Refocusing the traumatic past (an essay in two parts)

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ABSTRACT

In the greater landscape of South Africa's traumatic past, the South African War of 1899-1902 is arguably "old history", surpassed in time and importance by more pressing traumas. Moreover, because it was usurped by Afrikaner nationalism as a myth of national origin and used to justify claims of Afrikaner sovereignty, it is also often seen as "old *Afrikaner* history": at best, an episode of limited relevance to the many South Africans effectively written out of this narrative; at worst, a platform for nostalgic hankering by a conservative few.

The following is an attempt to reconsider the South African War in a manner that addresses both the assumptions pervading this history and the prevalence of its residues and traces in a present-day, "decolonising" South Africa. My premise is that the War, like all traumatic pasts, is neither stable nor resolved – less a closed chapter than an open book, subject to perpetual rereading. Precisely because this past is unfinished, looking again has the potential to focus past and present relationally, illuminating not only the vicissitudes of what has been, but also the co-ordinates of the seer, here and now.

I first encountered this history (in a resonant way) through the eyes of a witness: my great-grandmother, Maria, who was captured by British soldiers in 1901 and interned in the Winburg Concentration Camp. Shortly before her death (in 1946), Maria distilled her experiences into a handwritten, 56-page memoir, which was passed down through subsequent generations. I recall immersing myself in this document, with its brittle pages and fading ink, a vicarious spectator inserted into the space behind Maria's eyes.

Later, I came to see Maria's narrative differently: refracted through other archives and narratives; through critical accounts of the War; through the agendas and ideologies pervading the time of its writing (some four decades after "the fact"). I saw it as a belated "memory log", where memory is a pliant repository shaped by the context of remembrance and, in Maria's case, necessarily occluded by trauma. What her narrative evinces is not the unequivocal "truth" of experience, but the visage generated by her own sense-making, mediated by time and language, to be mediated again and again by the reader's interpretative lenses.

In taking the motif of "refocusing" as a starting point, this article – essentially a reflection, in two parts, on my own ambivalent apprehensions of the War – considers the literal and figurative technologies of looking that both enable and imperil access to the elusive past. I suggest that "doing history" is a mediated, subjective, embodied experience, one that both *locates* and *dis-locates* the researcher. For the very act of looking back (and looking again) shifts the vantage point from whence one looks, reciprocally. In this sense, "refocusing" could be seen as productively estranging, transforming both seer and seen. It does not "return" the researcher to a stable and familiar past (and its illusory "home truths"), but opens up mutable, multiple sightlines to (and from) a precarious present.

Keywords: South African War, refocusing, "doing history", photography, estrangement, embodied research.

1. A matter of wanton damage (Whereas ... and whereas ... Now therefore I)

> *PROCLAMATION.*
>
> *Whereas small parties of raiders have recently been doing wanton damage to public property in the Orange River Colony and South African Republic by destroying railway bridges and culverts and cutting the telegraph wires, and whereas such damage cannot be done without the knowledge and connivance of the neighbouring inhabitants, and the principal civil residents in the districts concerned,* [sic]
>
> *Now therefore I, Frederick Sleigh, Baron Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford, K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., V.C., Field Marshal, Commanding in Chief Her Majesty's Troops in South Africa, warn the said inhabitants and principal civil residents that, whenever public property is destroyed or injured in the manner specified above, they will be held responsible for aiding and abetting the offenders. The houses in the vicinity of the place where the damage is done will be burnt, and the principal civil residents will be made prisoners of war.*
>
> *ROBERTS, F. M., Commanding in Chief, South Africa.*
>
> *Army Head Quarters, South Africa, Pretoria, 16th June, 1900*

'Now therefore I …' says Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts, Commanding in Chief of Her Majesty's Troops in South Africa. He is warning the Boers that he will reciprocate their damaging of infrastructure by burning civilian homes. Why? Because it is June 1900, and the South African War/Anglo-Boer War/Boer War/Second War of Freedom is underway. Because the British have just taken Pretoria, but the Boer guerrillas – fighting for the independence of their two republics – are proving a resilient enemy. Because the logic of war is to answer damage with damage.

