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"by Any Means, Fair Or Foul": The Tactics Of Britain And Germany In Colonial Southern Africa

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**“BY ANY MEANS, FAIR OR FOUL”:
THE TACTICS OF BRITAIN AND GERMANY IN COLONIAL SOUTHERN AFRICA**

by

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THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

“Colonialism and colonial rule, be it that of Germany, Great Britain,... or any other colonising power, was fundamentally cruel, unjust, and disrespectful of fundamental human rights.”¹

This statement serves as part of the introduction to the 2003 annotated reprint of the British *Blue Book* of 1918, a document that sparked heated debate between Britain and Germany regarding both nations’ colonial practices, particularly in Africa. When viewed in general terms, it is difficult to refute this statement. European colonial powers consistently sought to exploit the people, land, and natural resources of their possessions. Indeed, a chief aim in garnering colonial acquisitions was the aggrandizement of the home county’s wealth and prestige. But were there instances in which these fundamental aspects of colonial rule were challenged at home? Were domestic public and political forces ever able to effect change that served to mediate, at least to some degree, the cruelty, injustice, and denial of rights? If so, what specific elements needed to be present for such changes to occur? This account investigates these questions through the comparison of two specific instances of colonial conflict in southern Africa: the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa and the series of conflicts commonly referred to as the Herero Wars in German Southwest Africa.

These conflicts represent two marked instances of colonial wartime policy that led to extensive noncombatant suffering and death during the height of European colonialism in Africa. They represented some of the first deployments of concentration camps (a loaded term that will be contextualized as it relates to each of these two situations) against enemy populations. In the case of South Africa, administrative policy shifts eventually occurred and significantly improved conditions for noncombatants. Changes in policy also occurred in Southwest Africa; however,

¹Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald, eds., *Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia: An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book* (Leiden, Netherlands and Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), xxix.

they ultimately did little to improve the quality of life for the enemies of the German colonial administration.

Studies on the conditions for noncombatants during the Anglo-Boer War were not seriously undertaken until the late twentieth century. S.B. Spies' *Methods of Barbarism?: Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics* (1977) was the first detailed account of tactics employed toward noncombatants by the British colonial administration. Several years later, Thomas Pakenham's *The Boer War* (1979) presented evidence of the mortality in the camps as part of a groundbreaking, comprehensive account that drew on voluminous primary sources in order to critically investigate the origins of the war and its consequences. Works focused on civilians became far more diverse as the centenary of the Anglo-Boer conflict approached. Brian Roberts' *Those Bloody Women: Three Heroines of the Boer War* (1991) focused solely on influential female figures. Collections of essays and articles were also published, dealing with myriad issues such as disease, the role of the press, and public activism.² The most recent scholarship comes from Elizabeth van Heyningen, who drew on extensive primary source material (including camp reports, administrative and governmental correspondence, and camp registers) to develop the first in-depth social history of the Boer concentration camps.³

The conduct of German colonialism in Southwest Africa, similarly, did not receive significant academic exposure for some time, and the first significant treatment was Horst

² Donal Lowry, ed., *The South African War Reappraised* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000); Fransjohan Pretorius, ed., *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town, South Africa: Human and Rousseau, 2001); Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie, eds., *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002).

³ Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, Ltd., 2013).

Drechsler's *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft* in 1966.⁴ Drechsler presented a charged critique of German tactics, focusing heavily on civilian mortality as a direct result of exterminatory military actions. Helmut Bley's *South-West Africa Under German Rule* (1971) echoed Drechsler's contentions, and extended the argument by addressing the role of social and administrative issues in sparking conflict. The centenary of the Herero Wars also inspired new scholarship. Historians comprehensively addressed the effects of German colonialism on Herero society and the interplay between colonial officials in the German government.⁵ In 2008, the collection *Genocide in German Southwest Africa: The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and its Aftermath* included essays on a wide range of topics, including the concentration camps, gender, and contemporary German literature. The same year, Casper W. Erichsen published a comprehensive account of the concentration camps in, and it contains one of the most detailed descriptions of the massive concentration camp at Shark Island to date.⁶

This thesis maintains that the propensity for meaningful shifts in the treatment of noncombatants depended greatly on the nature of the victims (i.e., whites of European descent, as opposed to native Africans) and the prevailing viewpoints on their roles in the respective colonial societies; moreover, that policy change was dictated mainly by differences in the presence, character, and effect of opposition in the public and political spheres and the structure of the administration within the colony carrying out the policy. It comparatively examines the phases of these respective conflicts in a roughly chronological fashion. Section I addresses the origins of the colonial presence in both regions, as well as the specific events that led to war.

⁴ This book was eventually translated into English in 1980 under the title *Let us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism*.

⁵ Jan-Bart Gewald, *Towards Redemption: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia Between 1890 and 1923* (Leiden, Netherlands: Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, 1996); Jeremy Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero: Kaiser Wilhelm II, His General, His Settlers, His Soldiers* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2011).

⁶ Casper W. Erichsen, *"The angel of death has descended violently among them": Concentration camps and prisoners-of-war in Namibia, 1904-08* (Leiden, Netherlands: African Studies Center, 2005).

Section II deals with the development of military tactics aimed at noncombatants. Section III summarizes the public and political forces that supported and opposed these methods, focusing heavily on the varying levels of influence opposition voices were able to achieve in each situation. Section IV analyzes the quality of life for noncombatants in the late war and postwar environments of the two colonial possessions. In each section, developments in South Africa and Southwest Africa are each addressed individually, followed by comparative analyses and conclusions.

Each section draws on sources that effectively represent its particular focus, for example, the public exposure of enemy civilians' living conditions and political debate about wartime conduct. Information regarding civilian conditions is drawn from those who directly observed them. This includes the original text of independent and government-commissioned reports and detailed representations of observer accounts in secondary sources. Articles in *The Times* that represent both domestic and foreign opposition to British tactics, as well as the responses of *Times* correspondents that defended British wartime conduct, are employed to analyze the extent to which critical voices were available for public consumption in Britain. A significant aspect of this study is the presence and results of the political debate surrounding civilian-focused tactics, and the records of British Parliament, as well as secondary sources detailing the positions of parties in the Reichstag, are used to address these developments.

SECTION I: COLONIZATION LEADS TO CONFLICT

South Africa: A Long-Standing Presence

Britain's colonial status in southern Africa at the turn of the twentieth century was well established. Britain's possession of the Cape Colony in southern Africa dated back to 1806. Unlike the Herero and other tribes of Southwest Africa, the Boers were not indigenous inhabitants of South Africa, but their presence on the continent had deep roots. White settlers, who dubbed themselves "Afrikaners," first came to South Africa after the Dutch East India Company established a shipping station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The *trekboers* (Boers) were the poorest group of these Dutch emigrants. They were nomadic farmers, and their constant search for fresh grazing lands brought them ever further into the African interior. The independent, republican Boers of the frontier were a particular source of resistance to British rule. Britain's efforts to reform the treatment of native Africans were a major source of opposition to colonial rule among the frontier Boers. A major point of contention arose in 1833, when Britain abolished the practice of slavery throughout its empire. The frontier Boers (*voortrekkers*, pioneers) began the Great Trek in 1835. This mass emigration led to a large population of Boers outside the Cape Colony, taking them beyond its northeast borders.⁷

British treatment of Boer sovereignty was inconsistent, but in 1852 and 1854 the British officially recognized two new independent Boer republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. However, in 1877, the British annexed the Transvaal and the First Boer War began. The Boers emerged triumphant and the republic passed back into Boer hands. In 1886, the discovery of gold inexorably changed the political landscape in South Africa. Predominantly British settlers, known as *uitlanders*, pushed into the Transvaal, swept up in the gold rush. The Boers

⁷ Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War: The British, the Boers, and the Making of South Africa* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2007), 3-5.

continued their refusal to allow British influence and committed to limiting the political rights of the uitlanders. Boer State Attorney Jan Smuts stated that any change in British policy that “intended to substitute for local self-government in South Africa an increased exercise of imperial authority... is bound to miscarry fatally.”⁸ The influx of uitlanders was so massive that they outnumbered the Boers in the Transvaal nearly two to one in 1898, and granting voting rights would have led to the loss of Boer political control in the region.⁹

The desire for control of the gold was certainly a motivation for British actions, but the issue of voting rights proved to be the spark that set off the Second Boer War.¹⁰ In 1899, Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain demanded political rights for the uitlanders. Paul Kruger, President of the South African Republic, responded with an ultimatum: the British were to remove their border troops within forty-eight hours or he would declare war. On October 11, hostilities commenced. The longstanding presence of the Boer people in South Africa meant that although they were not indigenous to the region, they maintained a strong connection to the land they worked and farmed. It is not surprising that they replied so strongly to measures they conceived to threaten their national sovereignty.

Southwest Africa: A Colonial Newcomer

Germany’s status in the push for African colonial possessions by European nations was unique in that it was a late arrival to the situation. This infused the country’s subsequent efforts in Southwest Africa with a sense of urgency, creating an atmosphere in which excessively harsh measures became commonplace.¹¹ These measures were deemed necessary in order to establish firm control as rapidly as possible. Swift subjugation of the native people was of great

⁸ Quoted in Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War*, 387-8.

⁹ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Random House, 1979), 44.

¹⁰ Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War*, 402, 416-23; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 112-4.

¹¹ Sarkin, *Germany’s Genocide of the Herero*, 4, 40.

importance because of Germany's overarching goals in Southwest Africa. First and foremost, Germany sought this colonial possession for settlement. Whether it was a pragmatic measure to provide additional land for Germany's rapidly growing population or a more esoteric mission to create a "New Germany" in Africa and increase the nation's prestige, especially in comparison to other European countries, the ultimate aim was to settle a significant German population in the region.¹²

The brutal excesses of Germany's later rule in Southwest Africa were largely (although not wholly) absent during the governorship of Theodor Leutwein, which lasted from 1894 to 1904. Leutwein had joined the Prussian Army in 1868 and was promoted to the rank of major shortly before he departed for Africa. Unlike his predecessor (*Reichskommissar* Curt von François), Leutwein engaged in concerted attempts to establish relations with Southwest Africa's indigenous tribes. His strategy in dealing with the native population focused heavily on diplomacy and the establishment of so-called protection treaties with chiefs of the major tribes in the region. He sought to divide and conquer by establishing accords with those he believed were able to exert the most influence. These agreements served the dual purpose of legitimizing Germany's presence in Southwest Africa and paving the way for settlement.¹³ While Leutwein's strategies emphasized conciliation, they always contained overtones of German military superiority. Additionally, an epidemic of rinderpest, which began in 1897, decimated the region's cattle population, effectively destroying the economic livelihood of the Herero. Many Herero were forced to sell major portions of their land holdings simply to support themselves.

¹² Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 6, 51.

¹³ Helmut Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule, 1894-1914* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 6-12.

After these developments, much of the veneer Leutwein had created through his deft negotiations was stripped away, and the Herero became much more cognizant of their subservient position.¹⁴

Leutwein's supposedly conciliatory policies were unpopular with German settlers. An atmosphere of superiority developed, fostered by the growth of European-style towns. In the major German city center of Windhoek, the limited native presence provided "no opportunities for the dogmatic ideas of the settlers... to be tempered by the practical experience of the Africans," and dictated that "[m]any of them [i.e., German settlers] could not even distinguish between the ruling class of the Herero and the ordinary members of the tribe, although,... it was on this distinction that Leutwein's entire policy was based."¹⁵ Settlers saw Leutwein's willingness to negotiate as an indication that the native population was on an equal plane. The desire to establish dominance permeated the settler mentality and led to strained relations with the native tribes.¹⁶ This tension was further increased by a 1903 regulation that established a limitation on debts, known as the German Credit Ordinance. Although ostensibly intended to relieve pressure on indebted Herero, the ordinance spurred a major push by traders to collect outstanding debts. Their forceful seizure of land and cattle deprived the Herero of their traditional means of subsistence. Social and economic pressure grew steadily in German Southwest Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, and by 1904, the Herero leadership recognized their people's position of powerlessness.¹⁷ When the bulk of German troops in the area were sent south to deal with unrest involving a smaller tribe, the Bondelswarts, the Herero revolted.

