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Bleed a little louder: Sound, silence and music torture*

Summary

Music, like medicine, can be used to damage as well as to heal, and there is a long history linking music with punishment rituals, and torture. However, the common tendency to think about violence and injury in terms of physical force and visible scars means that impacts of psychological and social violence have often been downplayed, even silenced. The emphasis on physicality also results in erroneous ideas about music torture: for example, the assumption that the music used must be intensely physical, *ergo* extremely loud. Studying the impacts of non-physical violence present difficulties for the historian, not least given changes in how injury and illness are discussed and perceived. However, as nineteenth-century debates around flogging demonstrate, historical actors sometimes show a surprisingly acute awareness of the medical impacts of psychological violence. This essay ultimately argues that giving voice to survivors of these forms of violence is imperative for justice and healing, and that historians are well placed to contribute to this.

Musik kann ebenso wie Medizin heilbringend, aber auch mit schädlichen Auswirkungen eingesetzt werden. Historisch gesehen, steht Musik schon lange mit Bestrafungsritualen und Folter in Verbindung. Die weit verbreitete Tendenz, bei Gewalt und Verletzungen an physische Gewalt und sichtbare Narben zu denken, bedeutet jedoch, dass die Auswirkungen psychologischer und sozialer Gewalt oft heruntergespielt oder sogar verschwiegen werden. Die Betonung der Körperlichkeit führt auch zu falschen Vorstellungen über Musikfolter: zum Beispiel zu der Annahme, dass die verwendete Musik intensiv körperlich sein muss, ergo extrem laut. Die Untersuchung der Auswirkungen nicht-körperlicher Gewalt stellt Historiker*innen vor Schwierigkeiten, nicht zuletzt angesichts der veränderten Art und Weise, wie Verletzungen und Krankheiten diskutiert und wahrgenommen werden. Wie die Debatten über die Auspeitschung im 19. Jahrhundert zeigen, sind sich die historischen Akteure der medizinischen Auswirkungen psychischer Gewalt jedoch manchmal erstaunlich bewusst. Dieser Aufsatz argumentiert schließlich, dass es für Gerechtigkeit und Heilung unerlässlich ist, den Überlebenden dieser Formen von Gewalt eine Stimme zu geben, und dass Historiker*innen maßgeblich dazu beitragen können.

* Dedication: For Louise Quinn

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Preface

In 1846, the Scottish military surgeon Henry Marshall published a book entitled *Military Miscellany: Comprehending a History of the Recruiting of the Army, Military Punishments, etc.*¹ Marshall had been a leading figure in the medical divisions of the British Army, helping pioneer the use of statistics to understand the impact of disease, and drawing on experience in the field in a number of colonised territories, including Ceylon and South Africa. Marshall also campaigned against the use of flogging in the British Army, and the extended chapter on military punishment in the book mentioned is part history of the practice, part pamphlet on why military flogging should itself become history. The year of the volume's publication is perhaps significant here: 1846 saw renewed debate in Parliament and in the press on flogging in the military, following the death of 27-year-old Frederick John White a month after receiving 150 lashes for striking an officer while drunk. An inquest held after White's death concluded, by jury verdict, that his death had been caused by flogging.²

As a military surgeon, Marshall would have known only too well what flogging entailed. For medics were called upon not only to treat the injuries that resulted, but often to supervise the flogging itself, and to intervene if they thought the soldier's life was at risk. In such cases, part of the sentence could be postponed until the soldier had adequately recovered. (Such practices of medical complicity in acts designed specifically to do harm continue to this day: for example, prisoners on death row in the USA must be certified as being physically and mentally "competent" to be executed).³ In his discourse on the subject, Marshall describes in detail both the ritual practice and the immediate and visible effects on the body of a flogging. He also draws on the testimony of those charged with carrying out the flogging, demonstrating how they, too, were brutalised by the practice. He cites, for example, the words of a commissioned officer recalling his first years in the army:

“From the very first day I entered the service as drum-boy, and for eight years after, I can venture to assert, that, at the lowest calculation, it was my disgusting duty to flog men *at least three times a week*. From this painful task there was no possibility of shrinking, without the certainty of a

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- 1 Henry MARSHALL, *Military Miscellany. Comprehending a History of the Recruiting of the Army, Military Punishments, etc.* (London 1846).
 - 2 A full account of the inquest can be found in ANON., *Fatal Case of Military Flogging at Hounslow*, in: *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* 66/169 (1846), 395–433; a shorter account, sometimes harrowing in detail, is given in ERASMUS WILSON, *Punishment by Flogging. The Medical History of the Case of the Late Frederick John White, of the 7th Regiment of Hussars, Hounslow*, in: *The Lancet* 48/1211 (1846), 540–542. I will return to this case later.
 - 3 Linda MALONE, *Too Ill to Be Killed. Mental and Physical Competency to Be Executed Pursuant to the Death Penalty*, in: *Texas Tech Law Review* 51/1 (2018), 147–167. The American Medical Association's ethical code explicitly prohibits physicians contributing to executions in this and other ways: see <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/ethics/capital-punishment> (last accessed: 20.6.2022).

rattan over my own shoulders by a Drum-Major, or of my being sent to the black-hole⁴. When the infliction is ordered to commence, each drum-boy, in rotation, is ordered to strip, for the purpose of administering twenty-five lashes (slowly counted by the Drum-Major) with freedom and vigour. After a poor fellow had received about 100 lashes, the blood would pour down his back in streams, and fly about in all directions with every additional blow of the cat, so that by the time he had received 300, I have found my clothes all over blood from the knees to the crown of the head. Horrified at my disgusting appearance, I have, immediately after parade, run into the barrack-room, to escape from the observations of the soldiers, and to rid my clothes and person of my comrade's blood.”⁵

