the Boer forces were faced with many military losses. On 13 March 1900, Lord Roberts occupied Bloemfontein and on 5 June 1900, Pretoria fell. The OVS and the ZAR became British territory later in 1900 and many Boers surrendered. Due to these events, there was a general decline in Boer morale.

President Kruger of the ZAR thus considered it his duty to boost the morale of the Boer fighters and went to the OVS, where he addressed the troops with a short, fiery speech in which he urged them to place their hopes in God and not lose heart because of the reversal of fortunes (Izedinova 1977:73). After the loss of Pretoria, morale was so low that many Boers left the Commandos and were given the name of “hands-upper”.¹⁵ There was, however, an upside to this: “The chaff was divided from the grain; cowards and traitors remained behind, and the willing ones went to the veld, even though in a retreating position” (van Warmelo 1977:34).

The last pitched battle of the war was fought at Dalmanutha in August 1900 and this was followed by the guerrilla phase of the war. During this phase, when the battle zone was spread across large parts of South Africa, the Commandos were broken into smaller units and sent all over the country. Battles only happened occasionally and “the interminable days were often passed in idleness” (Pretorius 1999:117).

Diary entries and letters attest to the fact that the Boers on Commando intermixed faith and nationalism. “In fact, this was one of the outstanding features of the burghers on commando. Firstly, many of them compared the Afrikaner people with Israel ... they saw their dire straits as similar and drew strength from God’s deliverance of Israel” (Pretorius 1999:177). The religious and nationalist fervour of the Boers was even more evident during the guerrilla phase of the war. The Generals had made it known to all Boers that 16 December 1900, Dingaan’s Day, would be celebrated by all on Commando and that the oath which their forefathers had taken at Paardekraal would be renewed and a new monument, Ebenaezer, would be erected to commemorate the event.

December 15 was a day of preparation to which about 5 000 Boers came. They were addressed by a Rev Kriel, and Generals Beyers and de la Rey who said that the sins of the day e.g. drunkenness, neglect to educate and raise the natives in their midst and desecration of the Sabbath had led to the war which was a

¹⁵ hands-upper (*n.*) Surrender. So hands-up (*n.*): the action of putting up the hands; hands-upper: one who surrenders. Also hand-up (*n.*): one who throws up his hands (Oxford [Internet] 2004).

punishment from God for having deserted His ways. They were ordered to spend the rest of the day in prayer for the next day when they would renew the oath of their forefathers with God. They were told to ask God to purify their hearts and to humble themselves before Him and that “[o]nly by serving God and putting sin out of our hearts could we hope for His help, and only then would we succeed in driving the enemy out of our land” (Taitz 1996:130).

Needless to say, the men were worked up to a pitch of religious fervour and patriotism by speeches delivered by the generals who urged them to fight to the last man for liberty and independence. Commandant Ludwig Krause explained how this ceremony stirred his soul “to its innermost depths and an intense pity for my poor persecuted race filled my heart and choked my utterances ... [and] the time will come when they [the British] will in sorrow reap the harvest seeds of which they are now sowing broadcast with a lavish hand” (Taitz 1996:131-132).

Krause acknowledged that the value of this ceremony was incalculable as the fainthearted had their weakness turned to strength, and the earnest and resolute were confirmed in their determination. He went on to say: “I felt then, that as long as the memory of the monument of ‘Ebenaezer’ lives, the English will find it difficult to force our race to submit to their hateful yoke” (Taitz 1996:131).

Many records show that the British thought it would be a quick war, mainly due to Boer inexperience. They did not take cognisance of the innovativeness of the Boer fighters. To their surprise, they found the Boer ready for them and according to Krause, “they have never been able to forgive the Boer for having been so ready for the war” (Taitz 1996:15). Britain, with an experienced army trained to fight in Europe, soon realised that the war being fought in South Africa against the elusive Boers was a unique war where conventional military strategy was not the answer.

3.3.4 Innovativeness of the Boers on Commando

It was especially during the guerrilla phase of the war that innovativeness of the Boers was especially evident under the leadership of dynamic young leaders.

Pretorius states that the tactics employed by Generals Christiaan de Wet, Louis Botha and J.H. de la Rey, resulted in the continuation of Boer resistance for almost two years during the guerrilla phase of the war. They swiftly gathered scattered Commandos whenever the occasion arose and then attacked isolated British columns with great success (Pretorius 1999:14).

It was especially General de Wet who became one of the real heroes of the war when he succeeded in his mission to protect President M.T. Steyn of the OVS, despite repeated attempts by the British to capture him. He was said to have had an army of about 15 000 Boers. Van Warmelo also joined de Wet's Commando and he gives many examples of his innovativeness and skill at misleading and dodging the enemy. He says that in this Commando he gained "a first experience of the long and tiresome marches that enabled de Wet to mislead the enemy" (van Warmelo 1977:51). A letter from a Canadian officer, published in the *Montreal Daily Witness*, speaks about the fact that there was considerable trouble amongst the Boer leaders as many had made advances for peace. He wrote that this was contrary to de Wet, who everyone knew would fight to the bitter end. British troops were often given the order: "After de Wet" (FAD A155/133/2).

According to Hanekom and Wessels (2000:17), "De Wet can truly be described as the father of mobile warfare in South Africa." A British correspondent wrote that de Wet's operations would in future be studied and copied and form the subject matter of studies at every military institution. He stated that "his [de Wet's] name will be handed down to posterity as a great exponent of partisan warfare" (FAD A296).

The British Commanders soon realised that if they wanted to win the War, they needed to resort to unconventional methods. This led to the scorched earth policy and all its ramifications. Boer war diaries bear witness to the fact that these strategies by the British soon began to bite deep into the fabric of Boer family life.

In order to understand the effect of the war on the Boers, the research will give insight into aspects of:

- ❖ The scorched earth policy
- ❖ Life in concentration camps
- ❖ Life in prisoner of war camps.

The scorched earth policy and life in concentration camps will fall under non-combatants.

3.4 NON-COMBATANTS

The women and children, as well as the elderly, were the non-combatants and they were the ones who suffered most from Lord Kitchener's attempt to break the Boer fighters' resistance. Descriptions of the life of non-combatants, mainly women, inevitably occupied the position of onlookers in what was a man's war and thus their diaries cast a somewhat different perspective on events to that of the men on Commando. A diary entry by Alie Badenhorst is an anguished cry of the despair felt by Boer women, "O my country, my country, wilt though be torn from us by the cruel enemy? Surely it can never be! I will trust in my God, He alone can help us, He alone" (1923:93).