¹⁴ Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 71-81.

¹⁵ Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule*, 86.

¹⁶ Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule*, 77-86; Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 43-9; Kirsten Zirkel, "Military Power in German Colonial Policy: The *Schutztruppen* and their Leaders in East and South-West Africa, 1888-1918," in *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, c. 1700-1964*, ed. David Killingray and David Omissi (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), 94.

¹⁷ Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule*, 137-9; Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 81.

Comparisons

At the most basic level, conflict in both cases revolved around the issue of basic rights; essentially, the perception by the Herero and the Boers that they had lost, or were soon to lose, their voice in running their own affairs. The heavy-handed pursuit and imposition of measures that sought to increase colonial dominance caused a backlash in both situations. In the case of South Africa, the British measures that sparked conflict grew out of a confluence of political and economic concerns. The demands for political rights for the uitlanders spoke to the British desire to protect their interests in exploiting the raw materials of the Transvaal. This also entailed securing British control of land holdings that contained these resources, culminating in measures that sought to protect and extend the economic gains of the uitlanders. In contrast, the German colonial apparatus in Southwest Africa sought to exploit everything as rapidly as possible. The economic success of German Southwest Africa as a colony was utterly dependent on the ability to secure control of land and cattle. The dispossession of the Herero and other native tribes was integral to the future of the colony. Effectively securing arable land and healthy stock was necessary in order to entice Germans to emigrate and establish the colony's place in the German Empire.¹⁸

Leutwein initially attempted to secure such control through policies that emphasized negotiation with Africans while preserving certain aspects of the native infrastructure. While he surely used Germany's military superiority to buttress his stance and bend tribal leaders to his will, he proceeded from a position that allowed the chiefs of the major tribes – particularly Samuel Maherero of the Herero and Hendrik Witbooi of the Nama, the second largest tribe in the

¹⁸ John M. Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 57-9; Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 64.

region – to believe that their pleas would be taken under consideration.¹⁹ The German settlers' growing distaste with Theodor Leutwein's policies emerged as an indication that the majority viewed the Herero as deserving only of complete subjugation. They "attacked the government's 'false sentimentality towards uncivilised natives' and demanded that the Africans' land and cattle should pass immediately into European hands."²⁰ As early as 1902, the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*, considered to be the voice of the settlers in Germany, stated:

There is certainly no other government in Africa... which spoils the natives more than ours does... A colonial government which only marginally realizes what it is there for... must have the aim to expropriate the natives of part of their land in order to create farm land for farmers: it must also curtail the freedom of the natives to a large extent in order to ensure sufficient native labour, without which the white settler and farmer will be lost.²¹

The increased presence of new settlers completely unfamiliar with African tribal culture and society led to behavior that amplified social tensions and degraded relations to the point that the Herero felt compelled to revolt. The actions of the settlers were a key contributing factor in radicalizing the official German position. Conceptions of German superiority by the settlers in Southwest Africa led them to take a position that tolerated far less resistance than the uitlanders in the Transvaal.²² Even when the British uitlanders became vehement in their demands, they initially sought to engineer a solution through political maneuvering in order to secure their place inside the existing Boer structure, not to tear it down.²³ In contrast, the actions and attitudes of German settlers during the prewar period were echoed in the methods adopted following the revolt. Despite the efforts of those like Leutwein, who sought to preserve some semblance of

¹⁹ Zirkel, "Military Power in German Colonial Policy," 94.

²⁰ Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule*, 85.

²¹ Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 45.

²² Trutz von Trotha, "'The Fellows Can Just Starve': On Wars of 'Pacification' in the African Colonies of Imperial Germany and the Concept of 'Total War'," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 428; Zirkel, "Military Power in German Colonial Policy," 94.

²³ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 77-8.

good relations between Germany and the Herero, the view that the colony would need to be “cleared” to achieve German aims became increasingly prevalent.²⁴

In the Transvaal, the British demanded political rights for their settlers that would put them on a just footing with the Boers in the region, suggesting a general feeling of equality between Briton and Boer. Although British interests certainly sought to exploit the natural wealth of the region, they did not assume an inflexible attitude of racial superiority. As early as 1896, Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain stated that a

war in South Africa would be one of the most serious wars that could possibly be waged. It would be in the nature of a Civil War. It would be a long war, a bitter war and a costly war... it would leave behind it the embers of a strife which I believe generations would hardly be long enough to extinguish... to go to war with President Kruger, to force upon him reforms in the internal affairs of his state, with which [we] have repudiated all right of interference – that would have been a course of action as immoral as it would have been unwise.²⁵

His statements showed a strong apprehension to meddle in the affairs of sovereign republics and indicated that amicable relations with the Boers would be important to the future of the region. In Southwest Africa, it was widely considered that the Herero should adhere to the policies dictated by Germany or be removed from the equation. Even Leutwein’s ostensibly conciliatory tactics strove toward this goal.²⁶

²⁴ Sarkin, *Germany’s Genocide of the Herero*, 64.

²⁵ Quoted in Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 18.

²⁶ Bley, *South-West Africa Under German Rule*, 6-8; Sarkin, *Germany’s Genocide of the Herero*, 109.

SECTION II: NONCOMBATANTS BECOME TARGETS

South Africa: “Tactical” Solutions

From 1899 to 1902, conflict raged in the South African republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The early stages of the war were characterized by large-scale engagements. Sizeable forces met in pitched battles until the British successfully invaded the Transvaal and occupied its capital, Pretoria, in June 1900. Rather than concede defeat, the Boer generals adopted a policy of guerilla war. They concentrated their efforts on British supply lines, communication depots, weapon caches, and troop columns. Relatively small groups known as commandos were extremely successful at harassing the British forces in this manner.²⁷ The British were at a loss with how to deal with these tactics, and consequently began to employ a different strategy, “scorched earth,” which was instituted under the direction of Lord Frederick Roberts, who served as commander of the British military forces until December 1900. Although scorched earth did not become official military policy until early 1901 when Lord Herbert Kitchener, Roberts’ successor, took over, it was used in practice during the summer of 1900. Roberts instructed troops to “take all stores, fodder, etc.,” “burn houses of men fighting against us,” and “denude the country of all supplies.”²⁸

According to an official summary submitted in Parliament, British forces destroyed 634 buildings between June 1900 and January 1901.²⁹ Roberts ultimately believed that putting pressure on the civilian population was the best way to bring a swift end to the Boers’ increasingly frustrating guerilla tactics. As the British marched through the countryside, they razed farmhouses, killed and stole livestock, and burned crops. Military officials sought to deny

²⁷ Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War*, 449.

²⁸ Quoted in S.B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?: Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900 – May 1902* (Cape Town and Pretoria, South Africa: Human and Rousseau, 1977), 133.

²⁹ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 116.

the Boer commandos necessary supplies and hiding places. Scorched earth was initially presented as a limited policy against only those farms where the occupants had fired on the British or were known to have harbored enemy troops. In reality, it is clear that, from the very outset, Boer farms were looted and set ablaze indiscriminately.³⁰ As 1901 progressed, the military administration established limitations on this policy, but they only existed on paper. The practice of farm burning had become so ingrained by this point that it was nearly impossible to curtail. The countryside was already in shambles due to the war's previous devastation, and the added pressure of deliberate property destruction left thousands destitute.³¹

The British administration needed to develop a solution for the growing number of refugees, women, and children displaced by the scorched earth policy, as well as surrendered Boers and their families. While ad-hoc refugee camps began to spring up during the early days of scorched earth, Kitchener was the first to envision that a formalized camp system, in which displaced women and children were compulsorily "collected," could provide a potential solution to the problem.³² His decision was certainly not without precedent. Spanish General Valeriano Weyler had employed similar tactics in Cuba several years before. A plan similar to Weyler's was even suggested by a British intelligence officer in an August 1900 memorandum.³³ While Kitchener and his subordinates in South Africa continued to use the term "refugee camps" in early 1901, British politicians, faced with limited reports that suggested the camps' compulsory nature, began to refer to them as concentration camps.³⁴

³⁰ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 101 (1902), cols. 400-6, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1902/jan/> (accessed March 17, 2015); Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 116.

³¹ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 175-7.

³² *Ibid.*, 181-3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁴ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 89 (1901), cols. 1021-2, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1901/feb/> (accessed March 19, 2015); *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 90 (1901) col. 180, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1901/mar/> (accessed March 19, 2015).

It is clear that, from the outset, Kitchener had little concern for the well-being of camp internees. He regularly distanced himself from dealing with civilian matters. His motivation was to bring a swift end to the war, and in order to achieve this, he was willing to make the displaced Boers suffer. Kitchener's initial policy established a differentiated scale for rations. Families of surrendered Boers received more than women and children whose husbands and fathers were still on commando. These women and children received no meat. Across the board, no vegetables were provided, and there was no fresh milk for children and babies.³⁵ The camps thus became a punitive experience.

Official policy was couched in the language of "protection" for women and children displaced from the countryside. But for Kitchener and the other proponents of this system, the basis for the camps always had a dual military purpose. They were intended to remove all sources of support and intelligence for Boer commandos in the countryside. They were also intended to entice surrender. Kitchener firmly believed that the Boers would lay down their arms in order to join their loved ones in the camps.³⁶ He also staunchly believed that those who were given "protection" in the camps would actively try to influence the men on commando to surrender.³⁷ In the words of Colonel Henry Rawlinson, "we shall not stop this guerilla warfare until really severe measures are taken. The Chief (that is, Roberts) will not, I fear, do this but when Kitchener takes over the reins of office he will, I expect, be less merciful."³⁸

The supposed military necessity of the policy blinded its supporters to the reality of the situation. There was simply no way to effectively care for the camps' occupants. Because the policy was hastily enacted, without concern for the enormity of the task at hand, the system was

³⁵ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 523-4.

³⁶ Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 76.

³⁷ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 182.

³⁸ Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 171.

plagued by an ineffective selection of camp sites, lack of food, clothing, and medicine, conflict between British and Boer cultural practices, and rampant disease, all of which contributed to astronomical mortality rates. The camps were hastily set up in the first place, and it was rare to find any respite from the seemingly unending influx of new internees. Although the issue of numbers is still debated, the most recent estimates record roughly 28,000 to 30,000 deaths throughout the existence of the camp system.³⁹

After the implementation of scorched earth and the concentration camps in South Africa, civilians could no longer exist as bystanders to combat. Their suffering became a weapon. The employment of practices like scorched earth and the use of concentration camps indicated that the British military, faced with an insurgency they were ill-equipped to handle, sought to use the plight of civilians to force surrender.

Southwest Africa: Policies of Extermination

The beginning of the Herero's open revolt signaled the beginning of the end for Governor Theodor Leutwein in Southwest Africa. The Herero were able to press their advantage in the first few months of the conflict because of the lack of a major standing German force in the area. His failure to swiftly end the rebellion became an embarrassment in Germany. This development changed not only the man in charge, but also the general mentality of German conduct.⁴⁰ When General Lothar von Trotha replaced Leutwein, the German military took over the administration of Southwest Africa. Von Trotha was a "broadsword" sent with the hope of quickly crushing the

³⁹ Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier, "The Number of the South African War (1899-1902) Concentration Camp Dead: Standard Stories, Superior Stories, and a Forgotten Pro-Nationalist Research Investigation," *Sociological Research* 14.5 (2009): 15.