Various reasons have been given for why drummers specifically were charged with the task of flogging in infantry forces of the British Army.⁶ The more prosaic explanation is that they were chosen as they were used to hitting things repeatedly – an explanation perhaps lent credence by the fact that in cavalry regiments, farriers or blacksmiths were responsible rather than drummers.⁷ But claims that the drummers simply had stronger arms are put in context when we realise that, as the passage cited testifies, drummers were often significantly younger than others in their regiment. They were officially allowed to join up from around age 14, but in practice they were often recruited much younger.⁸ It seems more likely, then, that the tradition of employing drummers for this task emerged from longer-standing links between the drum and discipline in the army, links also reflected in practices such as the drumhead court martial, which is the name often given to a court martial conducted while on campaign, since the sentence was sometimes written on the drum itself.

In this opening example of the links that exist historically between music, medicine and violence, music is represented solely by the persona of the musicians, the drummers. While there is evidence for music sounding at other forms of military punishment (perhaps most notably at the ceremony of “drumming out”, but also at some military executions), this does not seem to have been a feature of flogging, possibly because the musicians were of course otherwise employed.⁹ For this very reason, however, the example invites us to think in broader terms about the historical connections between music and punishment, and music and violence – to think in terms including, but not limited, to the sound we make through music, and what this means. In this essay, I will explore these connections in five stages, entitled *Sound, and Silence; Extremely Loud; Not Just the Noise; Hörsturz*; and in conclusion, *Bleed A Little Louder*.

4 The “black hole” was a place of solitary confinement. Note that for the soldier quoted, this was clearly on a par with physical punishment by flogging.

5 Unnamed officer of the British Army, cited in MARSHALL, *Military Miscellany*, 255.

6 For more on this topic, see Morag Josephine GRANT, *Music and Punishment in the British Army in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, in: *world of music (new series) 2/1*, special issue *Music and Torture / Music and Punishment* (2013), 9–30.

7 As in the case of Frederick White: his regiment was the 7th Hussars, a cavalry regiment.

8 See Morag Josephine GRANT, *Die Kindersoldaten von gestern. Vorbemerkungen zu einer Geschichte von Kindern als Militärmusiker im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, in: Michael SCHRAMM, ed., *Militärmusik zwischen Nutzen und Mißbrauch (= Militärmusik im Diskurs 6, Bonn 2011)*, 174–187.

9 GRANT, *Music and Punishment in the British Army*.

Sound, and Silence

As most historians of music and medicine know, the history of the connections between them is long indeed. Generally, this history is told as it relates to what at different times have been considered the beneficial effects of music on the body, the mind, and on moral behaviour.

What can be used to heal can also be used to destroy, however. In 1959, the esteemed British medical journal *The Lancet* published an article entitled “Perceptual Isolation Using A Silent Room”, which states that “A relatively recent development in psychiatry has been the study of the effects of reduced perceptual and sensory stimulation”, noting too that “to cut out all sensory input is obviously impracticable, but ingenious devices have been used to reduce it to a minimum”.¹⁰ The authors then detail some of these ingenuities, citing work done at McGill University and Princeton amongst others, before proceeding to describe their own experiments: in addition to complete sound insulation of the room where the experiments were conducted, goggles were used to obscure vision, and padding on the limbs numbed the sense of touch. Notable from the results is not least that every single one of the 20 volunteers experienced anxiety, and many experienced panic attacks. Two volunteers experienced such bad anxiety that they asked to leave the experiment after six hours, and were not included in the analysis of the final results.

It is now widely believed that studies such as these, ostensibly aimed at better understanding of certain mental illnesses, may ultimately have been funded by the CIA and allied organisations with the aim of inducing illness rather than alleviating it, possibly under the ruse of attempting to understand Soviet techniques of “brainwashing”.¹¹ As James Kennaway has demonstrated, the idea of brainwashing – the ability to effectively re-programme someone’s mind, against their will – would also influence later ideas around the supposed dangers of rock music, such as the claim made by some conservative critics that messages embedded in rock recordings promoted Satanism, or suicide.¹² In his history of ideas of pathological music, Kennaway notes that such claims have often been linked to music’s supposed effects on willpower and the rational mind.¹³ However, although musical practices have long been used in programmes of so-called “re-education” of political opponents by states on both sides of the Iron Curtain (particularly through forced singing), those behind the research explored by the CIA and its allies seemed to recognize early on that, as Kennaway puts it, “the whole idea of brainwashing, of involuntary trance, is at least seriously flawed [...] The evidence from the Korean War and elsewhere is that it was old-fashioned fear and violence that were apt to change behaviour, and that rumours of mind-bending techniques do not tend to amount to much”.¹⁴ This applies to people who are mentally stable, however. Experiments such as that reported in *The Lancet*, on the other hand, purported to investigate mental instability by inducing it through sensory deprivation.

10 S. SMITH / W. LEWTY, Perceptual Isolation Using a Silent Room, in: *The Lancet* 274/7097 (1959), 342–345.

11 Alfred MCCOY, *A Question of Torture. CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York 2006).

12 James KENNAWAY, *Bad Vibrations. The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease* (Abingdon–New York 2016), 118–125.

13 *Ibid.*, 18.

14 *Ibid.*, 124.