3.4.1 Plight of the women in towns and on the farms

Many women in similar situations would have echoed Alie Badenhorst's feeling of sadness and foreboding when her husband had to leave for Commando duty. An entry in her diary states "you do not know what this parting is costing me, nor how earnestly I have prayed for you" (Badenhorst 1923:80). She explains how they knelt down together to pray and that "[a]fter my prayer, it was as if a Voice said to me: 'I will never leave thee or forsake thee' " (Badenhorst 1923:93).

A female Russian doctor, V.A. Kukharenko, having witnessed many of these sad partings, spoke about the bravery of the women in these situations. She observed how they would encourage their husbands on Commando and joke as they

accompanied them to the station to go to war. They only cried after their husbands had left and never complained about their fate. She admired them for their exceptional courage, faith and belief that everything that happened was the will of God (Izedinova 1977:223).

In Bloemfontein, the news from the front was attached to a tree trunk in front of the offices of the local newspaper, *The Express*. People eagerly gathered there to get the latest news and according to Hanekom and Wessels (2000:52), there were often “[s]cenes of joy and sorrow as the names of the wounded and the dead were read.” They also wrote about how “the inherent qualities of courage, humility and firm belief in the will of the Lord siphoned through to dictate the daily existence of the women of the Anglo-Boer War” (Hanekom & Wessels 2000:18).

Diaries by many women convey the ambivalent emotions they felt at the start of the war. On the one hand, there was the sadness of the partings, while on the other hand there was a feeling of anticipation and excitement. Diary entries by Clara Levisseur in 1899 convey something of this spirit. She imparts the excitement felt at the station in Bloemfontein, when the women took refreshments to the Boers on their way to battle (ABWMA 6032/2). Russian medical personnel travelling on a military train also encountered this feeling of excitement. According to Izedinova (1977:62), at all the stations they were greeted with friendly excitement, and at one station, a chorus of local girls sang the anthems of the *ZAR* and *OVS* to those on the train. She explained how the troops, who were mainly young men, climbed down from the train to add their voices to those of the women. “The picture with the fiery South African sunset as a background was poetic and very beautiful” (Izedinova 1977:62).

The situation for the women on the farms was very difficult after the men left for the Commandos. They were faced with continual uncertainty about the fate of their husbands and sons and many of them were forced to do the work that had been done by their husbands before the war. This was problematic, as “[m]any of them had been delicately nurtured, in spite of the simplicity of their lives, and were not accustomed to hard work” (van Warmelo 1977:100). Hanekom and Wessels

(2000:20-21), however, give many accounts of how well these women adapted to their circumstances and managed to run the farms and find innovative ways to survive without the help of their husbands.

The situation of the women in their own homes on the farms was exacerbated by the fact that they had to live with continual looting and theft. This, together with the fact that they were living in their own homes surrounded by the British, resulted in some women leaving their farms and flocking to the towns because they had no food or clothing and felt imperilled. Other women complained of ill treatment by the British and the hands-uppers and endeavoured to leave their farms in order to be nearer to their husbands and sons. In so doing, they left their properties to the enemy. Sister Izedinova (1977:149) relates how two women and seven little girls between the ages of a few months and seven years old arrived at the Russian “surgery”. They were all wet, tired and chilled, since they had taken advantage of the darkness to escape from Warrenton and cross the river. They had had to hide in the bushes and wait until morning light so as not to be seen by the enemy and they had had nothing to eat since the previous day.

Many of the women left their farms with wagons loaded with grain, furniture, cattle and clothing. Van Warmelo (1977:102) gives an account of hundreds of wagons with women and children outspanned on either side of the Waterval River. According to him, it was a pitiful sight to see these frightened women and children and his words convey the feeling of helplessness of Boer fighters. “It is indeed a tragic sight! – we men, with our weapons in our hands, not able to defend them at such a time. And then a great feeling of shame came upon us. These same women had only the day before called down God’s blessing upon us, and now they cried to us to hurry, or we would be surrounded” (van Warmelo 1977:85).

The Boer women were generally very dependent on their husbands and scriptural arguments were often used as a basis for their lives. This dependency made it all the more difficult for them when their husbands left. To exacerbate the situation further, the ministers whom they relied on for spiritual guidance and whom they needed more than ever in their dire situations, had also in a sense deserted them

by joining the Commandos. Reitz (1933:37), on seeing the wife of General Kock, commander of the Johannesburg Commando, trying to get through the British lines to visit her badly wounded husband, observed that “the memory of her tear-stained face gave me the first hint of what women suffer in war.”

3.4.2 The scorched earth policy

In an attempt to break the lingering Boer resistance, Kitchener implemented the scorched earth policy. His main intention was to denude the ZAR and the OVS of forage and supplies so that no means of subsistence would be left for any Commando attempting to make incursions. In an interview, Mrs L.H. Lombaard explained to H.N. Conradie (FAD A289/3) how the British, who also burnt forty bags of wheat, their furniture and their home, killed all their cattle and poultry. Many women on other farms had to face similar situations.

Diaries and letters give an insight into the emotions felt by women during the implementation of this policy. In his war memoirs, Krause (cited in Taitz 1996:124) gives a poignant account of farmhouses that the British had burnt and destroyed. In one of the destroyed houses, he found women and children in scant clothing with nothing but a candle. The British had told them that they would be back for them and on hearing the sound of the Boer Commando horses, they thought the British had returned. He tells about their terror-stricken faces and how, with arms entwined, they were kneeling together on the ground and singing hymns. Even when Krause entered they ignored him and they sang “their hymn to the Almighty with increased fervour, as a prayer for protection ... the sight was sad and stirred my very soul with pity” (Taitz 1996:124).

Needless to say, many British soldiers were unhappy to follow these orders as can be seen by the testimony of a British soldier on the front who stated, “that we should force the surrender of our enemies by starving their children and degrading their wives and daughters is surely a barbarity that no European nation, except Turks, would be guilty of at the end of the nineteenth century of the Christian era ... I am deeply convinced that ruthless destruction of property, and the deliberate

exposure of women and children to horrors worse than those of the battle-field, will draw sooner or later the vengeance of God on the perpetrators” (FAD A155/133/2).