I found this proclamation in the Western Cape Archives on the 1st of February 2016, a sweltering summer's day in South Africa. In a small, airless room, under unforgiving fluorescent light, I captured it with a macro lens, click-click. I was drawn to its distress (literally and metaphorically). I had no idea what I would do with it at the time.

'Now therefore I …' says Roberts. With these words he literally made history, declaring it permissible for Her Majesty's Troops to wage their war by burning homes. In the process, Roberts set in motion the notorious "scorched earth" policy, which devastated the Boer republics. Over the next two years, 30 000 farms were razed, crops and livestock destroyed, entire towns torched. Those swept from the veld were rounded up by the British and taken to hastily-constructed, epidemic-riddled concentration camps, where they died by the thousands. Records list 27 000 casualties in the Boer camps – which, to put things in perspective, constituted ten per cent of the total Boer population, and far outnumbered their battlefield casualties. Perhaps as many died in separate camps created for Africans, although the legacy of these camps was suppressed and forgotten to the same extent that the legacy of the Boer camps was mythologised and entrenched.

Click-click. Often I photograph to see things, using the macro lens to magnify, to isolate and inspect; depressing the shutter to register on my retina what it is that I am looking at. I hone in on a gilt-framed family portrait, with a crack across the mother's face. In the margins of certain documents, ink spills morph into bloodstains, and pins pierce and mutilate pages. Observing these things with my camera facilitates intimate inspection. But it also shows up the lenses that mediate my looking (thus pushing me further away). I examine, zoom, focus, depress the shutter, import to laptop, zoom, examine. Amplified sufficiently, every digital image devolves into pixels.

In November 1900, five months after the Roberts proclamation, Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener picked up where Roberts left off, and expanded the concentration camp system. His stated aim (*lens 1*) was to deprive the Boer fighters of access to food and information, and to pressurise them into surrendering (Nasson 2010:243-244). Amongst the defenders of camp policies (*lens 2*), the Boer camps were justified as humanitarian, set up to house the vulnerable refugees who would otherwise be left alone and unprotected on the open veld (Nasson 2010:243). For many of the Boers themselves (*lens 3*), the camps were deliberately genocidal, administered by a hostile enemy intent on their extermination (Dampier 2008:369).

Here are some other lenses:

a. Knowing what happened next makes it impossible to see the Roberts proclamation untainted by the devastation that followed (and it is impossible to know if Roberts himself could anticipate what he was about to unleash).

b. The term "concentration camps" invites immediate association with the Nazi death camps of World War II, although there are patent and important differences. Reich Minister of Propaganda, Paul Joseph Goebbels, is largely responsible for this lens. He purposely labelled the Nazi camps "concentration camps" after the British "concentration camps" in South Africa, in order to 'deflect criticism of the Nazi ones onto the earlier British founding of camps that were apparently "the same"' (Stanley & Dampier 2005:94).

c. As a "born and bred" South African, I cannot contemplate this history unfettered by my heritage, which involves a great-grandmother who survived the Winburg concentration camp (but buried four of her children there). Neither can I sidestep my ambivalence as a white, Anglicised Afrikaner, as a Boer descendant raised to speak the coloniser's tongue.

After the War, from the ashes of "scorched earth", rose a new Afrikaner identity. The Boers had lost the War and entered into the Treaty of Vereeniging in May 1902. But for Afrikaner religious leaders, interpreting the War in sacrificial terms, it was not a disaster. Rather, it was God's means of testing his chosen people, of forging Afrikaner national unity, and, ultimately, of endorsing Afrikaners' claims to sovereign statehood over all the people of South Africa (Boje & Pretorius 2011:60). As such, the War became a 'narrative of nation' (De Reuck 1999:79) complexly complicit in the development of apartheid – as a political system premised not only on Imperialist ideas of white supremacy, but also (and more specifically) on notions of Afrikaner sovereignty.

To sustain the 'aftermyth' of the War (to use John Boje & Fransjohan Pretorius's term (2011:60)), Afrikaner nationalist leaders trained a highly selective and partisan lens on the issue of the concentration camps, foregrounding tales of Boer suffering, exacerbating supposed British cruelty, and downplaying completely the existence of the black concentration camps, which would detract from their own "nation-forging" narratives of sorrow and sacrifice. What evolved was an Afrikaner 'historiography of aggrievedness' (Boje & Pretorius 2011:60), fuelled by the proliferation of increasingly bitter testimonial writings, which evinced and perpetuated a decidedly occluded perspective on the past.