Similar techniques of sensory deprivation and its companion, sensory overload, have been used in torture repeatedly since at least the 1960s, including by the UK.¹⁵ The most famous such cases come from the US “War on Terror” from 2001 onwards, where these techniques were further developed by psychologists James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen. According to the findings of the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s (SSCI) investigation into CIA detention and interrogation practices, a company established by Mitchell and Jessen in 2005 was contracted by the US government to research and implement methods of “learned helplessness” in the interrogation of suspects. Over \$81 million dollars was paid to the company under the terms of the contract.¹⁶ The SSCI report, often known as the Feinstein Report after its chair, Dianne Feinstein, also includes detailed information on techniques used and their impacts, including multiple incidences of the use of music in torture. The findings of the report corroborate but also go beyond investigations previously conducted by NGOs including Physicians For Human Rights, whose 2005 report *Break Them Down* was one of the first to reveal the use of psychological torture in the “War On Terror”.¹⁷

Sensory deprivation works by disabling the body’s ability to receive information about its environment through blocking all sensory channels. In the case of the sense of hearing, as the example from *The Lancet* shows, the original idea was to use complete silence, but the use of one particular sound to drown out others has proved easier to implement (and perhaps more effective: it can also help induce sleep deprivation, for example). In some cases, and very famously in the recent US case, the sound used has been the sound of music.

The use of music as an instrument of torture in the “War On Terror” captured the public imagination and led to numerous responses in the media and from campaigning organisations. Widespread shock was expressed that music could be used in this way. However, there is a very long history of the use of music in torture, including but not limited to its use in practices of sensory deprivation and sensory overload. For example, around the same time that media attention was turning people’s minds towards the use of music against detainees in the “War On Terror”, a number of historical studies appeared which explored the uses of music in Nazi concentration and extermination camps.¹⁸ These studies laid out in horrific detail how music had been used not only by detainees themselves to negotiate and document their experiences, but how it had also been used against them, especially through practices of forced singing and

15 Darius REJALI, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton 2007); Samantha NEWBERY, *Interrogation, Intelligence and Security. Controversial British Techniques* (Manchester 2016).

16 SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE, *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program. Executive Summary*, available at https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/7/c/7c85429a-ec38-4bb5-968f-289799bf6d0e/D87288C34A6D9FF736F9459ABCF83210.sscistudy1.pdf (last accessed: 22.4.2022), 11. Mitchell and Jessen are not named in the report itself, but referred to by pseudonyms. See also Michael McCarthy, *Psychologists’ Firm Was Paid \$81m to Implement CIA’s “Enhanced Interrogation” Program*, in: *The British Medical Journal* 349 (2014), doi: 10.1136/bmj.g7639.

17 PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, *Break Them Down. Systematic Use of Psychological Torture by US Forces* (Cambridge, Mass. 2005), available at <https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2005/05/break-them-down.pdf> (last accessed: 22.4.2022).

18 These include the following: Guido FACKLER, „Des Lagers Stimme“. *Musik Im KZ. Alltag und Häftlingskultur in den Konzentrationslagern 1933–1936. Mit einer Darstellung der weiteren Entwicklung bis 1945 und einer Biblio-/Mediographie* (Bremen 2000); Juliane BRAUER, *Musik im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen (= Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten 25, Berlin, 2009)*; Shirli GILBERT, *Music in the Holocaust. Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps* (Oxford Historical Monographs, Oxford 2005).

forced music-making – both of which are common far beyond this specific historical example.¹⁹ In my experience, however, studies into music in Nazi camps have been received quite differently in media and popular discourse, with the positive aspects tending to dominate even when evidence of music torture is laid bare.²⁰ There seems to be a tendency towards denial of the Nazi use of music to torture which seems all the more strange considering the attention given, in the same period, to the use of music in torture by the USA. No doubt many factors feed into what I suggest are some fundamental contradictions in the reception of these two cases. I do wonder, however, how much these contradictions have to do with the exact way music has been used and portrayed in the recent US cases – in particular, the focus on the sheer loudness of the music played.

Extremely Loud

“Extremely loud” was the title chosen for the English translation of Juliette Volcler’s book *Le son comme arme*, which, literally translated, provides the book’s English subtitle: “sound as a weapon”.²¹ But what motivated the American publisher to introduce this arguably salacious and misleading main title? Perhaps it was felt necessary to differentiate Volcler’s book sufficiently from Steve Goodman’s *Sonic Warfare*.²² Possibly, the title “extremely loud” was chosen in oblique reference to Jonathan Safran Foer’s novel about 9/11 and its aftermath, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, the film version of which was released the year before the translation of Volcler’s book.²³

I have already suggested that the English title is misleading, especially since one of the main points that comes out of Volcler’s work is that sound does not need to be loud to work as a weapon. Volcler in fact challenges many of the claims made for sonic and acoustic weapons generally, while in no way downplaying the actual and potential impacts of sound and sonic communication as weapons in both the real and the metaphorical sense (a distinction often not made clearly enough in discourse around the subject).²⁴ The English title “extremely loud” indicates however, the tendency in much public discourse around music and violence to focus on volume, on loudness, and on sound as a physical force. In addition, the forms of music most easily associated in the public mind with loudness are also those most often presumed to be the most “violent”, such as metal music (if the perpetrators are presumed to be white) or rap music (if the perpetrators are presumed to be black).