Farwell (1977:367) was of the opinion that it was unhealthy for an army to be forced to carry out such a policy, as it tended to corrupt and brutalise soldiers. This led to aloofness on the part of many soldiers, which often resulted in brutality. This could be seen in the manner that many British officers implemented the scorched earth policy “without enthusiasm and without guilt or rancour, with little feeling for or against the folk whose ruin they were accomplishing” (Farwell 1977:367). Captain March Phillips, a British soldier, also conveys something of the mind-set that marked many British soldiers implementing this policy. According to him, (cited in Farwell 1977:367) the British soldiers “are men who have discarded the civil standards of morality altogether.”

British soldiers extended this brutality to cruelty towards the animals. Many diaries bear witness to the terrible fate of these farm animals. The diary of J.L. van Oostrum, a young boy on a farm, gives a clear account of the burning of their farm. He says they were allowed to keep a bed, mattresses and some sacks of corn to take with them to the Potchefstroom Concentration Camp. Everything else on the farm was burnt and he felt so sorry for the chickens because the English soldiers tied their legs together and they were then tied to their saddles even though they were still alive. On the way to the camp, they heard a terrible cry from a pig and a British soldier came towards them with a leg of pork, which he had cut from the pig while it was still alive (TAD A1887/2). Doubtless to say many such incidents would remain indelibly etched on the minds of many families who had experienced the scorched earth policy.

Although there were many atrocities committed, it would be unfair to generalise, as not all British officers exhibited this total lack of feeling. There are many examples of officers who hated fulfilling the task of burning farms. Farwell gives the example of a Lieutenant Cyril Rocke who sat helplessly on his horse and watched a farm

being burnt. He said (cited in Farwell 1977:368) “I could have sobbed. In fact I think I did.”

Diary entries offer readers an insight into the special characteristics of these Boer women and children. Their patriotism and religious fervour was evident in many cases. Captain March Phillips (cited in Fisher 1969:179-180) explained how on arriving to burn a farm “a small girl interrupted her preparation for departure to play indignantly their national anthem on an old piano ... Their talk is invariably, and without so far a single exception, to the same effect – ‘We will never give in, and God sooner or later will see us through’.”

Jan Smuts also often told the story of the woman who stood outside her house while a British officer was burning it down singing, *Praise the Lord*. The British officer had tears in his eyes but he was under strict orders to continue (Neethling 1917:80). This occurrence of passive piety on the side of the women Smuts regarded as a sign of hope for the future of the country (Landman 1994:15).

The women and children often exhibited extreme courage and bravery. Mrs F.J. Bezuidenhout speaks about the bravery of her daughter, Ellie, who confronted the English plundering their farm. She tried to grab some goods back and eventually took a black wattle branch from the officer and tried to throttle him. He retaliated by trying to shoot her but was prevented from doing this when her mother said: “Shoot you coward if you dare! You are too cowardly to fight our men, that is why you make war on women” (FAD 155/134/vii).

Subsequently the Boer women and children, the elderly and black farm workers had to be sent to concentration camps after the farms had been destroyed.

3.4.3 Concentration camps

The camps had been improvised under wartime conditions and their administration was in the hands of military men who were unacquainted with the needs of women and children. The result was that conditions in the camps were poor and there was

a high death rate. Many diaries and memoirs attest to suffering in the camps. A few examples will be given, allowing for an understanding of the Boer psyche through the hardships they had to endure.

The first camps were opened in the summer of 1900 for hands-uppers whom the British were unable to protect from the wrath of their fellow Boers. The British saw them as potentially valuable allies. Included in these camps were the families of Boers on Commando and Boer prisoners who had been sent by the British to sit the war out in prisoner of war camps in St Helena, Ceylon and India. Most of these families had been brought to the camps after their farms had been destroyed.

Between December 1900 and February 1902 about 120 000 Boers, mostly women and children, were inmates of some fifty camps, which ranged in size from 7 400 people in the Potchefstroom camp to the small Waterval North camp, which contained two men, three women and three children (Farwell 1977:397).

3.4.3.1 Journey to the camps

After their farms had been destroyed, the women, children, the elderly and farm workers were transported to concentration camps; often in open cattle trucks with no food or protection from the elements. In a letter to her grandson, Maria Wagenaar (FAD A621) explains how they were sent to concentration camps in Natal in open train trucks. Many children and old people got very sick from the cold and rain. *En route* to the camps, they were often used as buffers against Boer attacks and shot at by their own men. The feeling of trepidation the women and children faced is highlighted in the memoirs of H.P. Potgieter (TAD A1221/3). She says that, as they approached the Krugersdorp Camp, they saw a donkey cart with 27 coffins. When they enquired about the coffins they were told that between 25-28 people died and were buried every day in Krugersdorp.

Valuable accounts of circumstances facing South African women and children during the war, are gained from the writings of Emily Hobhouse who worked for the South African Conciliation Committee in Britain. She decided to come to South

Africa to see for herself what conditions were like in the concentration camps. In one of her letters, Hobhouse spoke about an aged aunt and uncle of President Paul Kruger, who were both in their 90s and were forced to wait for more than ten days next to a railway line for a train to take them to a concentration camp. The old lady had no skirt so she gave her her underskirt. The British had destroyed their home and they did not know where they were going to be taken. They died very soon afterwards and were buried in the Bethulie Camp. Hobhouse (1994:111-112) remarks, "Brave and dignified old people, they faced their final uprooting as 'the will of the Lord'."

3.4.3.2 *Life in the camps*

All diaries bear witness to the hardships, sickness, bravery and deaths in the camps. Maria Wagenaar's letter to her grandson illuminates the emotions of someone who spent time in a concentration camp. She writes that there were many hardships in the camps but she does not want to give him all the details in case he might hate the English and she could not call herself a Christian if she allowed him to hate. She writes that she will never forget but that she hopes she can forgive when she becomes wiser (FAD A621: Maria Wagenaar). Elizabeth Grobbelaar (FAD A248) writes about the hostility of the Boer women and their lack of fear of the British. They held marches carrying the OVS flag to protest against conditions in the camp. When the British tried to confiscate the flags they were unsuccessful because the women attacked them. There are so many subjective accounts by Boer women pertaining to conditions in the camps, that it makes it almost impossible to select sources that are reflections of the general conditions in concentration camps.