Click-click. I am adjusting and re-adjusting my tripod; balancing the documents on towers of angled foam bookrests, and attempting to align the macro lens exactly to this gradient. But the alignment is fractionally out: bits of my images keep slipping out of focus at the corners. Under my breath, I curse the limited facilities, recalling (in comparison) the banks of "proper" camera stands running the length of the Reading

Room windows at the United Kingdom National Archives. I try angling my camera directly down, the documents lying flat on the narrow bench, but the requisite proximity of camera to subject proves disastrous. The details I hope to capture disappear in a patch of shadow, cast by the camera body in the path of the overhead light. It is a particular conundrum of macro photography that the device for making visible is so often what obstructs and obscures.

Click-click.

Predictably, the Afrikaner nationalist 'aftermyth' was cultivated and sustained by a myopically partisan remembrance of the War – one which, for successive decades, 'carried not a trace of acknowledgement of the experience and losses of the thousands of black people who were caught up in the hostilities in one way or another' (Nasson 2000:150). This calculated blindness was maintained not only by Afrikaner popular history (folklore, poetry, music, commemoration, and so forth) but also by *volksgeskiedenis* – a branch of scholarship supposedly wedded to 'objective-scientific' truth but which was, in fact, heavily ideological (Van Heyningen 2013:20).

In effect, *volksgeskiedenis* legitimised its bias under the guise of assumed objectivity, donning the emperor's clothes of empirical historical inquiry. Empiricist history, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, presented itself as a scientific tool for uncovering the "truth" of the past. Its exemplars insisted that objective historical knowledge is both desirable and attainable; it requires only that historians dispense with their prejudicial lenses and apply their minds impartially and diligently to 'the facts' (Tumblety 2013:3). But for relativist historians – after the likes of Hayden White, whose critique of empiricist history in *Metahistory* (1973) caused lasting controversy – there are *always* lenses and blind spots that mediate looking, despite one's most valiant efforts. There is no neutral position outside of subjectivity to look from; no impartial vantage point untainted by context, belief and inference. In the words of Alun Munslow (2010:36), '[w]e cannot be "in touch" with the past in any way that is unmediated by historiography, language, emplotment, voice, ideology, perspective or physical and/or mental states of tiredness, ennui and so on … there is no possibility of bringing the past back to the present'.

Day Three in the archives. I am wading through boxes of documents; looking for synergies; reading; photographing; trying to understand. It is slow going. I am tired and impatient, undone by the incessant heat and the sudden onset of toothache. The word "damage" catches my eye, in a Public Works Department box. I start seeing bits of damage everywhere – tears, stains, ruptures. Click-click. An entire dog-eared folder on the "Burgher concentration camps" (another name; another lens). Later, flipping through my jpegs, I return to the wording of the Roberts proclamation, where he threatens those Boers doing "wanton damage" with fire and incarceration. What makes damage "wanton" is a matter of one's perspective, surely.

Later still, I am tweaking my images in photo-editing software and am struck by their malleability. If I sharpen the photograph digitally does it remain "true" to the source? If I darken, lighten, crop and recolour? At what point does the seemingly "truthful" photograph become a fabrication?

For Munslow (2010:139), history is inevitably a fabrication – a 'fictive, self-conscious, subjective-emotional, imaginative and carefully authored expression' not unlike an artwork. Munslow's insistence on the subjective nature of history is certainly not unique. But where many historians would uphold the pursuit of "truth" as a worthy aspiration (if not an attainable goal), Munslow advocates that this ambition should be relinquished altogether. Instead, one ought to embrace the potential of 'the-past-*as*-history-*as*-artwork' (Munslow 2010:127), cut loose from the ballast of "truth". 'In one sense', ventures Munslow (2010:139), 'the most responsible attitude of the future historian is to acknowledge that history is always about morphing the past'.