⁴⁰ Bley, *South-West Africa Under German Rule*, 152-69; Horst Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915)*, trans. Bernd Zöllner (London, UK: Zed Press, 1980), 144; Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 22.

rebellion. His ruthlessness in dealing with native revolts in East Africa (the Wahehe rising) and China (the Boxer Rebellion) was well known.⁴¹

Although the Herero enjoyed some success during the initial rising, the tide of the war turned quickly in favor of the Germans. Massive numbers of Herero retreated after the first few months of conflict and gathered with leader Samuel Maherero on the Waterberg plateau, which was a good distance from German supply lines. After arriving in Southwest Africa, von Trotha waited for promised reinforcements before engaging in a large-scale offensive against the Herero. He established an ambitious plan to encircle and crush the Herero at the Waterberg. The superiority of German forces was enough to destroy quickly any significant resistance. Forced to retreat, the Herero fled into the nearby Omaheke Desert. Von Trotha knew he had military superiority, but he was not confident in his ability to annihilate completely all of the Herero at the Waterberg with his existing forces. A study prepared by von Trotha's General Staff indicated that he had purposely left his weakest detachment to defend the path of retreat into the Omaheke: "If, however, the Herero were to break through, such an outcome of the battle could only be even more desirable in the eyes of the German Command because the enemy would then seal his own fate, being doom to die of thirst in the arid sandveld [i.e., desert]."⁴²

After the Waterberg, German conduct took on a distinctly genocidal intent. The next phase of the conflict consisted of the German troops' relentless pursuit of the Herero into the Omaheke. These were not just Herero fighters, but also women, children, the elderly, and the infirm. Waterholes were poisoned in order to deny the Herero any tools for basic survival, and in

⁴¹ Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting*, 153.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 155.

October 1904, two months after the battle at the Waterberg, von Trotha issued what came to be known as the “Extermination Order.”⁴³ It read:

I, the Great General of the German troops, send this letter to the Herero people. The Herero are no longer German subjects. They have murdered and stolen; they have cut off the ears, noses and other body-parts of wounded soldiers; now out of cowardice they no longer wish to fight. I say to the people: Anyone who delivers a captain will receive 1000 Marks. Whoever delivers Samuel [Maherero] will receive 5000 Marks. The Herero people must however leave the land. If the populace does not do this I will force them with the *Groot Rohr* [Cannon]. Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at. These are my words to the Herero people. [Signed: The great General of the mighty Kaiser]⁴⁴

Although brutality against the Herero was already commonplace, the Extermination Order made it official policy and firmly established von Trotha’s plans for the further prosecution of the war. He would not negotiate, even with a decimated enemy that could not put up concerted resistance.

The Extermination Order incontrovertibly showed von Trotha’s refusal to adhere to established international standards regarding the rules of war. Germany was a signatory of the Hague Convention of 1899, and although Germany was not specifically bound to follow these codes of conduct in their conflict with native Africans (for the Herero were obviously not signatories of the document), the document was nevertheless a widely accepted list of agreed-upon rules of conduct governing war among “civilized” nations at the time. The Extermination Order directly violated the provisions stating that it was prohibited “[t]o kill or wound an enemy who, having laid down arms, or having no longer means of defence, has surrendered at discretion” and “[t]o declare that no quarter will be given” (Article 23 of the Hague Convention).⁴⁵ In practice, Herero men were to be shot regardless of their status as enemy combatants. In the case of women and children, von Trotha did release a clarification shortly

⁴³ Sarkin, *Germany’s Genocide of the Herero*, 116.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Erichsen, “*The angel of death*,” 10.

⁴⁵ James Brown Scott, ed., *The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1899 and 1907* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1915), 116.

after issuing the Extermination Order which claimed that his intention was for soldiers to shoot over their heads to force them away rather than shoot directly at them. Regardless, it is undeniable that the end result in both cases was death, either from a bullet or dehydration and starvation in the Omaheke.

The Extermination Order was rescinded roughly two months after its issuance. The effects of the Herero's flight into the Omaheke and the prosecution of the war under the Extermination Order led to the influx of thousands of starving refugees into German towns. This highlighted the extremely dire situation of the Herero. Their plight in the desert forced them back into the arms of their oppressor. After consultation with the Kaiser, Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow issued an order "that the surrendering Herero should be placed in *Konzentrationslager* [concentration camps] in various locations in the territory."⁴⁶ This practice did not discriminate with regard to age, gender, or level of participation in the war, and compulsory labor was a key component of these camps from the outset. Inmates were given supplies only to the extent that their subsistence did not detract from provisions for German soldiers.⁴⁷

In the end, the camps proved to be just as deadly as von Trotha's policy of extermination.⁴⁸ Little to no concern was given to their location, the ability to provide supplies, or the importance of adequate support facilities. Efforts to curb the rapid spread of disease concentrated solely on the protection of nearby white German communities and allowed illness within the camps to increase unchecked.⁴⁹ The camp at Shark Island, located off the coast of the city of Lüderitzbucht, was a key example of the brutal and horrific nature of German

⁴⁶ Erichsen, "The angel of death," 22.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 46.

concentration camp policy. Inmates were essentially placed in a barren wasteland, forced to fend for themselves, and worked to death through slave labor.⁵⁰

The results of the Extermination Order and conditions in the concentration camps were representative of the overall policy pursued throughout the history of German Southwest Africa. Census information shows that, by 1911, 75 percent of the Herero population had ceased to exist.⁵¹ German tactics, in opposition to those of the British in South Africa, did not use the fate of noncombatants to force surrender. Rather, combatants and noncombatants were considered one and the same, and both were marked for extermination.

Comparisons

The adoption of military tactics that targeted noncombatants occurred in both situations, but developed in drastically different ways. First of all, Britain had an established colonial military force. When President Kruger demanded the withdrawal of Britain's troops on the borders of the Transvaal, they numbered roughly 10,000. In contrast, Germany had no established colonial army. Upon the outbreak of conflict, their forces were minimal. Additionally, the short history of German control in Southwest Africa meant that the region's modern infrastructure was severely lacking. At the time of the revolt, the only major railway that existed ran between the two German city centers, Swakopmund and Windhoek. German troops were hence small in number and extremely undersupplied. These facts, combined with the conceptions of native Africans outlined in the first section, suggest a propensity to resort to brutal methods with a swiftness that was not present in British conduct during the Anglo-Boer War. Since sheer troop numbers could not be relied upon to keep the native population in line, fear of German cruelty became the solution. Britain's adoption of civilian-focused tactics

⁵⁰ Erichsen, *"The angel of death,"* 65-145.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

(scorched earth and the concentration camps) occurred mainly because of a change in the Boers' method of warfare. This is not to argue that they were justified in burning homesteads and imprisoning women and children, but rather that Roberts and Kitchener outwardly represented their shift in tactics as a response to the Boers' implementation of guerilla warfare. British sources that favored these policies consistently maintained that extreme measures were the result of the Boers' shift to an "uncivilized" military strategy.⁵²

Germany's adoption of brutal tactics did not coincide with a change in the Herero's methods – the tactics were integral to their military strategy from the earliest stages of conflict. The revolt itself was a justification for harsh methods. This is evidenced most notably by the complete suppression of civilian authority and the appointment of Lothar von Trotha. Leutwein's stance of negotiation and conciliation was considered a massive failure and led to the elevation of a man who was essentially his polar opposite. Brutality was a fundamental component of von Trotha's previous military career, as was evident in a communication he sent to Leutwein when he assumed control in November 1904: "I know enough tribes in Africa. They all have the same mentality insofar as they yield only to force. It was and remains my policy to apply this force by unmitigated terrorism and even cruelty. I shall destroy the rebellious tribes by shedding rivers of blood and money."⁵³ His appointment was predicated on the desire for a swift and forceful suppression of native unrest by any means at his disposal.⁵⁴ When traditional methods of warfare (culminating in the battle at the Waterberg) did not lead to a decisive outcome, von Trotha quickly resorted to other means by issuing the Extermination Order. The provisions of the

⁵² "It is with some reluctance," *Times* (London), August 31, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014); "Lord Kitchener's Campaign in South Africa," *Times* (London), July 12, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014); "The Refugee Camps," *Times* (London), January 18, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 4, 2014).

⁵³ Quoted in Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting*, 154.

⁵⁴ Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 49.

Extermination Order made negotiation with the Herero impossible, and von Trotha confirmed that this was his outright intention when he distributed the order to his General Staff:

For me, it is merely a question of how to end the war with the Herero. My opinion is completely opposite to that of the governor [i.e., Leutwein] and some “old Africans.” They have wanted to negotiate for a long time and describe the Herero nation as a necessary labor force for the future use of the colony. I am of an entirely different opinion. I believe that the nation must be destroyed as such, or since this was not possible using tactical blows, it must be expelled from the land operatively and by means of detailed actions.⁵⁵

The way in which noncombatant-focused tactics were implemented in these two situations sheds light on Britain and Germany’s respective characterizations of their enemy. Scorched earth and the concentration camps developed as a response to the audacity of a supposedly civilized people to fight in an uncivilized manner. In Southwest Africa, brutality and the policy of extermination was a response to the rising itself and its implication that an “inferior” race was entitled to retain the land, property, and rights of the pre-colonial period. Although they were consistently unpopular with settlers, Leutwein was given room to pursue his tactics of conciliation and negotiation for as long as they were able to placate the native population and keep it in check. Once the atmosphere in Southwest Africa became volatile, the conciliatory approach was discarded in favor of forceful suppression. In addition, German authorities continued to support the colonial leadership of von Trotha even when he resisted opportunities to negotiate. It was likely that a truce could have been achieved at the Waterberg that would have been favorable to the Germans and preserved elements of native infrastructure necessary for the creation of an effective labor force. The decision to keep von Trotha in power displayed a powerful tendency toward extermination, even when it ran counter to efforts that could have helped ensure the longevity of the colony.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 58-9.

Isabel Hull argues that this tendency was linked to the “cult of the offensive” that existed within the German military at this time.⁵⁶ To Hull:

the first default method [of German warfare]... was the decisive, concentric battle; when that failed, the second default method of German military doctrine called for a relentless pursuit of the enemy, forcing them to turn and fight, thus giving the technologically superior force the edge and bringing the war victoriously to a close.⁵⁷

While Hull’s arguments provide some explanation for the progression of German tactics that culminated in the “pursuit” phase in the Omaheke Desert, they are far too generalized to explain the shift that led to the development of the concentration camps. If the “cult of the offensive” was as pervasive an element of Germany militarism as Hull maintains, why was the “relentless pursuit” of the Herero abandoned before complete victory was achieved? Exterminatory tendencies remained apparent in the administration of the camp system, but the shift from outright murder to imprisonment showed the importance of punctuated instances of opposition to German conduct (a subject that is addressed in Section III). Hull fails to address these meaningful developments in her account.

In addition to scorched earth and the extermination policy, the administration of the concentration camps systems provides distinct evidence of the differing conceptions of Boer and Herero. The defining characteristic of the camps in South Africa was mismanagement, while in Southwest Africa it was purposeful cruelty. The British hastily enacted an extremely ill-advised wartime measure in the hope that it would lead to the enemy’s surrender. They lacked the food, medical supplies, and trained staff to house a massive displaced population already ravaged by the effects of war. In certain cases, they choose poor sites based solely on convenience and proximity to rail lines. Huge numbers of Boers died due to disease from cramped conditions. But, Boer prisoners were not forced into conditions of compulsory labor, as in Southwest Africa.

⁵⁶ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 22, 100.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

The emaciated prisoners of the German camps were considered a disposable commodity. German authorities undertook massive projects, such as the construction of a jetty to block the harbor of Swakopmund, on the backs of these starving Herero.⁵⁸ Additionally, while certain campsites in South Africa suffered from poor placement, the colonial administration purposefully located one of the largest camps in Southwest Africa (Shark Island, or “Death Island,” as it came to be known) on a barren rock island, with its inmates consistently exposed to freezing ocean winds.⁵⁹ The policies of extermination in Southwest Africa espoused the view that the inferior Herero, through their revolt, had displayed their true nature and could no longer be considered as deserving of any place in the new German society. Even after authorities ostensibly reversed the policy, the camps continued this belief in death through overwork.