The writings of Emily Hobhouse are thus invaluable sources as during her tours of the concentration camps, she talked to many women and was able to give an insight into the hardship these people had to endure. The conditions in the camps might have remained largely unknown and been of greater magnitude, had it not been for the light of publicity thrown on the camps by her. She found conditions worse than she had thought as she went from camp to camp discovering the

inadequacies, which were almost impossible to remedy. Amongst other things, soap and water were scarce, most were sleeping on the bare ground and there were swarms of flies in the heat. Few of the camps had as much water as they needed and there was a shortage of fuel needed to boil or sterilise supplies for washing and drinking.

In the Bloemfontein Camp, where two thirds of the inmates slept on the ground, overcrowding was a major problem. Emily Hobhouse also gives the example of the Springfontein Camp, which could hold 500 people but within a few months held 3 000. Provision had not been made to supply the superintendent of the camp with additional tents, food and medical supplies for the extra 2 500 inmates (Farwell 1977:405). Overcrowding resulted because in many cases the camps had been built with an eye to defence rather than the comfort of those confined there and it was not uncommon to see sixteen people to a bell tent designed for five.

Hobhouse (1984:50) gives insight into the character and emotions of people in the camps, when she comments that “the women are wonderful: they cry very little and never complain. The very magnitude of their sufferings, indignities, loss and anxiety seem to lift them beyond tears, and these people, who have had comfortable, even luxurious homes, just set themselves to quiet endurance and to make the best of their bare and terrible lot.”

Hobhouse soon became a heroine in the eyes of the Boers due to her efforts to improve conditions in the camps. She wrote to the Distress Committee in England after visiting the Bloemfontein Camp: “I call this camp system wholesale cruelty. It can never be wiped out from the memories of the people. It presses hardest on the children. They droop in the terrible heat ... Entire villages and districts rooted up and dumped in a strange bare place. To keep these camps going is murder for the children” (Fisher 1971:18).

There were, however, people who did not agree with the sentiments expressed by Hobhouse. Sarah Heckford, an English trader, paid tribute to the bravery and power of endurance of the Boer women but she says they proved themselves

dangerous enemies as they served the Commandos as intelligence officers, spies and decoys. She criticised Hobhouse for having sympathy with them as she says that, although everyone admired their courage, they had to be put in concentration camps as “they had forfeited the right to be considered non-belligerents” (Allen 1979:222).

3.4.3.3 Deaths in the camps

The mortality rates and many serious diseases in the camps also horrified Emily Hobhouse. To make matters worse, many of the Boer women preferred their own home remedies, as they did not trust the camp doctors because they were mostly foreigners. Doctors found their advice ignored and this often resulted in disease and death amongst the inmates. The doctors were of the opinion that what was needed was early and careful nursing (Farwell 1977:407).

Maria Wagenaar (FAD A621) wrote about many people dying in the camps in Natal where she was interned. She was sent to another camp in Middelburg where she met a Tante Lenie Botha who had lost five children in concentration camps. She also speaks about the almost daily pitiful sight of children’s bodies piled high on a trolley surrounded by crying women on their knees praying. Elizabeth Grobbelaar also writes about the many deaths in the camp and epidemics of measles and diphtheria. Three of her sister’s four children died in the camp (FAD A248).

According to Farwell (1977:392) more Boer boys and girls under the age of sixteen, died in British concentration camps, than all the fighting men killed by bullets and shells on both sides in the course of the entire war. The exact number is unknown and Farwell gives a conservative estimate at 16 000 but says the actual number was closer to 20 000, most of whom died within a twelve-month period. He says this does not include the unknown number of black and coloured children who also died in the camps.

3.4.3.4 Schools in the camps

There were many children in the camps and every attempt was made to educate them. Originally Boer teachers in the camps taught the children, but the English decided that this was an ideal opportunity to educate the Boer children in English. The first English camp school in the ZAR was established in the camp at Zeerust in January 1901 (Otto 1954:152). The number of these schools grew very fast and soon the British Government decided to open English schools in prisoner of war camps as well.

The main aim for the establishment of these schools can be found in a letter (cited in Otto 1954:152-153) by the Lord Chamberlain to Sir Alfred Milner, British High Commissioner in South Africa. He wrote the following: “My attention has been directed to a suggestion that systematic and special efforts ought to be made to influence the many thousands of Boer prisoners who are now in our hands with the view of making them understand more clearly the causes of the war, the motives of Her Majesty’s Government, and their future position as British subjects under British rule and their long enforced leisure offers an opportunity such as cannot occur again of presenting to them ... a wider point of view than that to which they have been accustomed and one which may possibly modify the prejudices which have largely been the result of ignorance and anti-British propaganda.”

E.B. Sargent was given the mammoth task of forming the Education Department and wherever he went, he was surprised at the enthusiasm of the young Boers to learn. He was a patriotic Englishman who made it his aim to crush the few private Afrikaans-Nederlands¹⁶ schools in the camps. He even acted as Principal and teacher for two weeks in the Norvalspont Concentration Camp, to oversee the establishment of the English School and ensure that children attended the English Government School instead of the private Afrikaans-Nederlands School. His efforts were successful and within two months after establishing the English

¹⁶ Afrikaans-Nederlands: the language which links modern day Afrikaans to the root Nederlands (Dutch). (Visagie:2003)

School, the Afrikaans-Nederlands School was forced to close due to lack of support (Otto 1954:155). Even though many children could not speak English, Sargent's excuse (cited in Otto 1954:156), was: "The modern theory of teaching a language is to immerse the children completely in the new sounds and atmosphere ... [and] not to translate from one language to another. He also stated that South African history should not be taught and that political questions should be avoided."

According to Sargent, the Boers realised that the material advancement of their children was bound up with an adequate knowledge of English. He (cited in Otto 1954:167) warned the English teachers that they would "find apparent stupidity and a depth of ignorance to which you are unaccustomed ... [This will be due to the fact that] the difficulties of comprehension in a foreign tongue are very great." This schooling was clear indoctrination on the part of the British, but, according to Otto, its success was limited as children were not in the camps long enough to benefit from this education and they were also so bitter towards the English that they were hostile to pro-English propaganda (Otto 1954:168).