To describe the work of this future historian, Munslow (2010:189) coins the term 'experimental history' – a way of "doing history" that is, by definition, 'opposed to the concept of correspondence (to the past) in conventionally understood ways'. Experimental history does not pretend to offer up the "truth" of the past; it does not endeavour to "tell it like it was"; it does not mask its fabrication beneath a semblance of objectivity. Rather, it declares itself as performative, subjective, open-ended; a grappling with the past as process. In precisely this way, according to Munslow (2010:193), experimental history 'constantly forces the issue of ethical choice'; prompting recognition that 'all we have in the face of an unknowable past are … ethical choices'.

Back home from the archives with a data bank of images, the fruits of a necessarily failed endeavour to "bring the past back to the present". What now? After countless false starts, tests and rejections, reworkings, rethinkings, erasures and repeats, I believe I may be *onto something*. I am working on a slideshow titled "DODGE AND BURN", after the "dodge" and "burn" functions in Photoshop that I am using to manipulate areas of my images, and in reference to the British "scorched earth" policy.

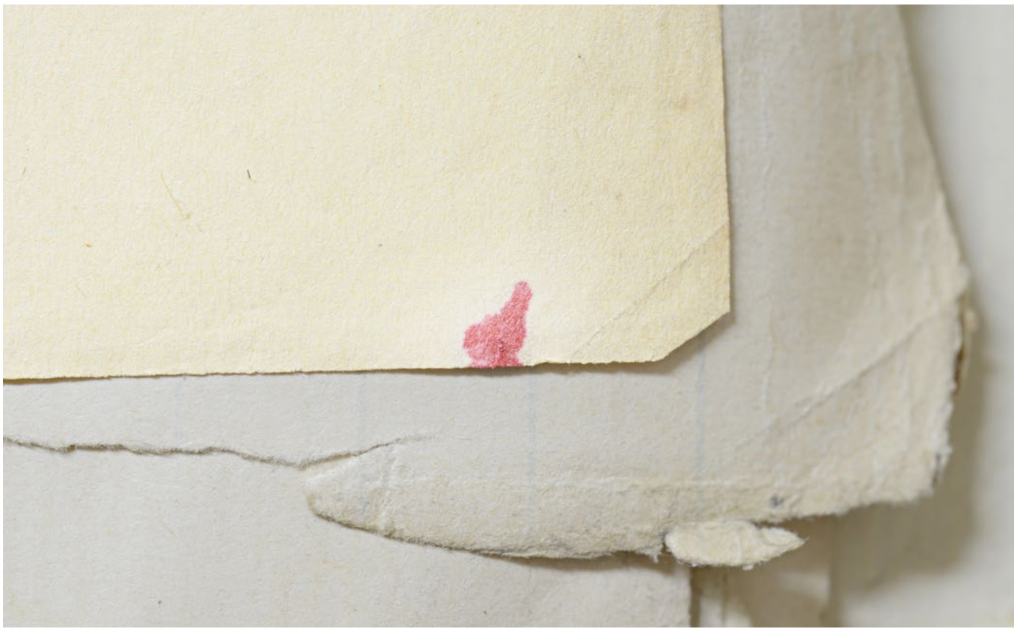

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Ink spot (dodged). Record PWD 1/2/21 (KAB). Photographed by the author, 3 February 2016.