There is a continuum, here, between the idea of music that is extremely loud, and the idea of a music that is, in fact, just noise – in other words, not really music at all. This, I would suggest, is one of the mental hoops that people jump through in order to maintain the illusion that music – *proper* music, as it were – is inherently good, and as such inherently non-violent.

19 For more examples see e. g. Morag Josephine GRANT, Pathways to Music Torture, in: *Transposition. Musique et sciences sociales* 4/4 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.4000/transposition.494>.

20 I have personally experienced such reactions when discussing this topic both in public and at academic meetings.

21 Juliette VOLCLER, *Le son comme arme. Les usages policiers et militaires du son* (Paris 2011); *Extremely Loud. Sound as a Weapon*, translated by Carol Volk (New York 2013).

22 Steve GOODMAN, *Sonic Warfare. Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, Mass. 2010).

23 Jonathon Safran FOER, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Boston 2005).

24 VOLCLER, *Le son comme arme / Extremely Loud*, especially Chapter 2.

Kennaway has noted that “in nineteenth-century medicine and aesthetics, serious music was a matter for the transcendental subject, and only over-stimulating, effeminate and dangerously sensual music was generally discussed in terms of the nervous system”: this, Kennaway argues, represented a clear change from earlier ideas of music’s impact on the nerves, which were generally applied to music *per se*.²⁵ Here, there is a clear link to the mistaken idea that music used to torture – music with the most devastating impacts of all – must also be much more obviously physical, which in turn can imply the literally physical force that comes with loudness.

It is true that in the “War on Terror” and similar cases in the last half century, the music used in music torture *was* generally loud – though not, officially, loud enough to cause hearing damage. There is no denying, either, that this made the music a forceful presence in the prisoner’s space (both their physical space, and their mental space). However, we need only remember that the original practices of sensory deprivation used complete silence, rather than noise, to realise that the situation is a lot more complex. Moreover, where music rather than other forms of sound are used for this purpose we also need to account for the decision to use music specifically, and oftentimes *specific* music as well (generally, music that has a specific relevance in terms of the cultural or political context).

Research in music psychology and the cognitive neuroscience of music is increasingly demonstrating what those of us who study music torture have long suspected: namely, that how music affects us, even to the level of how it is processed in the brain, depends very much on whether we actually want to hear that music.²⁶ Brain responses to music appear to differ depending on whether the music evokes joy or sadness and fear, but also on whether the music is perceived as pleasant or unpleasant: areas of the brain associated with processing of music-invoked emotions include the amygdala and the hippocampus, both areas implicated in anxiety and stress disorders (with chronic acoustic stressors known to have an impact on the size of the hippocampus).²⁷ This clearly speaks a word of caution to the use of music in therapeutic and other contexts, where the patient is not free to remove themselves from what may, according to these accounts, be an acute stressor.

Ultimately, to think that the impact of music in torture is primarily, or even exclusively, about the volume at which it is played, is to apply a Newtonian logic of physical force to a phenomenon that is inherently un-Newtonian. It’s not surprising that this error is made, however, given the widespread perception that violence is primarily about physical force in the most blatant sense. Clearly, physical force is at play when someone is held in prison, since they are held there against their will, but not everyone held in prison is tortured. Being imprisoned, however – being completely unable to remove yourself from the source of the danger – is one

25 KENNAWAY, *Bad Vibrations*, 14.

26 John SLOBODA, *Music in Everyday Life. The Role of Emotions*, in: Patrik N. Juslin / John Sloboda, eds., *Handbook of Music and Emotion. Theory, Research, Applications* (Oxford 2010), 493–513; for a survey of further literature exploring these issues, see Joy VAMVAKARIS, “As long as I’ve got my music, I’ll get there in the end”. A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Music Listening and Health and Wellbeing, PhD Dissertation, (University of Edinburgh 2020), 26–28.

27 Stefan KOELSCH, *Brain Correlates of Music-Evoked Emotions*, in: *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 15/3 (2014), 170–180. The long-term impact of traumatic stress on hippocampus size and function is explored in J. Douglas BREMNER, *Does Stress Damage the Brain? Understanding Trauma-Related Disorders from a Mind-Body Perspective* (New York–London 2005).

of the constituent factors that helps define torture, and which differentiates it from other forms of violence. And once that basic relationship of absolute power over another is established, overt physical violence is not the only way to cause serious injury to the person you have under your control. This applies not only to prisons, but also to other places where people are de facto deprived of their liberty: in certain circumstances, this can include hospitals, for example, and care homes; monitoring bodies for the UN Convention Against Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment have the remit to visit these kinds of institutions as well.²⁸

Just as violence itself need not be physical, the outcomes of violence – including physical violence – are not limited to the obvious signs of physical injury: this is one reason why drawing a dividing line between physical and psychological violence is problematic except as an analytical tool. To quote the sociologist Mary Jackman,

“Physical outcomes such as pain, injury, disfigurement, bodily alteration, functional impairment, or death, as well as physical restraint or confinement, have a wincing resonance that violates our basic desire for physical survival, avoidance of pain, and preservation of bodily integrity and autonomy. The apparent concreteness and immediacy of physical injuries heightens their visibility and ease of observation. They hardly encapsulate, however, the full assortment of injuries that humans find consequential. Psychological outcomes such as fear, anxiety, anguish, shame, or diminished self-esteem; material outcomes such as the destruction, confiscation, or defacement of property, or the loss of earnings; and social outcomes such as public humiliation, stigmatization, exclusion, imprisonment, banishment, or expulsion are all highly consequential and sometimes devastating for human welfare.”²⁹

Moreover, as she points out, “Authorities concerned with devising compelling human punishment have displayed a more sensitive appreciation of non-corporal injuries than have most scholars of violence”.³⁰

Many of the types of outcome Jackman outlines come into the category of social injury: several of these, particularly public humiliation, could also be regarded as forms of psychological violence. Stigmatisation, exclusion, and banishment, all widely practiced forms of punishment, may not seem so obviously “violent” in their impacts to people living comfortable, modern, western lives with at least the remnants of social security systems to fall back on; but in societies without that safety net, or in which life outside the safety of the group exposes individuals to other perils, these punishments can be regarded as severe to the point of posing a direct risk to life. Such practices also have particular relevance for our topic, since many historical practices of stigmatisation, exclusion and humiliation had a musical or para-musical element.³¹

28 UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, “Visits”, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/spt/visits> (last accessed: 30.6.2022).