⁵⁸ Casper W. Erichsen, “Forced labour in the concentration camp on Shark Island,” in *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and its Aftermath*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Monmouth, Wales: Merlin Press, 2008), 92.

⁵⁹ Erichsen, “*The angel of death*,” 71-6, 88-94.

SECTION III: THE PUBLIC AND POLITICAL SPHERES

South Africa: Activists for Relief and their Influence in Parliament

A letter which appeared in the *New York Herald* in April 1901 was one of the first accounts to draw significant public and international attention to the South African camps. Louise Maxwell, wife of the military governor of Pretoria, “claimed she was writing ‘in the name of little children who are living in open tents without fires, and possessing the scantiest of clothes.’”⁶⁰ She sought charitable contributions for relief, claiming that the current funds had been exhausted by the demands of war. Her words prompted a major response from the British government. Maxwell’s situation was a complicated one. Her letter appeared on the heels of a request by her husband for additional supplies to provide for camp inmates. While this request also brought attention to the conditions in the camps, it remained within military and government circles and thus did not expose the lack of resources to the general public. When Maxwell’s letter appeared, authorities came down hard on her husband, since they had no official authority over her actions. This did not go unnoticed by Maxwell. *The Times* published an addendum in which Maxwell downplayed her original account. It was an attempt to stem any accusations of neglect on the part of the camp administration and affirm that authorities were doing all they could to care for the internees.⁶¹ However, as far as public awareness was concerned, the damage was done. The importance of Maxwell’s letter lay not only in its exposure of camp conditions, but also in Maxwell’s status as the wife of a prominent British military authority in South Africa: “It was the first public admission, from a military source, that all was not well in the camps.”⁶² The British Cabinet openly denounced Maxwell’s appeal for aid, claiming that it “has given rise to

⁶⁰ Brian Roberts, *Those Bloody Women: Three Heroines of the Boer War* (London, UK: John Murray Publishers Ltd., 1991), 147.

⁶¹ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 147-9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 148-9.

statements that Boer families have been neglected by the government.”⁶³ This remark indicates a willingness by top governmental authorities to deny the initial reports that emanated from the camps.

Maxwell’s account was referenced in the House of Commons several days after it was released. Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) John Ellis inquired about the administration’s current efforts in “alleviating the situation and mitigating the sufferings of the women and children.”⁶⁴ Secretary of State for War St. John Brodrick was forced to admit, at this early stage, his overall lack of knowledge about the current conditions in the camps, but then proceeded to blindly assure Ellis that all proper measures for relief were being taken.⁶⁵ This practice of deflection became a trend among parliamentary leadership and fomented opposition in the House of Commons. Liberal MPs challenged Brodrick’s lack of information on nine separate occasions between February and June 1901. Brodrick consistently evaded their questions, touting outdated statistics about the number of people in the camps and the mortality rates and making unsupported claims that conditions were steadily improving.⁶⁶ He also expressed his displeasure to General Kitchener about the latter’s infrequent and insufficiently detailed communications: “I have to live from hand to mouth in all these matters and shall have to stand daily attacks in Parliament in parrying which I am far more likely to give you away than if I knew what to say.”⁶⁷ These early inquiries in Parliament showed growing anger over the lack of information provided by the leadership. The overwhelming desire to address camp issues was evident in the fact that two of the most significant debates on the subject occurred when Liberal MPs brought

⁶³ Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 200.

⁶⁴ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 92, col. 897.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, cols. 897-8.

⁶⁶ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 89, cols. 1021-2; *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 90, cols. 180, 557, 1026-7; *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 92, cols. 897-8; *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 93 (1901) cols. 407-8, 929-31, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1901/may/> (accessed March 19, 2015); *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 95 (1901), cols. 78, 540-3, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1901/jun/> (accessed March 19, 2015).

⁶⁷ Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 300.

up the camps during a motion for adjournment and a response to a speech made to Parliament by King Edward VII. They felt that their attempts to raise the matter through traditional parliamentary procedures had failed to garner a meaningful response.⁶⁸ Political opposition only grew more intense as vivid firsthand descriptions of camp living conditions, such as that of social welfare activist Emily Hobhouse, came to the fore.

Emily Hobhouse had developed liberal views and a passion for social work at an early age, but spent much of her young life caring for her ailing father. After his death, Hobhouse traveled to the United States and carried out relief work in a small mining town in Minnesota. Upon her return to England and following the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, Hobhouse became heavily involved in the South African Conciliation Committee. She served as honorary secretary for the women's branch of the organization. Well-known for her motivation to help victims of oppression, Hobhouse was incensed by the news coming out of South Africa about the concentration camps: the "constantly renewed picture of women and children homeless, desperate and distressed, formed and fixed itself in my mind and never once left me. It became my abiding thought...I saw myself amongst the sufferers bearing relief."⁶⁹ In October 1900, Hobhouse established the South African Women and Children Distress Fund. She was warned that her efforts would likely be perceived as critical of British conduct of the war and precipitate backlash, but she proceeded nonetheless. Her ultimate goal was to visit the camps, document the conditions, and provide whatever assistance she could.⁷⁰

After overcoming multiple administrative obstacles, Hobhouse was able to visit some of the concentration camps. She had to obtain official permission from Kitchener, and he only

⁶⁸ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, cols. 573-629; *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, cols. 86-164.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Andrew J. McLeod, "Emily Hobhouse: Her Feet Firmly on the Ground" in *Scorched Earth*, ed. Fransjohan Pretorius (Cape Town, South Africa: Human and Rousseau, 2001), 201.

⁷⁰ McLeod, "Emily Hobhouse," 199-201.

allowed her to visit a limited number of camps. These limitations suggest that Kitchener was aware that “his house was not in order and he did not want to be bothered by a civilian outsider.”⁷¹ Hobhouse’s requests coincided with the expansion of the scorched earth policy. This was a period in which the camp populations were growing at an exponential rate and camp administrators were struggling to deal with the influx of new internees. The dismal living conditions and soaring mortality rates horrified Hobhouse, who regularly wrote letters home detailing what she saw. In her letters, she consistently requested that they be sent to press outlets for publication. Upon her return, she was surprised to find that these requests had not been acted upon. Her brother Leonard realized the potential for controversy inherent in her accounts, and thought it best that her revelations not be made public while Emily was still in South Africa, for fear that authorities might put a stop to her relief efforts. This made Hobhouse consider her task of exposing the conditions that much more urgent when she returned to England.⁷² Hobhouse was making preparations for her return when Louise Maxwell’s articles were published. Hobhouse was conflicted about the content of Maxwell’s original letter. Though inspired by the attention it had brought to the situation in the camps, she refused to believe that Britain lacked the funds to care for those it had brought under its “protection.”⁷³ She campaigned relentlessly for the Boer women and children, showing her wholesale rejection of the claim that all possible measures were being taken to provide for the camps.

Hobhouse did not go directly to the press when she arrived in England. She instead decided first to approach St. John Brodrick, Secretary of State for War. He had recently

made a speech in Parliament, trotting out all the old specious arguments. Boer women, he blandly announced, were flocking to the camps for food and “protection against the Kaffirs,” some 20,000 to 40,000 women had sought asylum; there was “no occasion in

⁷¹ McLeod, “Emily Hobhouse,” 203.

⁷² Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 166.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 149.

which these camps' food ran short," and there had been "immense improvements" in living conditions.⁷⁴

This indicated to Hobhouse that authorities were pathetically unaware of the reality of the camp situation. At her request, Hobhouse was allowed a meeting with Brodrick, but supposedly had difficulty securing Brodrick's attention: he was "'ready to listen, also ready to drift'... [Hobhouse] had got through the interview by clinging to the belief that, as she had repeatedly told the Boer women, the people of England would never tolerate the suffering in the camps once it became known."⁷⁵ But, Brodrick gave no immediate response, and a distressed Hobhouse went to the press. In mid June 1901, she wrote a scathing exposé of the camp system that appeared in newspapers and was circulated among members of Parliament.⁷⁶

Hobhouse's report was unflinchingly critical of the entire policy of concentration. The camps were "wholesale cruelty" that involved "murder to the children."⁷⁷ Her extensive interviews revealed the indiscriminate nature of scorched earth: "In most cases there is no pretence that there was treachery, or ammunition concealed, or food given, or anything. It was just that an order was given to empty the country."⁷⁸ In a total of roughly seventy-six transcribed interviews, only four women explicitly stated that their homes and belongings had remained intact and undamaged by British soldiers.⁷⁹ Hobhouse's report was rife with descriptions of ill-planning and mismanagement in the camp system. The administration severely underestimated the necessary amount of supplies and support staff and lacked key knowledge of the South African terrain (for effective camp placement) and of Boer culture. Overall, the camps were wholly unable to cope with the massive and immediate growth that the policy entailed:

⁷⁴ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 166.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Emily Hobhouse, *To the Committee of the South African Distress Fund: Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies* (London, UK: Friars Printing Association, Limited, 1901), 4.

⁷⁸ Hobhouse, *Report of a Visit to the Camps*, 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-33.

If only the camps remained the size they were six weeks ago, I saw some chance of getting them well in hand, organizing and dealing with the distress. But this sudden influx of hundreds and thousands has upset everything, and reduced us all to a state bordering on despair. More and more are coming in. A new sweeping movement has begun, resulting in hundreds and thousands of these unfortunate people either crowding into already crowded camps or else being dumped down to form a new one where nothing is at hand to shelter them.⁸⁰

Hobhouse went on a speaking tour upon her return to Britain and was often harassed by those who considered her unpatriotic. Her requests to hold public speeches met with denial on several occasions. After she was refused a hearing at the Darlington Assembly Hall in June 1901, for example, Hobhouse stated that “though she had addressed 20 meetings, she had only been interrupted at two, while she had never been absolutely refused a hearing.”⁸¹ Soon after, in early July, authorities stymied Hobhouse’s attempt to hold a public meeting at the Old Town Hall at Scarborough.⁸² The import of her critical voice, however, was clear. Even articles in *The Times* (a conservative, pro-government news outlet predominantly critical of Hobhouse) attested to her popularity. They described a number of the large meetings she addressed and the attentiveness of the crowds.⁸³ Her speeches, which presented a graphic representation of conditions in the camps, consistently inspired emotional responses by the attendees. Listeners regularly lined up to meet Hobhouse following her presentations. Some nobles also stood behind Hobhouse in her quest for reform. During her absence from London on her speaking tour, Lord Ripon consistently pressured the War Office in her stead, demanding that significant aid be sent to alleviate the suffering of the internees.⁸⁴ Certain moderates and even staunch imperialists were also affected by Hobhouse’s revelations. Even though many still supported the war, they saw the potential for

⁸⁰ Hobhouse, *Report of a Visit to the Camps*, 12.

⁸¹ “The War,” *Times* (London), June 22, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

⁸² “The War,” *Times* (London), July 9, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

⁸³ “The War,” *Times* (London), July 2, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014); “The War,” *Times* (London), July 9, 1901.