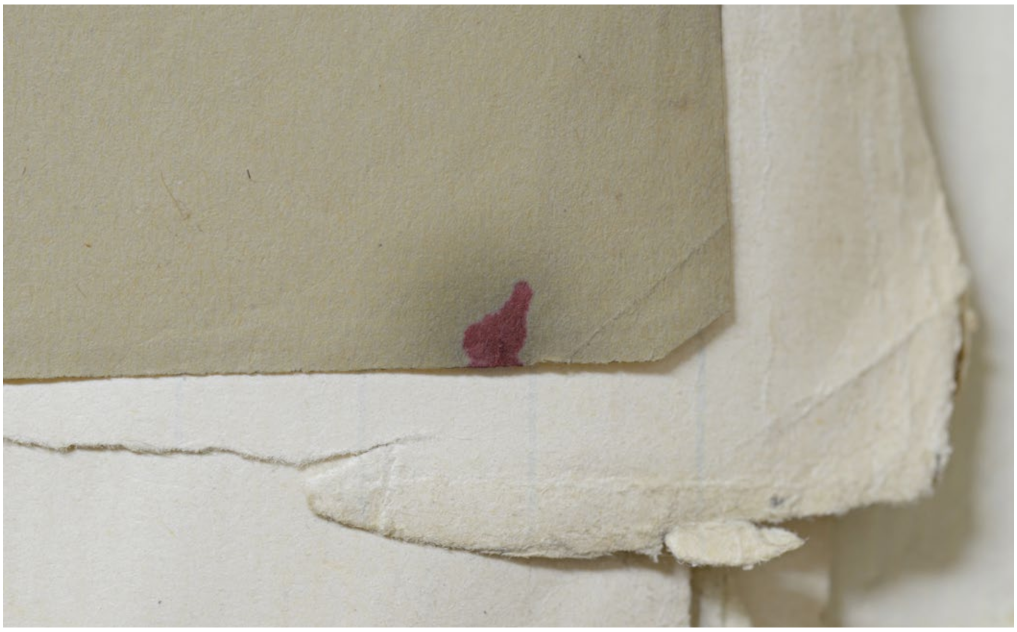

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Ink spot (burnt). Record PWD 1/2/21 (KAB). Photographed by the author, 3 February 2016.

As I work, I think about aftermaths and 'aftermyths'; the malleability of evidence; the ways in which history morphs the unknowable past. In the background, almost as an aside, I mull over the brutal logic of the Roberts proclamation: 'Whereas … and whereas … Now therefore I'. If *A* and *B*, then *C*. If *damage (wanton)* and *damage (intentional),* then *damage (justified)*. A formula to incite a war. These are the "big" thoughts informing my practice. But at the micro-level, zoomed in, manipulating my images "simply" enables me to re-animate the inert, forgotten detritus of the past – not to revive it as some kind of "truth", but to engage its very elusiveness. On the screen, close-ups of brittle archives morph and pulsate. Dodged, as if under the bright light of interrogative scrutiny, and then burnt, burnt, burnt. Pushed and pulled in Photoshop, to the point where pixels start to lose information, where the veracious image is destroyed.

Is this wanton damage? Who is to say?

2. Serendipitous encounters in the Archives (a personal narrative of belonging)

My first trip to the United Kingdom National Archives, in October 2015, was riddled with anxiety. What did I know, the infrequent traveller from South Africa, accustomed to the ebb and flow of fuzzy, ad hoc systems? Unmoored and disarmed by the cool authority of British efficiency, I felt myself coming undone, quite viscerally it seemed, just trying to negotiate the security checkpoint into the Archives Reading Room. 'Which way do I swipe my card?' I asked, fumbling. This was my third attempt at clearance. I had failed the first time for attempting to take in a jacket (and am hazarding a guess that I was not the first South African to do so). I had failed the second time for neglecting to unsheathe my laptop from its protective pouch. Back downstairs to the locker room, twice, to deposit the offending items.

What is it about officials in uniform that unnerves me so? Just a few days prior I had suffered the same disquiet in the limbo of Heathrow passport control, where, unwashed and exhausted, I had come under the scrutiny of a disbelieving Border Force officer. Evidently, the dishevelled apparition that stood before her bore scant resemblance to the placid, bright-eyed youth in my passport photo. 'Is this you?' she demanded, thrusting her finger at the image of the younger Maureen. 'Yes it is', I replied, deeming it safer to answer in the affirmative even though I had never felt more estranged from myself.

Months later (and with a few more anxious border-crossings behind me) I began to feel slightly more at ease. I could slump into a seat on the number 65 bus to Ealing Broadway and *almost* drift off, no longer gripped by panic that I would miss my stop at Mortlake Road and lose my bearings to the Archives. And once inside, I at least knew the drill (jacket off; laptop out; reader's card ready to swipe). I could finally settle into my research, even testing a smile on the guards now and then (with limited success).