29 Mary R. JACKMAN, *Violence in Social Life*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 28/1 (2002), 387–415, 393.

30 *Ibid.*, 394.

31 I am adopting the term “para-musical” from historians of charivari and related practices of public humiliation and public shaming to describe elements within those rituals that reference music but may not themselves constitute music in the narrower sense, or which may in fact function as a kind of anti-music. My use of the term “paramusical” here is thus slightly different to how it has been used in music therapy, for example.

Not Just The Noise

The practices of public shaming we are concerned with here, sometimes grouped together in academic writing under the name “charivari”, were widespread in various forms across Europe from at least the Middle Ages into the twentieth century. They took various forms and were sometimes more playful than punitive in intent: there were forms that specifically related to weddings, for example. One of the common features that link these traditions was the creation of what E. P. Thomson called a “rude cacophony”,³² sometimes created with actual musical instruments, but also by bashing on pots, pans and the like as well as using the human voice. The fact that this was such a central aspect of these practices is captured in the terms *Katzenmusik* and *rough music* to denominate some of the German and English practices respectively. But as Thompson pointed out, “[i]t is not *just* the noise, however, although satiric noise (whether light or savage) is always present. The noise formed part of a ritualised expression of hostility”.³³ And because it is a ritual, we need not be surprised that music, or at least para-music, is present: cross-culturally, music plays significant roles in ritual, helping to mark the boundaries of the ritual and draw attention to it – which is clearly the case here – but also communicating what the ritual is doing.

Victor Turner said that the difference between a ceremony and a ritual is that a ceremony confirms or “indicates”, while a ritual transforms.³⁴ In many cases, the transformation sought by charivari rituals seems to have been to bring moral or other transgressions into the open, thus to overcome them and restore the integrity of the community. This might also explain the use of para-music as a form of anti-music, given other historical examples of practices which similarly seek to restore the harmony of the community by integrating musical or paramusical elements into practices of punishment: this includes the symbolic logic of medieval instruments of torture that were shaped like musical instruments, such as the shrew’s fiddle or the flute of shame.³⁵

Thinking through the implications of these practices can help us think again about what music is doing in other practices as well. Consider, for example, the tradition of drumming out. Here, the ritual serves to rid the army of a disgraced soldier: the transformation involved is that of turning a soldier back into a civilian, with all honours removed. The name “drumming out” come from the role of drummers within this practice, which was not limited to the drums being played on such occasions: in some cases, the disgraced party concerned was led out by the smallest drummer boy available. This was clearly intended as a further humiliation, as the following passage from a book published in the 1790s indicates:

“When a soldier has been convicted of such a scandalous enormity, as to render him a disgrace to his corps and to the service, he is sentenced to be discharged with infamy, or, as it is commonly termed, to be drummed out of the regiment; but this seldom takes place till he has received a

32 E. P. THOMPSON, *Rough Music Reconsidered*, in: *Folklore* 103/1 (1992), 3–26; here 3.

33 *Ibid.*

34 VICTOR TURNER, *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York 1982), 79.

35 Marie-Louise HERZFELD-SCHILD, “He Plays on the Pillory”. The Use of Musical Instruments for Torture in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, in: *Torture. Journal on the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims and Prevention of Torture* 23/2 (2013), 14–23.

severe corporal punishment. When a soldier is to be dismissed in this manner, he is escorted with a halter about his neck by the drummers of the regiment, with a written label containing the particulars of his crime, through the streets of the camps or garrison, and is dismissed with a kick from the youngest drummer. His crime is also inserted in his discharge.”³⁶

Investigating the connections between such practices, and using this to help interpret and understand them, is one thing. A much more difficult task for the historian is to evaluate the harm such social and psychological violence caused. To the extent that the rituals of humiliation just discussed were time-limited, it may be that any psychological impact might also be relatively short-lived. But again, this depends on the precise context, on the level of control or agency the victims felt over their fate, and whether or not the victims regarded this as an ordeal to be got through, or as something more significant or more inherently dangerous.

Because of the types of sources at our disposal, we generally see these practices through the lens of the communities carrying them out, not through the eyes of those on whom they are inflicted. We need to be careful, therefore, not to jump to conclusions concerning the actual harm caused, especially considering that our knowledge of the impacts of music in practices of ill-treatment and torture in the more recent past comes largely from survivor testimony. Moreover, there is a continuum of sorts – both synchronous and diachronous – between uses of music and para-music in less obviously harmful practices, and in practices that clearly amount to torture and ill-treatment. For example: as the passage cited shows, it is very likely that the soldier being drummed out had previously been flogged, perhaps repeatedly. Move into the twentieth century, where the lines between combatant and civilian have often effectively been erased, and where mass incarceration of civilians under military control becomes more common, and we repeatedly find practices of musical violence that in part have roots in older traditions of military discipline.³⁷ The use of music in Nazi camps and in acts of genocide is particularly well-documented: these include some reports from mass shootings in remote areas of occupied Poland and Ukraine where local villagers were required to play drums, or, in some cases, to bang on pots and cans.³⁸ Again, such practices have often been explained away as an attempt to drown out the sound of execution, but this explanation is problematic — not least since, as testimony from locals indicates, the sounds of violence were heard anyway. And again, this is not *just* noise. Its job *may* be to conceal, but it could be the exact opposite: to communicate. If the latter is the case, we need to consider exactly what is been communicated.