⁸⁴ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 175, 179.

the situation in the camps to bring, in the words of Reverend Charles Gore, “a stain which we will not be able to obliterate.”⁸⁵

Emily Hobhouse certainly did not shrink from mounting criticism of her views. Many spoke up in staunch support of British conduct and the necessity of the scorched earth and concentration camp policies. They painted Hobhouse as naïve and subject to “feminine sympathies.” Lord Windsor attacked her for her supposed lack of knowledge of the conditions of war, claiming that the suffering of civilians was an inevitable consequence.⁸⁶ Major General Robert Baden-Powell noted that “Miss Hobhouse has evidently been such a short time in South Africa, and is so little acquainted with the manners and customs of the individual Boer that she is quite unaware that he (and more specifically she) is one of the finest exponents in the art of bluff.”⁸⁷ A *Times* correspondent reported that “these families themselves [i.e., the Boer prisoners] are eager to acknowledge the kindness with which they are treated, except when they see the chance to pour lamentation into the ear of sentimentalists.”⁸⁸ Hobhouse fired back, using her status as a firsthand observer to her advantage: “Working as I did in close touch with people born and bred in the country I discovered that our views on the camps coincided exactly excepted that mine were more moderate. These fellow workers were of various nationalities – English, German, and Dutch.”⁸⁹ Her statements showed that she did recognize the reality of the situation in South Africa, and she even admitted her own shortcomings:

⁸⁵ Quoted in Marouf Hasian, Jr., “The ‘Hysterical’ Emily Hobhouse and Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy,” *Western Journal of Communication* 67, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 156.

⁸⁶ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 97 (1901), col. 371, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1901/jul/> (accessed March 19, 2015).

⁸⁷ “The War,” *Times* (London), August 28, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

⁸⁸ “Mr. Brodrick stated last night,” *Times* (London), June 26, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

⁸⁹ Emily Hobhouse, “The Concentration Camps,” *Times* (London), August 30, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive*, (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

Common sense tells one that the standard of life cannot be the same in war time as in peace... He [Baden-Powell] says I am ignorant, and that is true. But in one piece of knowledge I have an unhappy advantage over him. To my share fell the awful experience of being in the midst of the sickness and suffering which precedes and accompanies such a mortality.”⁹⁰

The key importance of Hobhouse’s efforts was her ability to garner significant political support. MP David Lloyd-George continued his paramount role in bringing camp conditions into political discourse, raising the issue in the House of Commons on the very day that Hobhouse’s report was published. Lloyd-George had been likely the earliest and most vocal political critic of the concentration camp policy. In July 1900, he had openly compared the policy to the brutal methods employed by Spanish General Valeriano Weyler in Cuba, methods that had sparked significant criticism in Britain several years before.⁹¹ Lloyd-George specifically referred to the “English Lady” Hobhouse as a chief factor in bringing camp conditions to light, and his forceful words echoed her outrage:⁹²

“The Herod of old,” he was reported as saying, “sought to crush a little race by killing all the young children. It was not a success, and he would commend that story to Herod’s modern imitator.” This was very much the line he took in the parliamentary debate. He accused the government of pursuing a policy of “extermination” against women and children. It might not be a direct policy but it had the same effect.⁹³

Lloyd-George latched on to Brodrick’s previous admission that in May 1901 alone, 250 children, 47 women, and 39 men had died in the Transvaal camps. To Lloyd-George, this proved that “so far from this being the result of temporary conditions, it is growing worse.”⁹⁴ His comments prompted significant backlash from St. John Brodrick, who claimed he was misrepresenting the situation in the camps. Although his motion was defeated, the ethical and moral issues inherent in the use of concentration camps entered the political arena. Those politicians who had written

⁹⁰ Hobhouse, “The Concentration Camps,” *Times* (London), August 30, 1901.

⁹¹ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 148.

⁹² Hasian, “The ‘Hysterical’ Emily Hobhouse,” 149.

⁹³ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 168-9.

⁹⁴ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, col. 574.

off the suffering in the camps as a temporary condition could no longer deny the reality of the situation. Time alone would not heal the system. In order to stem the death toll, and action had to be taken. In the words of MP Herbert Lewis, these revelations were due in large part to the “evidence at first hand, taken from a considerable number of the camps by a lady [i.e., Hobhouse] whose word will command implicit confidence from everyone who knows her.”⁹⁵

Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the leader of the Liberal Opposition in the House of Commons, agreed to a face-to-face meeting with Emily Hobhouse upon her return to England.

Later she recalled the meeting to Campbell-Bannerman’s biographer:

The interview... remains vivid in my mind. Of all whom I saw at the time, deeply interested as they were, he alone, greatly occupied as he was, seemed to have the... determination to hear and understand everything... For nearly two hours... he listened with rapt attention, now and then putting a question to elucidate a point. He left the impression of a man who spared no time or pains to arrive at the truth and in whom wisdom and humanity were paramount.⁹⁶

Although Campbell-Bannerman had secretly favored a pro-Boer position for some time leading up to this meeting, he did not openly declare it until after his encounter with Hobhouse.⁹⁷ In a famous speech shortly thereafter, he declared, “When is a war not a war?... When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.”⁹⁸ Several days later, Campbell-Bannerman weighed in during the debate in the House of Commons over Lloyd-George’s proposed motion and voiced his suggestions for reform in the camps:

What I object to is the whole policy of concentration, the whole policy of destroying the homes of women and children, driving them in circumstances of considerable cruelty... What I would urge upon the Government is to send out a staff of nurses and competent civilian medical men... I am quite certain that this is the course which humanity dictates, and it is the only course which will convince these unhappy women and children, so far

⁹⁵ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, col. 619.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 171.

⁹⁷ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 170-1.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 9.

as they can realise the circumstances, that the British people really care for them and desire to save them from unnecessary pain and suffering.⁹⁹

Campbell-Bannerman specifically referenced the “reports of the gallant and plucky lady” as the key inspiration for his charged words, and expressed his admiration for her individual efforts in providing relief to the camps’ occupants.¹⁰⁰

Campbell-Bannerman’s criticisms met with opposition in the House of Commons. Nationalists were more than willing to color him as unpatriotic and weak, unable to stomach the measures they considered necessary to win the war. However, in the end, it was the suggestions of Campbell-Bannerman and his Liberal counterparts that were eventually adopted in South Africa. In another speech in Parliament in mid January 1902, Campbell-Bannerman outlined the recent changes in the conduct of the war and the treatment of prisoners.¹⁰¹ His statements about the curtailment of scorched earth and improvements in the concentration camps at the inaugural meeting of the London Liberal Federation led to cries of “Shame!” and “Miss Hobhouse!,” and he harshly criticized those who failed to speak out against colonial practices: “If the man who held his tongue has his admirers or partisans anywhere it cannot be among the Ministers of the Crown, for they have acted upon the recommendations which he failed to make.”¹⁰²

Liz Stanley recognized that the “significance accorded [Emily Hobhouse’s] work has derived particularly from how it underpinned the publicity and campaigning activities she engaged in, which ensured that the plight of Boer women and children remained on the political agenda.”¹⁰³ Hobhouse’s revelations were of key importance in the effect they had on politicians like Lloyd-George and Campbell-Bannerman. Essentially, she paved the way for open criticism

⁹⁹ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, col. 599.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, cols. 599, 601.

¹⁰¹ “Sir H. Campbell Bannerman On Liberal Policy,” *Times* (London), January 14, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

¹⁰² *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, cols. 573-629.

¹⁰³ Liz Stanley, *Mourning Becomes: Post/Memory, Commemoration, and the Concentration Camps of the South African War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), 77.

of Kitchener's conduct of the war. Exposure of camp conditions precipitated change when it was channeled through the proper medium. When Lloyd-George, Campbell-Bannerman, and their Liberal compatriots took up the cause of reform, Hobhouse's campaigning gained a much-needed political voice. The opposition voiced by these politicians, spurred by the writings of Hobhouse, eventually led to a resolution by the National Liberal Federation. It deplored "the terrible rate of mortality among the women and children in the concentration camps' and urged the government to take immediate steps to remedy their present condition."¹⁰⁴ As conditions within the camps began to improve in early 1902, Liberal MP John Dillon remarked that when "men talk now about what the Colonial Secretary is doing, I remember that it was because public opinion had been stirred up by her [i.e., Hobhouse]."¹⁰⁵

Even when MPs did not specifically reference the work of activists like Hobhouse, their political pressure helped to drive reforms in South Africa. Heated debates began to occur in British Parliament in mid 1901, and they continued well into the following year. While the Nationalists, on the whole, supported the policy as it was painted by Kitchener (a necessity of war), the Liberals expressed open opposition both in public and in the House of Commons. The parties' opinions on the camps were, generally, a reflection of their larger opinions on the war itself. The Nationalists expressed broad support for colonial expansion and supported military action against the Boers from its earliest stages. British victories in the formative period of the war helped the party win the majority in the House of Commons during the elections of 1900. Their success in this election was the result of distinct fractures among the Liberals, which resulted in the development of two distinct factions – the Liberal Imperialists and the so-called

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Thompson, "Imperial Propaganda During the War," in *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*, ed. Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), 318.

¹⁰⁵ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, col. 410.

“pro-Boers.” Some, such as Henry Campbell-Bannerman, attempted to occupy a middle ground which tacitly supported the war, but opposed the government’s aggressive diplomacy in South Africa. Ultimately, the situation in the concentration camps proved to be a source of unity in the Liberal Party, and the disparate elements reached wide agreement in their opposition to camp policy.¹⁰⁶

For many Liberal MPs, the situation in the camps was a stain on the reputation of Britain that would have far-reaching consequences for the country’s continued colonial presence in South Africa. The camps were *diabolical* – a *dishonour*, a *disgrace*, an *infamy*, and an affront to British ideals. These politicians expressed the firm belief that British policies were instilling hatred that would make future effective governance next to impossible.¹⁰⁷ For example, James Bryce openly considered the camps to be the largest source of continued animosity towards the British in both republics, as well as in the Cape Colony, maintaining the “infinite harm done to the minds of the Boers.”¹⁰⁸

A consistent theme among the camp policy’s political opposition was the issue of delayed action to improve living conditions on the part of the government and camp administration. They considered it a criminal act to postpone steps toward significant reform once it became clear that the war would continue for some time and that these camps were not “merely temporary things.”¹⁰⁹ Politicians who had consistently pressed for details on the camps, had called attention to the dismal conditions, and had urged reform throughout 1901 expressed their frustration in the

¹⁰⁶ Iain Sharpe, “The Liberal Party and the South African War, 1899-1902,” *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 29 (Winter 2000-2001): 4-7.

¹⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, col. 583; *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, cols. 120, 123; Parliament,” *Times* (London), August 1, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014); “The War,” *Times* (London), June 21, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, col. 427.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 357.

debates of 1902 that the administration had not acted on their recommendations.¹¹⁰ They levied charged accusations that the government had failed to use “common sense,” had “turned a deaf ear to suggestions,” and had “been blind to the consequences of their actions.”¹¹¹ Henry Campbell-Bannerman effectively summed up this viewpoint, taking into account the role of both public and political criticism in eventually overcoming apathy toward camp reform on the part of the British government:

[W]hy were these reforms not sooner undertaken?... Why this delay of months before the nurses and civilian medical men were sent out? Why? The Government waited until the public opinion of the country was shocked at the death rate in the camps. There was no promptitude, there was not even a reasonable hurry. Lord Milner[, High Commissioner for South Africa,] telegraphed on November 21st[, 1901], although our suggestions were made on June 17th[, 1901], and the Government ought to have realised the state of things long before that, and what did Lord Milner say in that telegram? He says, “Things will only be made worse by flurried action.” Flurried action! Flurried action five months after we had pleaded that immediate and strenuous action should be taken!... I am... complaining of... the whole system which, without any provision at all adequate, swept in 100,000 people, and then for months waited on Providence until the mortality of the camps became a public scandal.¹¹²

South Africa: Organizations, Foreign Opinion, and the Press

A number of committees formed by British citizens also responded quickly and powerfully as the situation for the inmates in the camps became known to the public. They lodged numerous complaints in the closing months of 1901. In addition to the public presentation of petitions and resolutions decrying British conduct, some of these committees were able to cull meaningful support from local political and religious figures. For example, the South African Conciliation Committee

adopted a resolution expressing their condemnations of the policy of the Government, which has led to the continuance of this unhappy war, has resulted in the devastation and depopulation of two once contented countries, and in bringing into concentration camps

¹¹⁰ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, cols. 324-436, 455-6; *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th ser., vol. 104 (1902), cols. 402-67, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1902/mar/> (accessed March 17, 2015).