But the sense of estrangement, of being out of place, still trailed at my heels like a shadow. It tripped me up intermittently, reminding me that "home" was across the equator, 6 000 miles south as the crow flies. "Home" was almost the polar opposite of where I was, geographically. At the same time, being a stranger in London also threw into sharp relief the abundant ironies of "home". One of the closest neighbouring cities to where I live is "East London", just 100 miles to the east. My hometown is Grahamstown, founded by Lieutenant-Colonel John Graham in 1812 as a military outpost. Like so many places in South Africa, it is steeped in violent colonial history, arising as part of British efforts to protect the eastern frontier of the then-Cape colony against the local amaXhosa. Indeed, my charming little town was 'built up on land which belonged to the Xhosa' (Grahamstown 2016:[sp]; see also Wells 2003:82), a fact which unsurprisingly provoked significant hostility. In the legendary Battle of Grahamstown of 1819, the guns and muskets of modest British troops rapidly overpowered vast armies of Xhosa warriors armed with traditional weaponry.

So, in this sense, the question of belonging – of being "at home" in Grahamstown – has never been entirely self-evident. My own home looks out onto the hillside where that long-ago massacre occurred. "Egazini", as it is known to this day: "The place of blood".

Months later still … It is July 2016, to be precise, and I am starting to find my way around the Archives with increasing familiarity. I am calmer and more confident, a Reading Room regular, with a well-swiped card and a favourite seat (33D, at the window). Today I have ordered Record WO 32/8063: a folder of telegrams from British High Commissioner Alfred Milner to Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, regarding the alarming mortality rates in the South African War concentration camps. Milner, seemingly more concerned with explaining away the figures than proffering proposals to curb them, is preoccupied with the word "mortality", which I read as "official-speak" for "death". "Mortality" is what happens to other people.

I take out my digital camera; attach it to the camera stand; switch it on. Recently I have been using a remote control to autofocus and activate the shutter, to avoid pushing buttons on the camera body. But before I can even touch the remote, my camera

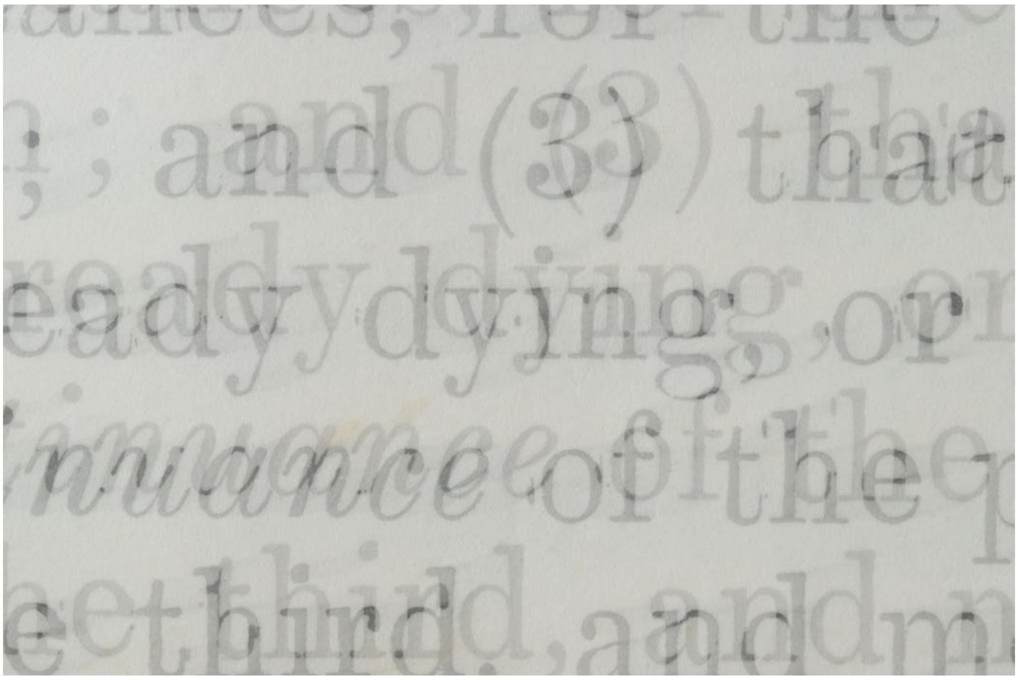

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Already dying. Record WO 32/8063 (TNA). Photographed by the author (and an unwitting accomplice), 1 July 2016.

zooms into focus and clicks, again and again, intermittently taking photographs as if of its own accord. I switch it off, check the settings, switch it on. At first, nothing … and then: zoom-click … zoom-click … zoom-click-click-click … like a thing possessed. I switch it off, completely flummoxed. What is happening here?