36 ANON., *The Elements of Military Arrangement, and of the Discipline of War; Adapted to the Practice of the British Infantry* (London 1791), 123.

37 GRANT, *Pathways to Music Torture*.

38 See Morag Josephine GRANT, *Understanding Perpetrators’ Use of Music*, in: Susanne C. Knittel / Zachary J. Goldenberg, eds., *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies* (London 2020), 206–216. Testimony relating to these events was collected (by others rather than myself) several decades after the events described, and relates to a traumatic event, so the usual words of caution do of course apply here.

Hörsturz

As Willem de Haan has pointed out, “Violence is socially constructed because who and what is considered as violent varies according to specific socio-cultural and historical conditions”.³⁹ We could extend this by saying that the impacts of violence, and how injury manifests, can also vary according to socio-cultural and historical contexts. This is an additional challenge for historians and others looking to understand the impacts of punishment and violence across epochs and cultures.

Let me illustrate this with an example. I have entitled this section of my essay “*Hörsturz*”. Dictionaries tell me to translate this as “acute hearing loss” or “sudden hearing loss”. I need to rely on a dictionary here because prior to living in Germany, which I did for around twenty years, I had never known anyone experience this kind of sudden loss or deterioration of hearing. I am not alone in this: in an entry in the discussion forum of dictionary and translation site Leo.org., one confused translator posted the following:

“I’m curious to know to what extent ‘Hörsturz’ is a cultural phenomenon. I’m a young American who has known various Germans in my age group to be hospitalized because of a ‘Hörsturz’, yet the only translation I can find (‘acute hearing loss’) is not a common complaint of any Americans I know. I’ve never know[n] an American to be hospitalized with ‘acute hearing loss’. Is this a fluke, or is it really an illness far more often suffered (or recognized/diagnosed) in Germany than in other cultures?”⁴⁰

The first post written in response, in German, commented as follows: “Well, given 8,000,000 Google hits for ‘sudden hearing loss’ and an abbreviation ‘SHL’ it doesn’t seem to be THAT rare. Clearly none of your friends suffer from stress ;-).”⁴¹ The subsequent discussion on the thread included posts from other users with roots outside German-speaking cultures who agreed with the original poster that they only became familiar with the condition when living and working with the German language. Important for our purposes is also the link that the first respondent immediately made between a *Hörsturz* and stress.

I do not want to overstate a point and suggest that only Germans can suffer a *Hörsturz*: several studies have indicated a link between traumatic stress disorders and tinnitus, for example, so there are clearly broader connections between psychological ill-health and hearing disorders.⁴² I have used this example, however, as it is probably familiar to many readers of this journal, and illustrates well how illness and injury can manifest differently in different

39 Willem DE HAAN, Violence as an Essentially Contested Concept, in: Sophie Body-Gendrot / Pieter Spierenburg, eds., Violence in Europe. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (New York 2008), 27–40; here 28.

40 Post by user “EY” on 7 June 2006, <https://dict.leo.org/forum/viewGeneraldiscussion.php?idThread=2159&idForum=4&lang=en&lp=ende>, (last accessed: 1.11.2021).

41 “Na, mit 8.000.000 Google Hits für ‘sudden hearing loss’ und einer Abk. ‘SHL’ scheint es ja sooooo selten nicht zu sein. Offensichtlich haben Deine Freunde keinen Stress ;-).” post by user “judex” on 7 June 2006, <https://dict.leo.org/forum/viewGeneraldiscussion.php?idThread=2159&idForum=4&lang=en&lp=ende>, (last accessed: 1.11.2021).

42 Devon E. HINTON et. al., Tinnitus among Cambodian Refugees. Relationship to PTSD Severity, in: Journal of Traumatic Stress 19/4 (2006), 541–546, doi 10.1002/jts.20138; Marc A. FAGELSON / James H. QUILLEN, The Association between Tinnitus and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, in: American Journal of Audiology 16/2 (2007), 107–117.

cultures. Medics often use the term “culture-bound syndromes” to describe this, although more recently the term “culturally influenced” has been suggested to be more accurate.⁴³ It may be that the human body, understood holistically, itself has different languages at its disposal to communicate when something is wrong, and chooses the one most likely to be understood in a particular time and place. Coupled with the fact that explanations for physical and mental ailments can also vary quite dramatically between cultural contexts, we would seem to be faced with an additional set of problems when trying to understand the connections between music and punishment in history, as well as additional reasons why the specific skill sets of historians in evaluating data in context are so important here. A further difficulty is that how certain practices are presented by arbiters of the particular tradition may not reflect the experience of those actually affected. Practices may be presented as harmless, or any harm caused as justifiable, from the perspective of the perpetrators. Things may look very different from the perspective of the victim. But how do we get their perspective? How can we know?