Van Oostrum (TAD A1887/1) gives an interesting account of his schooling in their camp. They had only English teachers and when his father, a prisoner of war in Ceylon, heard that his children were in an English school he wrote to his mother asking how she dared allow his offspring to be taught by the enemy.

3.4.3.5 Religion in the camps

Despite all their troubles and the terrible conditions, diaries written in the camps bear testimony to the fact that the women maintained their belief in God. Practically all consulted sources have many references to their firm belief. Alie Badenhorst's diary (1923:91) reflects the religious views of many women in the camps. From the entries in her diary, it is apparent that even when confronted by a situation of utter powerlessness, she actively practised piety and seemed to place blame for the war on her personal sins.

Mrs P.J. van der Walt's diary (FAD A155/134/1) also reflects the deep religious fervour of the women in the Klerksdorp Concentration Camp. She speaks continually about God and says that she was often comforted by the words of a Boer nurse who, speaking about the continual hardships and deaths, said "*die Here siet en sal 't vergelde*" (Translation: The Lord sees and He will repay). She says these words were especially meaningful when she heard her son had been killed on Commando.

A letter written on 5 September 1900 and signed as Mother, could be from the daughter of Gen Piet Joubert (TAD A1362). Her total belief in the will of God is reflected in the letter. She is almost desperate, but consoles herself by saying that "God knows his own time ... and should they conquer us now and take our country away from us we shall still become a great nation, and our country will be given back to us through God in His own time, therefore the darker the clouds of adversity, anxiety, suffering and oppression laid upon us, the more steadfast must our trust be in God, the darker the night the brighter the morn breaks."

There are conflicting opinions about the effectiveness of the camps, as weapons in the struggle to break the Boer will to resistance. On the one hand, they relieved the Boers on Commando of anxiety for the safety of their families, and allowed them to devote their undivided attention to fighting the British (Fisher 1969:184). On the other hand, the traumatic experience of life in the concentration camps was to be a source of bitterness for several generations. This is confirmed by Thomas Pakenham (1982:495) when he says that Kitchener is not remembered in South Africa for his military victory but "his monument is the camp - 'concentration camp', ... [which] has left a gigantic scar across the minds of the Afrikaners; a symbol of deliberate genocide."

James Ramsay MacDonald, afterwards Prime Minister of Great Britain and a devout Scotsman, echoed Pakenham's sentiments. He (cited in Fisher 1969:204) stated: "It was the *vrouw* who kept the war going on so long. It was in her heart that patriotism flamed into an all-consuming heat ... She it is who feels most

keenly that all her sufferings, her weary waiting and her prayers have been naught. The camps have alienated her from us forever.”

In contrast to the fate of the women and children in the concentration camps, was that of the captured Boers sent to prisoner of war camps. It will be seen that conditions in these camps, while Spartan, were not unduly difficult. The lot of the civilians, mostly women and children, left behind was considerably grimmer as they were increasingly subjected to restrictions, commandeering, looting, destruction and forced removals.

3.5 PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS

Diaries, memoirs and letters have a tremendous power to recapture the atmosphere of a situation. As there are more documents available on life in prisoner of war camps than on any other aspect of the war, it was necessary to select references that allow readers to gain an insight into the physical and psychological experiences of these Boers.

3.5.1 Life on boats to and from the prisoner of war camps

At first, Boer prisoners of war were kept on board transports converted into prison ships and anchored in Simons Bay, where their health suffered due to close confinement. The prison ships were soon abandoned and the prisoners were moved ashore to the sports ground at Green Point or to the camp established at Simonstown. Boer Prisoners of War were moved successively to Harrismith, Ladysmith, Durban and Green Point, to be despatched to St Helena, the Bermudas, India and Ceylon. By the end of the war, there were 37 000 prisoners of war living in camps.

Diary entries by G.J. van Riet (FAD A252/1) convey the feeling of trepidation, which marked prisoners of war in general when they left South African shores for an unknown destination. Van Riet sailed on the boat, the Montrose, to the Bermudas, with 580 prisoners in one compartment in hammocks. He said that on

losing sight of Table Mountain, the National Anthems of the two Republics were sung and many other patriotic songs. Of the singing, he writes: “It was really most impressive and beautiful.” He gives an evocative account of his feeling of despair on the crowded boat. One of his entries gives the impression of someone talking rather than writing. He writes, “I cannot get a quiet corner to hunt up some consoling words of which I feel oh, so much in need of – my grief cannot be described and will never be known. If only my darling and dear ones are all right.” He almost consoles himself that they are well by saying “I committed them to God’s care and protection upon my departure” (FAD A252/1). The sentiments expressed by van Riet echo those in many other diaries.

Van Riet’s diary also gives us an insight into the treatment on the Montrose. He writes about the bad food, which he said was unfit for dogs. There were also about 80 deaths on the boat due to a measles epidemic and the terrible heat. They were taken by tugs from the Montrose to the Island, where they were ordered to put all their blankets in a hole. His feeling of despair was aggravated on finding that the blankets were stolen and he wrote, “I am now robbed by the hounds of everything – ‘Hope’ and nothing else keeps body and mind together” (FAD A252/1).

Van Warmelo’s diary (1977:123) has entries that also convey something of the conditions on the boats. He was taken to India on board the Manila, together with 490 other prisoners of war. He says about his boat trip, that they suffered terribly for want of space and insufficient and bad food.

Alyce Stopford-Green, a British lady who went to visit the Boers on St Helena, also provides an insight into conditions on the boats. She writes (FAD A621[a]) about the Boers who landed at St Helena after having been imprisoned for over three months in ships, fed on bully beef, shut down from air, had been packed tightly in ships which had been used for cattle and were only allowed one hour a day on the deck. From the harbour, these broken and suffering men had to march five miles to the camp “and their aspect filled all who saw them with pity.”

There is a common thread that runs through almost all prisoner of war diaries, namely, the Boers' strong faith. Almost all documents bear testimony to this. One such diary is that of J.H. du Toit who, with 992 Boers, was taken out to sea by tugs to board the *Aurania*. While waiting to be sent by boat to India he makes many references to God's mercy. He praises God many times. He misses his family and he asks God to help him bear the situation he finds himself in (FAD A10/1).