¹¹¹ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 104, cols. 453-4.

¹¹² *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, col. 563.

the Boer women and children, where the death-rate, according to our Government returns, has reached the unprecedented total of 264 per thousand per annum, and of the children alone 433 per thousand per annum.¹¹³

The exposure of camp conditions also led to the formation of the Manchester Concentration Camps Committee. In late 1901, this group wrote an official petition in response to camp mortality rates. It was signed by the Lord Mayor, the Lord Bishop, and roughly 4,000 residents of both Manchester and the city's surrounding neighborhoods. These residents, according to *The Times*, included "many leading citizens representing all shades of political opinion."¹¹⁴ The petition deplored the reported death rates and pleaded for "radical alterations" to current camp practices. In addition, the Committee stated their staunch commitment to assist in any reform efforts.¹¹⁵ For its part, the Women's Liberal Federation considered the "unprecedented rate of mortality" in the camps to be "a reproach to the nation."¹¹⁶ In the Federation's estimation, the camps would likely prove to be the most significant obstacle in the way of postwar reconciliation between the British and the Boers. The group thus called on all Liberal members of Parliament to push for swift action to improve conditions in the camps. Their criticisms formed the basis for an official resolution submitted by the Lancashire and Cheshire Liberal Women's Union, which described the situation "as a case of willful neglect which almost amounted to intention."¹¹⁷ In addition, a large majority of the union's members defeated the proposal of an amendment to this resolution, ostensibly moved by Nationalists "who had come to

¹¹³ "The War," *Times* (London), November 2, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹¹⁴ "The War," *Times* (London), December 3, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ "The War," *Times* (London), November 7, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹¹⁷ "The War," *Times* (London), December 10, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

the meeting under false colors,” which attested to the original humane intentions of the camp system as well as the good work of the authorities under the circumstances.¹¹⁸

Overall, the stance of these organizations ascribed the mortality in the camps directly to mismanagement by the government and consequently increased the pressure on authorities to take action. Resolutions and statements such as those made by the members of the Lancashire and Cheshire Liberal Women’s Union took a strong position on the operation of the system. Those who administered the camps were no longer making the best out of a bad situation, they claimed, but continuing to pursue a course that resulted in suffering and death en masse. These groups essentially maintained that if prompt steps were not taken to improve the lot of the camps’ inmates, further death could not be considered the result of negligence, but rather a direct intent to destroy the Boer population. Additionally, the pledge of support by the Manchester Concentration Camps Committee indirectly spoke to the inability of the government and colonial authorities to remedy the situation without outside assistance.

One particular source of opposition from within the camps themselves inspired an official international response. Hansie van Warmelo, who served as a nurse in the camp at Irene experienced firsthand the ramifications of the haphazardness and mismanagement that plagued camp administration, as well as the often coldhearted nature of camp officials. According to van Warmelo:

The women prefer to suffer and starve with their children, even when twenty are herded together in one tent, almost without bedding, rather than expose themselves to insults when they approach with their needs. Is it considered such a crime in these present days to fight for home and independence, that it is wreaked on defenceless women and helpless children, in order to compel the... men to surrender? We earnestly beseech you to take steps without delay to relieve the suffering of these unfortunate beings.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ “The War,” *Times* (London), December 10, 1901.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 162.

The petition received no response from Kitchener or the British administration. A frustrated van Warmelo then brought her petition to several foreign representatives in Pretoria, which prompted consuls from Portugal, Austria, and Germany to establish the Diplomatic Corps and apply for permission to inspect the camp at Irene. Ultimately, this gathering of foreign powers forced the authorities' hand, and they allowed a visit. The subsequent report established the number of deaths in the camps to be fourteen times higher than the normal rate in Pretoria, and it highlighted the scarcity of food, the atrocious living conditions, and the dismal state of medical and sanitation services.¹²⁰

The case of Hansie van Warmelo provided one instance in which the campaigning of an individual led directly to international criticism. But, as knowledge of British tactics became more widespread through exposure by prisoner advocates such as Emily Hobhouse, negative opinion in foreign circles became a much larger source of worry for the supporters of scorched earth and the concentration camps, especially when it began to appear in *The Times*. The statements made by pro-Boer groups in Austria with regard to the British conduct of the war were particularly virulent. The terms used included *systematic murder*, *inhuman*, and *barbarous terrorism*.¹²¹ The Christian Socialists openly asked, "How was it to be accounted for that the whole world did not venture to tell Englishmen that they were tyrants and cruel executioners for dragging thousands of women and children into the concentration camps and then doing them slowly to death [i.e., slowly killing them]?"¹²² In addition, Socialist leader Emile Vandervelde levied strong accusations against the British in Belgium's Chamber of Representatives, referring specifically to the writings of Hobhouse. He accused the British of barbarous conduct,

¹²⁰ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 163.

¹²¹ "The War," *Times* (London), December 14, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹²² "The War," *Times* (London), January 8, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

buttressing his argument with appeals to existing international law: “I know that the South African republics were excluded from the Hague Conference; but does this mean that they are beyond the pale of humanity?” His remarks drew applause from members of both the political left and right.¹²³

British conduct also came under scrutiny in the French press. An article in the newspaper *Le Temps* stated that in “Africa the farms were burned *en masse*, the fields ravaged, the noncombatants flung together in the concentration camps, while proclamations pretended to inflict punishment on belligerents contrary to international law. This is the scandal denounced by the conscience of the world.”¹²⁴ *Le Temps* remained critical even after the British had announced their plans for camp reform in late 1901. Another article claimed that “these decisions are... very tardy, when thousands of innocent lives have been lost which should and could have been spared... [The] confession they implicitly contain is... made in a surly tone seasoned with unjust attacks against the initiation of this reform.”¹²⁵

It is unsurprising that opposition to British conduct of the war in South Africa became a topic of interest in the Irish National Convention, where the general theme of the war against the Boers, that of a colonial power interfering in the affairs of sovereign republics, surely struck a chord. The comments of nationalist Michael Davitt referred to the concentration camps as “Herodian infamies”: “The braggart English, defeated again and again by inferior numbers in the field, their generals disgraced, resolved to make war upon foes who could not strike back; they resolved to make war upon the women and children for the base purpose of trying to induce the

¹²³ “The War,” *Times* (London), December 11, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹²⁴ “Germany And England,” *Times* (London), November 25, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

¹²⁵ “The War,” *Times* (London), December 16, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

commandos to lay down their arms.”¹²⁶ Criticism of British tactics also appeared in the Spanish newspaper, *Liberal*, which referred to Chamberlain as “determined to persevere in a war of extermination,” and described Kitchener as “the organizer of concentration camps, burner of farms, and implacable executioner of prisoners.”¹²⁷ Pro-Boer contingents in several major American cities convened large meetings that expressed outrage over the concentration camps. One of the speakers was William Jennings Bryan, who “considered it a disgrace that no official expression of sympathy for the Boers had yet been made by the United States Government.” He believed the U.S. should “make an effort to end the horrors of the concentration camps and the war, which ‘by its unexampled ferocity and enormous cost of life... has astounded the civilized world.’”¹²⁸

Public figures in the Netherlands voiced strong criticism of British tactics in South Africa as well. In a quote in a Vienna newspaper that was reprinted in *The Times*, Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper reportedly claimed that “there are no more Boer children, they have all died in the concentration camps.”¹²⁹ Charles Boissevain, an eminent Dutch journalist, was another well-known proponent of the Boer cause. His article, “The Law of Nations and the Law of Humanity,” appeared in the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* and levied powerful accusations against the British:

The British Government ought either to have offered acceptable and honourable terms of peace to the Boers or else have overwhelmed them with irresistible force, acting

¹²⁶ “Ireland,” *Times* (London), January 9, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

¹²⁷ “The End of the War,” *Times* (London), June 7, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

¹²⁸ “The War,” *Times* (London), January 7, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹²⁹ “We have news this morning,” *Times* (London), December 27, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

according to the honourable usages of warfare. But it has neither the moral courage to do the first nor the soldiers and the conscience to do the last.¹³⁰

It was difficult for the British to ignore detractors in Europe who had a shared heritage with the Boer people. *The Times* felt obliged to respond strongly to Boissevain's comments, stating that he

purposely overlooks the fact that these evils are the inevitable result of the reckless warfare by which the Boers are prolonging their resistance, and that the British authorities have done their best to mitigate them. The whole spirit of the letter is inspired by the well-worn theory that all British acts are barbarous, and all those of the Boers are sublime, a theory which – making all allowance for exceptions on both sides – has long been abandoned by more moderate writers on the Boer side.¹³¹

Germany was by far the harshest critic of British conduct in South Africa. Newspapers and politicians spoke out against scorched earth and the concentration camps, and pro-Boer groups formed several large relief committees and organizations. The *National-Zeitung* and *Berliner Tageblatt* responded vociferously to Chamberlain's claim that German conduct in France in 1870 had set a precedent for Britain's current practices in South Africa: "We would ask him [Chamberlain] where in France there was a wholesale massacre of children such as, according to English accounts, is being enacted day by day in the so-called concentration camps." The *Tageblatt* maintained that "it would be simply an impossibility to intensify the cruelty of the present methods of warfare of the 'butcher' Kitchener."¹³² *Germania*, a Catholic publication, expressed anger over Britain's refusal to allow German aid to be sent to the camps, stating that "the British refusal will cause deep feeling among the German people." It asked "whether England desires to turn the camps into pits for murdering Boers with the object of

¹³⁰ "The War," *Times* (London), October 12, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹³¹ "The War," *Times* (London), October 12, 1901.

¹³² "Mr. Chamberlain's Speech," *Times* (London), October 28, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

destroying the Boer nation.”¹³³ The Ladies’ Relief Fund for Boer Women and Children spoke out in “universal protest against ‘a war with women and children... There is in the whole civilized world no heart susceptible of feeling which would not be filled with warm indignation against such a system.’”¹³⁴ Responses from *Times* correspondents attempted to address the overall negative German conception of British conduct in South Africa. One stated that

scores of...falsehoods [are] disseminated every day among the German people...that the whole policy of the concentration camps has been deliberately conceived with the purpose of killing off the Boer women and children has been dinned so continuously into German ears that the vast majority of the Germans actually believe these things.¹³⁵

Another criticized the Pan-Germanic League and the Boer Relief Association of

propagating the worst calumnies with regard to the conduct of the British in South Africa. Their adherents and those who have derived their information from the publications of these societies have been taught...to regard the concentration camps and places where Boer women and children were “deprived of their liberty and menaced by the gravest dangers to their health, their honour, and their lives.”¹³⁶

Much of the commentary by the foreign press on scorched earth and the concentration camps was overwhelmingly negative. Terms such as *extermination*, *atrocities*, and *murder* were consistently used. There was clearly a tendency to dwell on the gravest details of reports from South Africa. These harsh criticisms became part of the public discourse and the British Parliament recognized the effect they could have on the nation’s international prestige. During debate in the House of Commons in late January 1902, John Dillon stated that the camps “have aroused the indignation of the whole civilised world outside of Great Britain,” and Reginald

¹³³ “The War,” *Times* (London), February 14, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

¹³⁴ “The War,” *Times* (London), March 10, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

¹³⁵ “The extraordinary outburst of Anglophobia,” *Times* (London), November 20, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014).