There is no single answer to this question, which is a common challenge when attempting to write a history from below. Contentious cases such as the debate around flogging in nineteenth-century Britain are easier to address in this regard, precisely because they allow us to evaluate a number of different contemporary views and perspectives. Flogging is of course an extremely physical punishment, which leads to obvious physical injury. Nevertheless, there are things we can learn here too. Reviewing the debates that occurred following Frederick White’s death in 1846, I was struck by a couple of points. The first was how much the debate on the issue that took place in *The Lancet* reflected the limited medical knowledge and diagnostic instruments available at the time. Following White’s death, a post-mortem examination did what such examinations do: opened up the body, looked under the skin and investigated the state of health of the major organs. This revealed, among other things, inflammation of the heart and lungs, this being noted as the primary cause of death. Had White not been dead, this examination would not have been possible: with x-rays still in the future, the major organs and their inflammation would have remained invisible. The real debate, however, emerged from the question of what caused the inflammation. Erasmus Wilson, one of those who conducted the post-mortem, presented many theories on the less immediately visible but ultimately more lethal impacts of flogging, including suggesting that direct damage to the muscles of the chest during the flogging could have played a part. Introducing his ideas on this subject, which centred around the action of the fibrils that make up muscle fibre, Wilson noted that a hindrance to understanding the workings of the muscle had previously been “the extreme minuteness” of the fibrils and “the want, within the last few years, of optical instruments for its examination”.⁴⁴ Another commentator, “J. A. W.”, theorised that injury to the blood through the damage visibly inflicted on the skin could in turn have led to organ failure that killed White.⁴⁵ This commen-

43 Oyedemi AYONRINDE / Dinesh BHUGRA, Culture-Bound Syndromes, in: Dinesh Bhugra / Gin S. Malhi, eds., *Troublesome Disguises. Managing Challenging Disorders in Psychiatry* (Chichester 2015), 231–251. See also KENNAWAY, *Bad Vibrations*, 17–18.

44 Erasmus WILSON, Punishment by Flogging. On the Minute Structure of the Ultimate Fibril of the Muscle of Animal Life, in: *The Lancet* 48/1212 (1846), 570–571; Erasmus WILSON, Punishment by Flogging. The Pathological Effects of Military Flogging on the Muscular System, in: *The Lancet* 48/1215 (1846), 651–652, here: 651.

45 J. A. W., Military Flogging and its Effects on the Blood, in: *The Lancet* 48/1199 (1846), 215–216. A different take on the impact of injuries to the skin was presented in a passage quoted in the previous issue of the journal relating to a soldier who had died from tetanus following a flogging: ANON., Military Flogging. Effects of Injury to the Skin, in: *The Lancet* 48/1198 (1846), 198.

tator and others suggested that inflammation was likely to be particularly serious when the punishment was inflicted on soldiers prone to alcohol abuse (as was not infrequently the case, although disputed in the case of White).⁴⁶ Disputing the claim made by Wilson – and upheld by the jury – that flogging had been the ultimate cause of White’s death, George Ballingall, Professor of Military Surgery at the University of Edinburgh, argued that the inflammation was linked to “atmospheric changes” during White’s stay in hospital after the flogging (in modern terms, he was arguing that White died of a chest infection caught in hospital: infection, however, was not properly understood in the 1840s).⁴⁷ We could indeed draw parallels between the primitive state of the medical understanding when this debate took place, and the still limited understanding of the pathology of trauma and mental illness in the present day.

This brings me to the second point that struck me when reviewing this material: the extent to which doctors and other commentators of the time seemed fully to understand the psychological impacts of flogging, and how these in turn could cause physical injury and even death. Wilson, while also discoursing on his theory of muscle damage, stated clearly that “I feel convinced that the shock caused to White’s nervous system by the anguish he endured, conjoined with the violent efforts made to suppress the manifestations of suffering, produced inflammation of his heart”.⁴⁸ Even more pointed are comments made in an article published in *The Examiner*, a newspaper known for its radical and reformist leanings. The article is unequivocal in its position on flogging:

“Let the punishment be defended as it may, it is torture, and intended to be torture. The scheme of the punishment is to extend the suffering over a length of time, inflicting strokes separately of no great severity, but become torment by repetition. So, in the days of torture, water was dropped on the head till it became one of the most intolerable sufferings. To the brave man flogging is more of a torture than to the one who succumbs to the suffering, for half an hour or more under the lash is a tremendous trial to the fortitude, and the strain to the nervous system in bearing up against it must have its ill effects.”⁴⁹

Significant here is that flogging is regarded as a form of torture specifically because of the duration of the punishment and hence, the mental anguish caused. The article goes on to argue that in the Navy, there was a stricter limit on the number of lashes given and hence the time the punishment took, and that this more than compensated for the fact that the lash used was itself more injurious. In the Navy, as opposed to the Army,

“A man is not seen for half an hour writhing under it; it is not made to look like a husbanded, a treasured cruelty, to be made the most of; the monotonous dull sounds of the cat lacerating the quivering flesh are not heard a hundred and fifty times; it is soon over, short and severe, but without the studied contrivance of a torture”.⁵⁰

46 See here also ANON., *The Fatal Flogging at Hounslow*, in: *The Lancet* 18/1200 (1846), 253–254 (reprinted from *The Medical Gazette*, August 1846).

47 ERASMUS WILSON, *Punishment by Flogging*. Reply to the Observations of Sir George Ballingall, on Portions of the Medical Evidence Delivered at the Late Inquest at Hounslow, in: *The Lancet* 48/1209 (1846), 488–489.