Rev D.J. Viljoen (FAD A289/2), on his arrival in India, wrote about catechism instruction in the morning and a prayer meeting afterwards where they thanked the Lord for their safe boat trip and beseeched Him to lead and preserve them in India.

3.5.2 Life in the camps

Most of the camps were in beautiful settings, which made life much more bearable. The Dutchman, R.L. Brohier, who was a respected official and engineer living on Ceylon, verifies this: "Sad and dour though they were, who can venture to doubt that it must have been with shock and delight that they beheld in that vast panoramic landscape many of the characteristics of their own country" (TAD A1396/1). Rev P.H. Roux also gave favourable reports about conditions facing prisoners of war. In his personal book written on Ceylon, he calls the Island the gem of the Indian Ocean. "I have as regards treatment no complaints to make and am able even to speak of kindness shown by several amongst who I moved as a captive in Diyatalawa" (FAD A305/2).

Similarly, life on the Bermudas had many positive aspects with regards to living conditions. There were seven separate islands occupied by Boers and their guards. The confined space of the guarded enclosure was small but care was taken to give the prisoners what liberty was possible under the circumstances. They were allowed to bathe in the sea and swim to a distance of fifty yards from the shore, where small naval vessels were moored to guard the islands. The system of self-government that the prisoners were allowed to exercise avoided friction and simplified the discipline in the camp (FAD A621: Elwes).

On the Bermudas, work with pay was provided for the Boers wherever possible. A Recreation Society was formed to provide the prisoners with recreation and exercise. Amongst the earliest gifts sent to the Boers were woodwork tools, carpenters' benches and wood. A shop was even opened in Hamilton for the sale of Boer handiwork.

Deadwood camp resembled a small town where every sort of industry was carried out. The rows of tents and huts were laid out in streets named after places in the ZAR and OVS. Every house was numbered so that a proper register could be kept and the prisoners often sold their stands to each other.

In June 1901, A.L. Paget took over the work and responsibilities of Commandant of the Deadwood Camp. He tried to allow the Boers more freedom as he considered the Boer to be "renowned for his love of freedom" (Paget 1901[a]:516). This resulted in many men from Deadwood earning money outside the camp as they worked all over the island and some did not even sleep in the camp. According to him, the behaviour of the Boers when out on pass and of the working parties was excellent and they were such law-abiding citizens that during his time as Commandant of their camp "I never received a single serious complaint from any of the islanders as to their conduct, although there were often nearly four thousand a day on pass, when they could roam freely all over the island" (Paget 1901[b]:36). There were many talented craftsmen as could be seen by the walking sticks, paper knives, baskets, and fancy toys, which the prisoners made, as well as cooking and baking. Law was not harshly administered: many games were played, clubs established, cultural activities, concerts and singsongs took place. Paget, however, states that life was monotonous for the Boer prisoner and "Beneath this outward cloak of apparent cheerfulness there were many hidden sorrows" (Paget 1901[a]:516).

Paget (1901[b]:36) gives a perceptive and evocative account of the Boer prisoner of war. He describes how depressing he finds it to be in daily contact with these people as they are not only prisoners of the nation they are at war with, but "the whole male population of vast districts, old and young – the halt, the maimed, and

the blind; and ... even some who, by the effects of the long confinement and from brooding over their misfortunes, are losing their reason". He conveys a feeling of sympathy for them but "not with their leaders in the field, and their ex-President [Kruger] in Europe, who through their obstinacy, have brought so much desolation and misery on their fellow-men."

The camps in India seemed to have presented the harshest climatic conditions, yet diary entries bear witness to good living conditions in the camps. Van Warmelo (1977:123) wrote that despite the harsh conditions the morale of the Boers was high, mainly due to the spiritual guidance of a Rev Viljoen and that they were kept alive and "in pretty good health by an extremely temperate manner of life."

Findings (cited in Henning 1975:26) about Boers in prisoner of war camps suggest that there was a revival of cultural activities and that creativity in music, writing and poetry flourished despite the fact that by 1900 the educational background of a large percentage of these Boers was very limited. Notwithstanding the fact that all cultural activities ceased in the two Republics of South Africa, there was a thriving of activity on an unprecedented scale outside South Africa, particularly among the 4 735 prisoners of war in Ceylon, 4 000 of who were held in the Diyatalawa Camp.

In order to pass the long monotonous hours in exile, the resourceful Boer in the Diyatalawa Camp turned to activities of nearly every conceivable type. Two of the newspapers for the Prisoners of War in Diyatalawa, *De Prikkelraad* and *De Strewer*, include many advertisements for services available by inmates (TAD A1727). Newspapers were printed in other camps as well, e.g. St Helena had *De Krijgsgevangene* and the prisoners on Burt's Island published *De Burt's Trompet*.

Music concerts were held in all the camps but they were especially popular in the Diyatalawa Camp. These concerts were popular with the prisoners as well as the local inhabitants. Henning (1975:29) writes about a concert, which was attended by 1 400 people. The proceeds from the concert were sent to the Orphans and Widows' Fund in South Africa.

As has been stated, the arts flourished in Ceylon camps and H.S. Kok (cited in Henning 1975:26) echoes the fact that life was quite good in the camp and he had learnt a great deal there. “*Het is inderdaad de heerlijkste dagen die ik doorgebracht heb. De ballingskap van Ceylon was mij waarlijk een goede leerschool.*” (Translation: This was truly the best day that I have had. My banishment to Ceylon has been a good learning experience.)

3.5.3 Schools in the camps

As has already been noted, many boys fought with their fathers and older brothers in the Commandos and some were captured and sent to prisoner of war camps overseas. There were teachers amongst Boer prisoners of war in the camps who concerned themselves with the education of the boys and often illiterate older men. One such person was O.van Oostrum who described his satisfaction from his work as a teacher in Ceylon, mainly because he was of the opinion that it helped with the upliftment of the Boers. He was paid a small salary and this enabled him to send money to his wife and children in the Potchefstroom Concentration Camp. They used this money to buy a stable to live in. He said that the teaching kept him so busy that he had no time to be bored as many other prisoners were (1943:41-42).