¹³⁶ “The Boer Generals,” *Times* (London), September 27, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

McKenna spoke of the policy's inherent danger to Britain's foreign relations.¹³⁷ Lord Windsor maintained that criticism was

bad enough if it is only for the ears of English people, who can weigh the merits of this particular form of attack against His Majesty's Government in regard to our military operations; but it becomes much worse when such things are read by people in foreign countries, who are very often not friendly disposed towards us, and who certainly, however willing they might be, have not the opportunity of sifting the matter to the bottom.¹³⁸

In a particularly telling response, MP John Lawson Walton stated to his constituents in South Leeds "that he had read with pain the slander in foreign newspapers, and he had blushed to see that these were founded on the loose, haphazard language used by orators in this country." Lawson admitted to a degree of "carelessness" in the creation and initial management of the camp system, but maintained that it was "humane in design" and a necessity due to the actions of the Boers.¹³⁹

There were many instances in which the scorched earth and concentration camp policies engendered criticism in public forums, but they also received significant support. In fact, it was not difficult for Britons to find opposition to the viewpoints of "radicals" like Hobhouse. *Times* correspondents were more apt to criticize during the early stages of the war than when the Boers became "irreconcilable" and refused to fight in a "civilized" manner.¹⁴⁰ More to the point, *The Times* gave little credence to the writings of Hobhouse. It "consistently took the line that the sufferings were regrettable, but that in the long run it was kinder to be cruel and that the remedy lay in the hands of the women themselves, who should urge their men to lay down their arms."¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, cols. 335, 397.

¹³⁸ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 97, col. 371.

¹³⁹ "The War," *Times* (London), January 10, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

¹⁴⁰ Jacqueline Beaumont, "The Times at War, 1899-1902" in *The South African War Reappraised*, ed. Donal Lowry (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 80.

¹⁴¹ Jacqueline Beaumont, "The Making of a War Correspondent" in *The Impact of the South African War*, ed. David Omissi and Andrew S. Thompson (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002), 133.

It is undeniable that Hobhouse had significant influence on the public's view of the camps, but this was not the only perspective available for public consumption. Additionally, the readership of *The Times* was predominantly from the upper echelon of British society. Hence, those who had the most influence were presented with consistent reinforcement of official government policies.

Immediately following the publication of Hobhouse's report, *The Times* found it "necessary to set forth once again the true aspects of the case, which have been too much obscured by mistaken sentimentalism and by an astonishing incapacity or unwillingness to recognize the necessities imposed by the peculiar character of the war in its present stage."¹⁴² The paper vehemently defended camp policy as a military necessity, essentially maintaining that all Boer women were acting as spies, which "would have justified their removal and detention simply and solely as belligerents."¹⁴³ The article, nevertheless, went on to say that the creation of the camps first and foremost reflected humanitarian concerns. The policy of scorched earth and "clearing the country" were never questioned, and the camps were painted as the salvation for women and children who would have otherwise been left in the open to survive on their own. Generally, *The Times* presented scorched earth and the concentration camps as not only a military necessity, but the only option available to the British once the Boers turned to guerilla warfare. Correspondents presented the farms of South Africa as supply depots and intelligence hubs, and women became the commissaries and devious spymasters. Moreover, the British were not only justified in burning the farms and turning out their inhabitants: their policy of concentration was supposedly a compassionate and benevolent action in the context of modern warfare.

¹⁴² "It is with some reluctance," *Times* (London), August 31, 1901.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Many articles that took a defensive stance in the wake of Hobhouse's revelations appeared in *The Times* following the growth of international and domestic criticism in mid to late 1901:

The truth is that the Boers and not we are properly responsible for keeping Boer women and children alive; that our efforts to do so are carried on in the teeth of every obstacle that they can put in our way; that they are perfectly satisfied with the existing condition of affairs which gives them a free hand to carry on their peculiar warfare; that had we left these women and children to the ordinary chances of war the mortality among them would have been indefinitely greater than it is; and that, such as it is in our hands, it is very greatly due to the inveterate Boer habits, which kill off most of the children in infancy at all times.¹⁴⁴

The policy of concentration was mainly due to another consideration, that of humanity. When the guerilla methods of the Boers rendered it necessary to clear the country of supplies, the authorities were presented with the alternative of letting the women and children starve on their farms or of bringing them together and feeding them themselves. The former course might very possibly have been more effective in bringing about the surrender of the Boers. But we decided upon the latter, because we did not wish to have upon our conscience the suffering which the alternative policy might have involved.¹⁴⁵

Another article applauded plans to break up the concentration camps into smaller units and the installation of permanent dwellings (as opposed to tents), but stated, at the same time, that the Boers' own sanitary practices were the largest contributor to mortality and would ultimately emerge as the main roadblock to a sustained decrease in the death rate.¹⁴⁶ For its part, *The Times* selectively reprinted communications from Kitchener to Brodrick in an attempt to present them as incontrovertible evidence that the concentration camp policy had been "forced" on Kitchener by the actions of the Boers.¹⁴⁷

The increase in these types of defensive articles suggests that the opposition was gaining ground and British conduct required defense in the public sphere. Correspondents attempted to

¹⁴⁴ "A despatch from Lord Kitchener," *Times* (London), October 22, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹⁴⁵ "We publish today various letters," *Times* (London), October 31, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹⁴⁶ "The War," *Times* (London), December 20, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ "The Refugee Camps," *Times* (London), January 18, 1902.

soften the consequences of scorched earth and the concentration camps by shifting blame to the Boers for both the adoption of these tactics and the camps' high mortality rates, vacillating between claims about military necessity and/or the humanity of these policies, and latching on to any reports that indicated plans for the improvement of camp conditions.

Southwest Africa: Missionary Activism, the Press, and Contemporary Literature

German conduct in Southwest Africa did not benefit from the same level of public exposure at home as that of the British in South Africa. Sources of opposition in the colony were much less prevalent, and critical treatment in the press occurred mainly in non-German newspapers. In addition, German responses to critical press treatment revealed a general lack of understanding of (and an unwillingness to understand) the Herero's dire condition. These responses displayed a tendency to promote the stereotypical viewpoints of "inferior" native Africans that were so prevalent among German settlers, and had helped create the volatile environment that sparked the initial revolt. In addition to press outlets, these viewpoints were also disseminated in popular German contemporary literature, and were key thematic elements in one of the most widely published colonial novels of the era.

Protestant missionaries from the Rhenish Missionary Society were the most outspoken critics of German conduct in Southwest Africa. This organization was one of the most significant missionary societies in Germany at the time, and its presence in the region began in 1842.¹⁴⁸ The mission generally avoided involvement in political entanglements, but its overarching philosophy opposed the exploitative practices that occurred throughout the history of German colonialism, and was distinctly anti-nationalist, running directly counter to the opinions of

¹⁴⁸ Cynthia Cohen, "'The Natives Must First Become Good Workmen': Formal Educational Provision in German South West and East Africa Compared," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 1, Special Issue: Namibia: Africa's Youngest Nation (March 1993): 117.

government and colonial authorities.¹⁴⁹ Shortly after the uprising, missionaries disseminated reports blaming the actions of the settlers for the revolt and denying accusations of excessive barbarity on the part of the Herero. These reports engendered significant backlash from nationalist press outlets and government officials, who painted the missionaries as traitors. Even Chancellor von Bülow, who later attempted to defend the Herero in response to the brutality of von Trotha's policies, spoke out strongly against the mission's viewpoints in the immediate wake of the revolt: "In a war, the place of missionaries is on the side of their fellow countrymen. I can grant them neither the right of neutrality between Germans and Herero nor the office of complainant or judge."¹⁵⁰

Missionary Heinrich Vedder visited the concentration camp in the major city of Swakopmund shortly after it received its first significant shipment of prisoners. He documented the horrific conditions and communicated the information to his superior, Dr. Gottlieb Haussleiter. The latter appealed to von Trotha, who "adamantly refused to allocate more money 'for the *better* provisioning of prisoners.'"¹⁵¹ After an appeal to Berlin, Deputy Governor Tecklenburg tasked the district administrator of Swakopmund, Dr. Fuchs, with assessing the situation. His discoveries were sobering: "I regard the cause [of the high mortality rate among native prisoners in Swakopmund] as inadequate accommodation, clothing, and food, in combination with the raw, unaccustomed climate and the weakened condition of the prisoners brought here." He recommended "accommodation in dry, ventilated but wind-fast rooms, warm clothing (flannel shirts, pants, blankets, shoes) and some variation in the diet (rice, flour, if

¹⁴⁹ Jeremy Best, "Godly, International, and Independent: German Protest Missionary Loyalties before World War I," *Central European History* 47 (2014): 585-6.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 189.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

possible frequently meat, onions, or oil), and medical care.”¹⁵² The statistics in Fuchs’ report exemplified just how dire the situation was. The annual death rate in the Swakopmund city jail for the years 1903 and 1904 was 1.7 percent. For the final two weeks of May 1905, the camp’s death rate was 10 percent.¹⁵³ Fuchs also compared the mortality in the camps to that of the native Africans under the care of his local government: “As long as I have been here [i.e., since September 15, 1903] not even a single one has died.”¹⁵⁴

Fuchs’ paramount recommendation was to remove the Herero with failing health from the coastal camps to the interior of the colony to facilitate their convalescence and “avoid decimation.”¹⁵⁵ Regardless of humanitarian concerns, Fuchs’ recommendations made pragmatic sense in order to maintain a strong native labor force, a concern that was (and remained) a consistent undercurrent of German colonial policy in Southwest Africa. In the end, however, Tecklenburg and Rear Commander Colonel von Dame refused to act on the suggestions in Fuchs’ report. They considered the labor needs at Swakopmund and Lüderitzbucht to be too high to engage in any changes in the number of available workers, despite their overall health.¹⁵⁶ Although the sickly Herero could only provide short-term, low-quality labor (at best), shortsighted economic motives overshadowed any improvement in their conditions.

Critical treatment of practices in Southwest Africa appeared most prevalent in the British newspapers of the Cape Colony. Well before the uprising, in 1897, a German lieutenant had led a small party of troops against native Africans alleged of stealing cattle. The *Cape Times* reported that

¹⁵² Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 76.

¹⁵³ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 76.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Erichsen, “*The angel of death*,” 147.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 77.

¹⁵⁶ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 77.

the whole tribe was practically annihilated. As an instance of the way in which the Germans treated rebellion, there were at the close of the war twenty odd prisoners in the hands of the Germans... On the way [to trial] any falling out, unable to walk, were shot on the spot, and the remained [sic] at arrival... were tried and shot.¹⁵⁷

In September 1905, the *Cape Argus* ran a scathing series of articles detailing German atrocities. In reports from Angra Pequena, where the Shark Island inmates were used for labor, women were “made to work until they die. If one falls down of sheer exhaustion as they constantly do, they are *sjambokked* [i.e., beaten with a heavy whip].”¹⁵⁸ According to the testimony of a British accountant working in Angra Pequena:

Children as young as five or so years of age are made to work and are ill treated like their unfortunate elders...Heavy loads of sand and cement have to be carried by the women and children, who are nothing but skin and bone...When they fall they are sjamboked by the soldier in charge of the gang, with his full force, until they get up. Across the face was the favorite place for sjamboking and I have often seen the blood flowing from the faces of the women and children and from their bodies.¹⁵⁹

A particularly visceral portion of the man’s testimony described a supposed instance in which a woman and the baby she was carrying were both beaten with a sjambok after the woman had collapsed while working. The *Cape Argus* reported that, according to several of their informants, the response of the soldiers, when asked about the beatings, was that “The Kaiser has ordered us to do this.”¹⁶⁰ This series of articles in the *Cape Argus* was based on two separate rounds of interviews with camp observers. This fact suggests that these were not singular, punctuated instances of brutality, but practices endemic in one of Germany’s largest concentration camps.

The *Cape Argus* also printed several responses to the above series of articles by Germans living in Southwest Africa. These responses provided indications of the German colonists’ feelings about conduct with regard to the Herero:

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Silvester, *Words Cannot Be Found*, 157 n. 143.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 346-347.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 347-8.