Eventually it occurs to me that a neighbouring photographer must be using the same type of remote as mine, and that *his/her* remote is inadvertently triggering *my* camera. I have an unwitting accomplice … the serendipity of this intrigues me so much that I opt to make the most of it, relinquishing control, for the whole afternoon, and allowing my unsuspecting collaborator to take my photographs for me. My own process is merely to pass the telegrams below my mounted camera, reading them in the LCD display as if through a magnifying glass. When I get stuck on a portentous word, I centre it in the display and wait (and wait) for the inevitable zoom-click to follow. Otherwise, I simply continue moving the pages beneath the eye of the macro lens, letting the incidental photographs register this blur.

Some concluding thoughts on Milner. Although he eventually conceded that the concentration camps were a 'sad fiasco' (letter to Lord Haldane, 8 Dec 1901, Milner cited in Women and children … 2011:[sp]), this realisation seemed slow to arrive. In a letter to Chamberlain dated 7 December 1901 (almost a full year after the introduction of the camp system), he writes,

> The black spot – the one very black spot – in the picture is the frightful mortality in the Concentration Camps. It was not until 6 weeks or 2 months ago that it dawned on me personally ... that the enormous mortality was not incidental to … the sudden inrush of people already starving, but was going to continue (Milner cited in Women and children … 2011:[sp]).

Note that, for Milner, the issue of concentration camp deaths is the only "black spot" in the picture. One might surmise that the "picture" itself – the South African War and imperialist agenda underpinning it – is otherwise without blemish, in Milner's eyes. An 'arch imperialist' and self-declared 'British race patriot' (Van Heyningen 2013:81), Milner cared little for the Afrikaners and even less for the Africans. After the War, he was instrumental in brokering the Union of South Africa in 1910, instituting a united British and Afrikaner government that excluded Africans, Coloureds and Indians from political processes (Lord Alfred Milner … 2012:[sp]). As such, he effectively co-authored a system of governance based on white supremacy, one that dominated South African politics, in some form or another, until the watershed elections of 1994.

On paper, South Africa's hard-won democracy seems a far cry from Milner's 'white segregationist state' (Nasson 2010:256). South Africa now boasts one of the most inclusive constitutions in the world. But the legacy of political and economic disenfranchisement endured by black South Africans – under Union and then apartheid – is in evidence everywhere. To add insult to injury (for some), there is at least one "Milner Street" in every major city. The plush Cape Town suburb of "Milnerton" was named in honour of Milner, formerly Cape Governor from 1897-1901. A Google search on "Alfred Milner Legacy" directs one to a site called "LEGACY INSPIRES", which profiles Milner's former residence (now a five-star hotel) in the most effusive, romanticised terms. It is worth quoting from at length:

> The leafy suburb of Parktown has played host to an incredible history of days gone by when gold rush fever took hold of Johannesburg … Built in 1895, the Sunnyside Park Hotel is a Victorian-style icon that, should it be able to speak, would be able to walk us through the history of the country, the province and the city itself.
>
> Originally built for [an] American mining consultant … it later became the residence of Lord Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner to

> South Africa … Today the hotel stands as a living legacy in the heart of Johannesburg, Gauteng, and offers the best in top notch elegance, fantastic dining experiences and an old-world allure all in the heart of one of Africa's busiest cities.
>
> … One look at the gorgeous structure and you will be transported to a time when carriages arrived en masse to enjoy croquet on the lawns while taking in one of the many garden parties it once played host to.
>
> In fact, during his residency at the Sunnyside between 1899 and 1905, Lord Milner was reported to have said in a letter to family in England, "The abundance of room, the brilliant air, the open surrounding country [is] of great nature, beauty and fertility still unspoilt …". It is no wonder that Milner refused to move to the political capital of Pretoria during his tenure as Governor of the Transvaal and rather preferred to stay at the Sunnyside (Milner cited in A living legacy 2014:[sp]; A living legacy 2014:[sp]).