An interesting account regarding British education is given in the memoirs of Rev J.A. van Blerk. He wrote that on the Bermudas there were 177 boys under the age of 16 and the British Government provided the necessary equipment for a school there. As there was only a Boer teacher on Hawkin’s Island, the British had all the boys deported to Hinson’s Island where there was an English School, or a Khaki School, as the Boers called it in reference to their uniforms. The boys were defiant about this forced removal and on the boat that took them to Hinson’s, they sang Afrikaans-Nederlands folk songs, despite the fact that the British captain was watching them. They knew he could not understand them and was thus unaware that they were singing patriotic songs (ABWMA 5074/5).

The Boer boys had never been allowed to sing patriotic songs on the Bermudas and were severely punished and beaten if they did this. This did not deter them and by singing these songs they were able to affirm traditional values in a disintegrating world (ABWMA 5074/5).

3.5.4 Religion in the camps

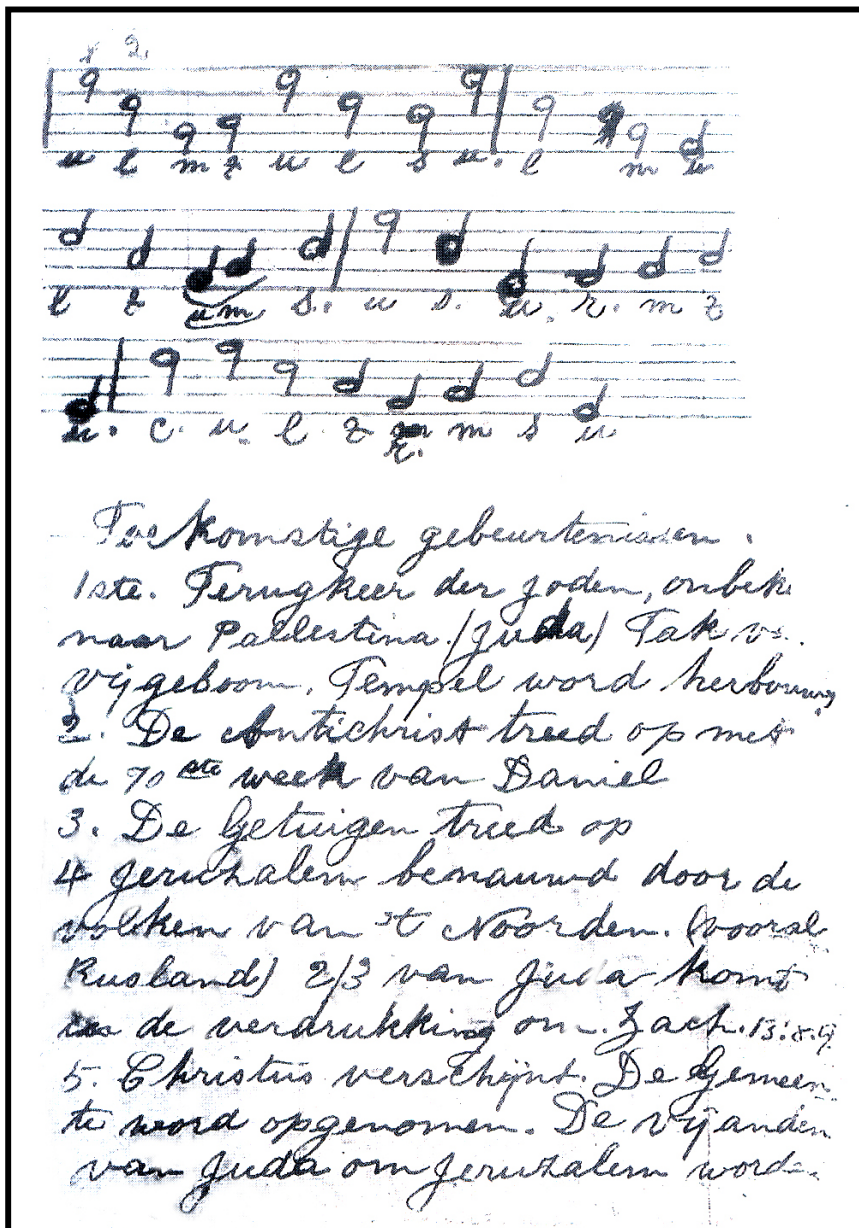
Spiritual activities flourished in the camps and this was mainly due to the fact that there was never a lack of spiritual and cultural guidance. Dutch Reformed ministers accompanied the prisoners of war to their camps as many of them had joined the Commandos and were captured by the British. A Rev Albertyn had also voluntarily had himself interned on Hawkin's Island so he could minister there.

Diaries bear testimony to the fact that the most important aspect of Boer life in the camps was their faith. The creators of most diaries give details of religious activities. A good example is the diary written by F.P. Venter (Example 3.1) in the Diyatalawa Camp (FAD A261). He continually speaks about religion and in his letters to his family in South Africa he reminds them of God's grace and love, asking them to trust in Him and reminding them that God will give them courage in every circumstance. He reminds them about Jesus' suffering on the cross and he says that they must learn from this and accept their hardship. He clearly sees their circumstances as punishment from God. He writes that he is well and has all he needs, surviving by relying totally on God and accepting every circumstance as God's will. He says he hopes to see them soon but God will decide when the time is right. In his letters there are some Biblical references together with hand-notated music that could possibly have been a religious song that was linked to the references.

Many diaries reflect the stern Puritanism shared by most prisoners of war. Not only do they refer to religious messages but they also refer to psalms, hymns and songs with religious messages. Many hand-notated and holograph hymnbooks compiled in the camps bear testimony to the importance the Boer attached to singing. R.L. de Brohier (cited in Groenewald 1992:41) spoke about the open-air

prayer gatherings held by the Boers and that songs filled with longing and heartache were often heard. It would seem that the Boers gained a tremendous sense of security from their religion and anything that kept them from their worship was considered wrong. When the brass band of the British regiment began giving evening concerts, the Boers objected because it kept the young people away from prayer services (Groenewald 1992:41).

Example 3.1 Diary with a hand-notated song: H.P. Venter



The image shows a page from a diary with handwritten musical notation and a list of events. The musical notation consists of three staves with notes and lyrics written below them. The lyrics are in Dutch and correspond to the list of events below. The list of events is written in Dutch and describes various biblical and historical events related to the Jews and Jerusalem.