48 *Ibid.*, 541.

49 ANON., *Flogging in the Army*, in: *The Examiner* 2008 (25 July 1946), 465–466; here 465.

50 *Ibid.*

The author's further description of torture as "a studied refinement in giving pain" is followed by the commentary that watching this punishment is itself a form of torture – a recognition of what until recently was called secondary trauma, long before modern theories of trauma developed. Similarly, the author's comment that an officer in White's own barracks had received no punishment for the surely comparable delict of striking a superior officer (with a sword rather than a poker, as White had done) is not merely a comment on the injustice of military justice as then practiced, but also points to the imbalance of power that lies at the heart of all torture, and how so much about torture can be understood by regarding it as a violent performance aimed more at reasserting that power than any utilitarian ends. This, of course, has long been noted by opponents of torture; it is also characteristic of several other types of violence, including relationship abuse, and rape.

Bleed a little louder

Clearly, there are some impacts of violence that do not depend on culture. If I cut you with a knife, or flog you, you will bleed. How much you bleed will depend on a number of factors, but you will bleed. Psychological violence may be slightly more complicated, but the same can basically apply here as well: if I deprive you of sleep, you will eventually hallucinate, among other impacts. Post-traumatic stress may manifest in different ways, but the underlying cause – a past traumatic event, or a series of such events – is the same. The difference between physical and psychological violence is principally to be found in how the scars manifest; and that we still live in a culture which routinely separates mind from body, often only taking violence (and illness) seriously when it affects the latter rather than the former. The connection between traumatic stress and physical illness (including heart disease, strokes and other often fatal conditions) is however strong enough for the psychiatrist and renowned trauma specialist J. Douglas Bremner to have argued that "One of the most important determinants of disease is the lasting consequences of traumatic stress".⁵¹ As we have seen, this was already being discussed in the nineteenth century.

The title of this essay is taken from the song "All in Time" by Louise Quinn, written for her gig theatre play *Music Is Torture* which was staged in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness in 2017.⁵² The play follows a music producer named Jake who discovers that music he created is being used in the torture of prisoners. *Music Is Torture* is simultaneously a play about complicity in torture, and also about destructive and coercive relationships in the music industry and in society in general. Jake's descent into mental illness over the course of the play mirrors the psychological destruction wreaked by torture itself, a destruction which is much more difficult to depict or evoke than representations of physical violence and its impacts.

There is a scene in *Music in Torture* when Jake receives a letter informing him of the use of his track in "enhanced interrogation", the euphemism *de jour* for torture in the "War on Terror". This is the first time any of the characters have heard of music the use of in torture

51 BREMNER, Does Stress Damage the Brain, 276.

52 LOUISE A. QUINN, All in Time, from: Dawnings (album) (Tromolo Records 2017). Also available online at <https://dawnings.bandcamp.com/track/all-in-time> (last accessed: 13.4.2022). I am grateful to Louise for providing access to the unpublished script of *Music Is Torture*.

— with the exception of trumpet player Rab. From his position inside the studio's sound booth, we hear Rab launch into an informed monologue on the history of this kind of torture from the Nazis to the present day. The monologue is entirely scripted, but a few sentences in, the stage directions indicate that Jake, seated at the mixing desk in the main studio, turns down the volume on the loudspeaker connection to the sound booth: neither Jake, nor the audience, can hear the remainder of what Rab has to say, except for the tail end of his monologue: "... basically it all boils down to economics".

Looking online one evening for the song from which the line is taken, I typed "Bleed a little louder" into Google. The first match was an article published on the BBC news website in 2014: "How can music make your ears bleed?"⁵³ It concerns a concert by the band UB40 which was so loud that one member of the audience reported it had caused her ears to bleed. The article explores the possible risks of exposure to extremely loud noise at concerts, coming generally to the conclusion that persistent rather than one-off exposure is more likely to cause lasting harm, but also noting that room acoustics, positioning within the room and also personal vulnerability, including due to age, can be risk factors. The actual content of the article is much less sensational than the headline suggests. Note, however, that it is the presence of blood, as a visible sign of injury that makes this story newsworthy. Again, the idea of music as force: it seems we really do need to bleed a little louder if we want people to take notice. The irony, of course, is the contradiction that exists between the idea of loudness as the only possible way to represent the force of music, and the silence that too often surrounds the consequences of how music is actually used as a form of punishment and torture. Anna Papaeti has described how people tortured under the Greek Junta of the 1960s and 1970s were told not to talk about the uses of music and sound in this torture when they testified in court against their torturers, because non-physical torture was not then considered torture.⁵⁴

And so, the torturers win again. Psychological torture is designed to destroy the subject's ability to feel they are in rational control of their own being, their own feelings, their own mind. Too often we respond by doubting what victims tell us, compounding the violence and silencing them again. This is why we need to break these silences, restore these voices. Survivors can't bleed a little louder, and at stake here is not simply the question of justice, but of healing, of survival. For if we don't speak up for the truth of their experiences, how will those suffering know that their experience of violence is valid? How else can we reassure them that the violence they have experienced, and many still be experiencing, is real?

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53 David KELLER, *How Can Music Make Your Ears Bleed?* BBC News, 16 April 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-27052513> (last accessed: 13.4.2022).

54 Anna PAPAETI, *Music, Torture, Testimony. Reopening the Case of the Greek Military Junta (1967–1974)*, in: *the world of music (new series) 2/1 (2013)*, special issue *Music and Torture / Music and Punishment*, 67–89.