And so the article gushes, on and on. But in it lies an appalling irony: at the very time that Milner was relishing the "brilliant air" and croqueting on the lawns, Boer women and children were bumping up mortality rates at the Turffontein Concentration Camp, a mere 10 miles to the South of Milner's lavish residence. In the Transvaal alone there were 36 concentration camps for black Africans – essentially forced labour camps, with no shelter or rations provided at all. How does one even begin to reconcile this massive discrepancy? Later in the article, the author breathlessly conjures the 'old world charm' of the turret that housed Milner's study (where 'he poured [*sic*] over his plans for the colony') (A living legacy 2014:[sp]). 'Many believe that his spirit has never left what was believed to have been his most loved home', s/he intones.

On this point, at least, we concur.

While I write this (in October 2016), volleys of stun grenades resound nearby. At the university where I teach – and indeed at most universities across South Africa – public order police are engaged in increasingly violent clashes with student protestors, who are demanding not only a free education, but also an education that is *decolonised*. It is debatable whether these ideals are attainable. With regard to the latter, it remains to be seen if Milner's spirit can indeed be expunged, along with the spirits of those of his ilk. It remains to be seen what a "decolonised" South Africa might look like. And it remains to be seen what further price this exorcism might exhort from all South Africans – inhabitants, in one way or another, of the place of blood.

Postscript

In September 2015 I embarked on a practice-based Fine Art PhD, through a university in London. At the time, I thought my PhD would be "about" the South African War, a traumatic history in which I have a vested interest (for reasons articulated above). But as my research gained momentum (alongside various forays into the archives in South Africa and the United Kingdom), I came to realise the peculiar elusiveness of my subject – in part, because there are so many versions of the War that it defies being tied to a singular "truth". It is, as Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier (2005:92) observe, a site where differing accounts continue to '"speak" past each other, demonstrating something of the epistemological gap that exists concerning what is understood to be knowledge and truth from competing perspectives'.

Because of this "epistemological gap", the operations of history as a "truth-finding" discourse – in relation to the South Africa War but also in general terms – have necessarily come under scrutiny, in turn deepening and informing my understanding of the value of practice-based research. For if history is where knowledge of the past is subjectively constructed rather than objectively discovered, then the most appropriate research tools with which to "know" and to "make known" the enigma of the uncertain past are themselves open-ended, exploratory, and self-consciously subjective. This is where and why practice-based research, as aligned with Munslow's 'experimental history', can afford new insights on "old" material.

The preceding text-explorations are attempts at "doing history" performatively, in a manner that foregrounds the relational flux between past and present, between researcher and subject. Both texts evince a commitment to embodied research, premised on the assumption that the vantage point of one's gaze conditions what one sees, inasmuch as what one sees conditions the vantage point of one's gaze. To this extent, both texts reflect on the traumatic past by invoking (rather than supressing) the vicissitudes of subjective looking. They suggest that any perspective on past events is always already a partial view: mediated, occluded, differentially focused, supported and intercepted by the variable lenses and glances of self and others.

At the same time, both texts evoke the discomfort of belonging and not-belonging; of being "positioned" not only in relation to a history (one way or another), but also in relation to a precarious present, marred and marked by past trauma. In them, I question what it means to be "at home" (with certain versions of events, inherited assumptions, the compulsion of legacies and lineages) against a backdrop of visceral damage, where "the truth" has all too often been used to hurt.

"A matter of wanton damage (Whereas… and whereas… Now therefore I)" is a revised version of a paper initially presented to peers, supervisors and a Faculty committee, reflecting on the progress of my first year of PhD study. The slideshow to which it refers, entitled "DODGE AND BURN", was projected onto the wall behind me as I spoke. "Serendipitous encounters in the Archives (a personal narrative of belonging)" was written as a soliloquy, a text to be memorised and performed. Its first performance was to an audience of peers (in a small, intimate theatre at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London) after the screening of a slideshow which I compiled titled "PROOF".

As such, the "refocusing" of these works here – in a different format and in implicit conversation – embraces and extends the logic of the partial view. They are themselves mere glimpses of something larger, something else, interpretative ventures that are morphed by the variables of context (inasmuch as they lend shape to the contexts within which they emerge). They are mutable bodies, not stable truths, shape-shifting in relation to each other, to other texts, to the perspectives that readers bring to bear. They are not only about history but *like* history, in this sense.

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