1ste. Terugkeer der goden, onbekend naar Palestina (Juda) Fatk vs. vijgeboom. Tempel word herbouwing
2. De Antichrist treed op met de 70^{ste} week van Daniel
3. De Getuigen treed op
4. Jerusaleem beernaamd door de volken van st Noorden. (vooral Rusland) 2/3 van jusa komt toe de verdrukking on. Zach. 13: 8. 9
5. Christus verscheijnt. De Gemeente word opgenomen. De vijanden van jуда om jerusaleem word.

(FAD A261)

Out of the sad conditions of the war came a revival of mission endeavour. In Ceylon there was a *Hulp Zending Vereniging*. Members of this society had to promise that after the war they would give a shilling a year towards mission work. They also evangelised on the Island to thank God for all He had done for them as prisoners of war on Ceylon (FAD A621:Rev J.W. de Kok).

The importance of religion to the Boer is once again highlighted in the diary of J.H. du Toit in the camp at Umballa, India. In an entry on 15 February 1902, he writes about the arrival of Rev George McKelvie, a chaplain from the Church of Scotland, who had been sent out to minister to them. School had to be discontinued so that McKelvie could conduct choir practices, confirmation classes and prayer meetings in the tent set aside for the school. McKelvie, realising the importance of religion to the Boers, complained because the prisoners were not given permission to go to the church outside the camp except on Sundays. Du Toit states that McKelvie wrote saying that to deprive the prisoner of war “of a tent in which to worship God according to the rites of the Church of Scotland as by law established, looks like petty persecution” (FAD A10/1).

How seriously religion was viewed is conveyed by C.J.P. Schoeman in Trichinopoly, India. He gave an account of an incident where the Indians had built an enormous temple with a bat idol on top of the building. A young Boer decided to go into the temple and had to remove his shoes because the Indian worshipers said he was on holy ground. On returning to the camp he was scolded for removing his shoes for a bat idol, while he had never removed shoes for his Christian God. He evidently became demented with shame and the result was that he had to be cared for in the camp and on the boat trip back to South Africa (FAD A289/3).

There are also many accounts by British guards and officers of the religious fervour of the Boers. Farwell (1977:425) quotes a British soldier on the Bermudas as saying of the Boers, “I tell you they can pray. They pray ... until we outside get tired of it and call out ‘Oh, gag yourselves!’.”

Many foreigners came out to fight for the Boers in what they believed to be the side of freedom and justice. Many were also captured and sent to prisoner of war camps with Boer prisoners. Needless to say, these foreigners tried to build morale by enjoying singing, music and acting. According to Stopford-Green (FAD A621 [b]), the Boers on St Helena with their stern Puritanism, would not share in these gaieties as secular entertainment was not acceptable to all of them. She says she encountered a Boer who, on seeing these gaieties, said: "It is a good way to spend a sinful evening." She was of the opinion that melancholia developed because they did not want to take part in anything secular. On the other hand, prison forged closer bonds between the Boers and the foreign volunteers. On St Helena, when the British tried to separate the foreigners from the Boers, the prisoners objected and according to a camp newspaper article (cited in Farwell 1977:426), "[f]ellow warriors who have fought with us and shared our trenches in the *veldt* are just as much Boers as we are."

Despite the fact that life in the prisoner of war camps was not unduly difficult, diary entries by inmates remind readers of their longing for loved ones without knowing what lay ahead for them. Many also spoke with great sadness and bitterness when they received news of their farms having been burnt. Stopford-Green (FAD A621 [a]) observed that many of the young men showed bitterness and despair while the older men showed "patience and unquenchable fortitude: their private griefs they carry with grave reserve."

3.5.5 Peace

The news that a peace treaty had been signed reached the prisoner of war camps on 1 June 1902. British soldiers drank a case of whiskey and sang *God Save the Queen* and *Britannia Rules the Waves*. The Boers, who were devastated by the conditions in the peace treaty, got together and sang *Prys den Heer!*

The most contentious issue amongst Boer prisoners after the peace treaty was whether they should accept the inevitable and take the British oath of allegiance. The result was that the "irreconcilables exhibited rancour towards those who took

the oath of allegiance such as they never showed the British” (Farwell 1977:426). According to Paget, race hatred and vindictive feeling against the English was kept alive by these irreconcilables through threats of violence and intimidation towards those with pro-English views, who were prepared to take the oath of allegiance. The groups with opposing sentiments became so antagonistic towards each other that separate peace camps had to be established where views could be expressed freely without threats of violence and intimidation from fellow prisoners (Paget 1901[a]:516). There is evidence that some of the Boer ministers were even banned because they gave political sermons and discouraged the Boers to sign the oath (Groenewald 1992:42).

3.6 RETURN TO FARMS

The diary of Elizabeth Grobbelaar (FAD A248) allows for insight into the scenes that faced most families returning to their farms. She writes about all fruit trees having been chopped down, animals killed, and crops and farmhouses burnt. Despite her feelings of desolation, she is grateful to God for sparing them in the concentration camps and her brothers in the prisoner of war camps. She writes: *“My nasie sal ek nooit verrai nie, mog my nageslag altyd staan by hulle God, wat my God ook is, wat ons krag gegee het om alles te dra wat op ons gelê was”*. (Translation: I will never betray my nation and may my descendants always stand by their God, who is my God, who gave us the strength to face all that came upon our way).

There are many reports about how families returned to their devastated farms and started rebuilding everything without complaint. Most write about gratitude towards God for sparing them during the war. R.L. Brohier, speaking of the Boers returning to their devastated farms, observed that “[t]hese ruined Boers are certainly undismayed and dignified under disaster. Few other people would display such fortitude and bear such heavy losses with so even a mind” (TAD A1848).

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has given an insight into the experiential world of the Boers during the war. Neither the cultural-historical approach in this chapter nor the musicological approach in Chapter 6 will lead to a viable understanding of the processes of affect and meaning in vocal music, which is the focus of the study. This is mainly because these chapters do not put forward concepts capable of explaining the attraction vocal music had for the Boers, or whether it appears to have had an influence over them.

The lacuna between cultural studies and musicology will be located in the next two chapters in order to lead to an understanding of Boer vocal music as a form of human expression.