I consider they [African natives] are well treated – in many cases too well, as to be utterly spoiled for good work... In Angra Pequena, I have only seen a few women at work, most of the prisoners being kept on an island in the bay [Shark Island], connected with the shore by a bridge. This island is reserved for prisoners and as no construction [sic] works are carried on there, nor are there any sheds or stacks of goods, the poor blacks can hardly be made to work too hard – if they work at all. In Swakopmund a goodly number of women can be seen working... They have to load and unload trucks and push them along for little distances, but although this may look as if they were working hard, this is not the case.¹⁶¹

This author's statements reveal a profound ignorance of the reality of the Herero's situation. He clearly had no knowledge of the nature of Shark Island as the holding area for inmates who were consistently taken offsite to carry out work projects. He essentially turned an admission of the barren conditions on Shark Island into supposed evidence that the inmates are not forced to do hard labor. In addition, despite his general claims about light work and the "spoiling" of the Herero, he admitted that he did not have any firsthand knowledge to deny the specific incidents in the initial articles.¹⁶² Another response stated that a

point raised by your correspondents is that women captured with rebellious Herero have been shot. I believe that this had actually happened, but if it was known that it is the custom of the Herero women to cut from the wounded but still living soldiers and particularly officers pieces of their flesh... and to give them roasted to their husbands, thinking to instill them with the courage of the fallen, then one will hardly wonder that the soldiers can sometimes not be constrained from killing such bestial creatures.¹⁶³

These statements reiterated specious claims about the savage nature of the Herero, as well as justified the existence and continuation of German brutality. Overall, the German viewpoint evidenced in these articles was characterized by a lethal combination of ignorance concerning Herero living and working conditions and sensationalism regarding Herero wartime conduct. These responses suggest a distinct lack of concern for the consequences of German rule for the country's colonial subjects, and a willingness to accept stereotypes that were widely promulgated

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Silvester, *Words Cannot Be Found*, 354.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 353.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 355.

and served to solidify the characterization of native Africans as lazy, brutal savages, undeserving of any semblance of fair treatment. These views were not confined to the press, and they appeared as overarching themes in literature that became extremely popular in Germany.

Numerous publications flooded Germany in the wake of the Herero uprising. Overall, these contemporary sources justified German colonial practices in Southwest Africa. The wholesale murder and extermination of native Africans was considered a necessary part of Germany's "civilizing" mission and a natural consequence of the confrontation between "whites" and "blacks." German methods were "seen as a reasonable and justifiable contribution to carrying out and fulfilling a universal process in developing a global culture."¹⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, many of these publications were written by authors with colonial backgrounds, distributed by colonial and military press outlets, and were popular predominantly in circles concerned with colonial politics. However, works by authors with no vested colonial interest and aimed at a broad middle-class audience were also widely read. Friedrich Meister was one of the most prominent authors in imperial Germany. His book *Muherero riKarera* ("Watch out, Herero") was published in 1904 as a *Jugend- und Familienbuch* ("Book for Young People and the Family"). To Meister, the conflict in Southwest Africa was "a race war between blacks and whites and it must be fought to a final conclusion. Either the Herero must submit, or they will be exterminated. Nothing else can be imagined."¹⁶⁵

Gustav Frenssen's *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest* was the most successful and widely disseminated contemporary work regarding the Herero uprising. A fictional account of a German soldier and his time fighting against the Herero, the book was peppered with vivid descriptions

¹⁶⁴ Medardus Brehl, "The drama was played out on the dark stage of the sandveldt': The extermination of the Herero and Nama in German (popular) culture," in *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and its Aftermath*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Monmouth, Wales: Merlin Press, 2008), 101.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Brehl, "The drama was played out..." 102.

of native atrocities against Germans, effectively painting a picture of the Herero as brutal savages: “On this slope, on the long dry grass in front of the huts, lay the naked, mutilated, half-devoured bodies of many of our men. Some of us were silent; some gnashed their teeth, doubled up their fists, and cursed; other mocked and said: ‘How long will it be before we are lying [sic] that way?’”¹⁶⁶ Frenssen’s prose consistently seemed to suggest the impossibility of coexistence between Germans and the Herero. These “blacks are quite, quite different from us, so that there could be at heart no possible understanding or relationship between us. There must always be misunderstandings instead.”¹⁶⁷ As recognized in the British *Blue Book* of 1918, Frenssen avoided extended descriptions of barbarity on the part of the German soldiers.¹⁶⁸ Periodically, however, “slips of the pen” revealed glimpses of “merciless inhumanity and uncalculated ferocity”¹⁶⁹ – for example, with regard to the pursuit following the battle at the Waterberg: “The general decided to follow them thither, to attack them and force them to go northward into thirst and death, so that the colony would be left in peace and quiet for all time.”¹⁷⁰ Frenssen also described encounters between soldiers and starving groups of Herero:

Telling them with threats not to move, we looked through the bundles which were lying near them and found two guns and some underclothing, probably stolen from our dead. One of the men was wearing a German tunic which bore the name of one of our officers who had been killed. We then led the men away to one side and shot them. The women and children, who looked pitiably starved, we hunted into the bush.¹⁷¹

The main theme of Frenssen’s book was the elevation of the “civilizing mission” inherent in Germany’s colonization of Southwest Africa. Frenssen concluded that the annihilation of the Herero was a prerequisite for cultural advancement:

¹⁶⁶ Gustav Frenssen, *Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest Africa: A Narrative of the German Campaign*, trans. Margaret May Ward (Boston, MA and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), 89.

¹⁶⁷ Frenssen, *Peter Moor’s Journey*, 34.

¹⁶⁸ Silvester, *Words Cannot Be Found*, 111.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷⁰ Frenssen, *Peter Moor’s Journey*, 199.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

These blacks have deserved death before God and man, not because they have murdered two hundred farmers and have revolted against us, but because they have built no houses and dug no wells... God has let us conquer here because we are the nobler and more advanced people. That is not saying much in comparison with this black nation, but we must see to it that we become better and braver before all nations of the earth. To the nobler and more vigorous belongs the world. That is the justice of God.¹⁷²

The impact of *Peter Moor* was enormous: sixty-three thousand copies were printed in its first year of publication. Editions were also printed in English, Danish, Dutch, Afrikaans, and Swedish, and special student editions were produced for use in German schools. The edition used in schools contained notes that referenced real-world historical information, such as dates, people, and places in an effort to provide legitimacy to Frenssen's fictional account.¹⁷³ The extreme popularity of the book in Germany and its promotion in the educational system tended to indicate both a wide public agreement with its themes and a desire by the government to imbue German youth with Frenssen's message. This was exemplified further by the notes that were added to the student editions – the provision of authoritative links to historical figures and events showed a desire to lend further credence to book's overarching message. The use of the book in schools suggests that the racial “values” it contained were considered important not only to contemporary German society, but to the future of the country and its colonial mission.

Southwest Africa: Viewpoints in German Politics

Significant debate about German conduct in Southwest Africa occurred in the Reichstag, and the Social Democratic Party constituted an anomaly in conceptions of the Herero. They were the only group in the Reichstag that engaged in efforts to determine the extent of destruction wrought upon the Herero by Germany's brutal tactics. The party also criticized the prosecution of the war in its central organ, *Vörrwarts*.¹⁷⁴ The Social Democrats' conceptions of the universal

¹⁷² Frenssen, *Peter Moor's Journey*, 233-4.

¹⁷³ Brehl, “The drama was played out...,” 104-7.

¹⁷⁴ Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting*, 188.

rights of man meant that the party took a significantly more sympathetic stance toward the actions of the Herero than other parties within the Reichstag. Social Democrat August Bebel was arguably the most vocal defender of the Herero people in German political discourse. Following the rebellion, he openly discussed the unjust application of the German Credit Ordinance and established it as one of the key causes for revolt.¹⁷⁵ This put him in a minority position, one which put the blame on Germany for the outbreak of conflict. He was one of the few to ascribe a degree of humanity to the Herero, considering them a people deserving of rights rather than a mass of barbarous savages. He even used the term *Volk* to describe them, essentially maintaining that the Herero constituted a nation that was “structurally equivalent” to those in Europe.¹⁷⁶

To Bebel, the Herero were justified in their rebellion, acting as any “civilized” nation would when its property was taken away and its people were denied basic human rights. Particularly of note are comments in which he inverted negative conceptions of native Africans. The conflict in Southwest Africa was a war “in which not only no men are taken prisoners but also whatever is living and has a black color, including women and children, is shot down.” This was “not only barbaric, but bestial.”¹⁷⁷ These remarks took stereotypical, clichéd conceptions of native Africans (that of beasts and savages) and ascribed them to the colonizer instead of the colonized. Bebel’s tactics attempted to “make violence visible, thus making it the object of critical reflection.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Sarkin, *Germany’s Genocide of the Herero*, 83.

¹⁷⁶ Helmut Walser Smith, “The Talk of Genocide, the Rhetoric of Miscegenation: Notes on Debates in the German Reichstag Concerning Southwest Africa, 1904-14,” in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacy*, ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer et al. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 110-1.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Helmut Walser Smith, “The Logic of Colonial Violence: Germany in Southwest Africa (1904-1907); the United States in the Philippines (1899-1902),” in *German and American Nationalism: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Hermann Wellenreuther (New York, NY: Berg, 1999), 216-7.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, “The Logic of Colonial Violence,” 216.

Bebel's statements in the Reichstag also called into question the role of government and military leadership in purposely perpetrating an immoral war of extermination. With regard to the Extermination Order, he posited:

I don't know whether Herr Von Trotha acted on his own or according to a similar slogan to the one made [by Kaiser Wilhelm] in 1900 [during the Boxer Rebellion]: "Take no quarter, behave so that no Chinese will dare to look askance at a German for a 1,000 years..." Herr Von Trotha must have received secret instructions as to how he was to proceed in South West Africa; I find no other explanation for the fact that he, a general, ordered his men to disregard every principle of military law, civilization and Christianity.¹⁷⁹

With these comments, Bebel showed his willingness to take a critical stance against the conduct of the war which took aim at the highest authority in Germany, the Kaiser. In addition, this was not the first time Bebel cast an unfavorable light on German practices in its colonies. He had previously expressed vocal opposition to conduct in China several years before. In his estimation, it was "a commonplace war of conquest and a war of revenge and nothing more... a war of revenge so barbarous that it has found no equal during the last centuries and not often in a history at large."¹⁸⁰ That an equal to this barbarity was found in Southwest Africa serves to indicate a theme of violence that permeated Germany's colonial history.

Conceptions of the Herero as deserving of rights and even Bebel's references to them as their own *Volk*, or nation, were tempered, however, by persistent ideas of an established racial hierarchy. However much he believed that the Herero constituted their own nation, the socialist leader openly referred to them as primitive, a "wild people, very low in culture."¹⁸¹ Essentially, humanity was ascribed to the Herero, but Bebel was a hesitant to place native Africans on the same plane as Europeans. In addition, the Social Democrats succumbed to widely-held nationalist sentiments in the immediate wake of the uprising and did not present a concerted

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 156.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Smith, "The Logic of Colonial Violence," 217.

front in the Reichstag against increases in the influence of the military over the existing civilian administration.¹⁸²

The Center Party was the political organ of the German Catholics and occupied a significant minority within the Reichstag. The party's platform had consistently focused on natural rights, and this belief led to limited criticism of colonial conduct in Southwest Africa. In response to von Trotha's extermination order, Peter Spahn, a deputy for the party, noted that violence was an inseparable part of war, but also that "we must prevent extermination."¹⁸³ The Center Party did voice limited opposition, but lacked the level of conviction that existed among the vocal members of the Social Democrats. The Center Party's members exhibited a "profoundly felt desire to be accepted as patriotic," which severely limited their propensity to criticize the conduct of the military.¹⁸⁴ Ultimately, the party's major contributions to the rights discourse surrounding Southwest Africa were limited to Catholic concerns, most notably their support for upholding mixed marriages between Germans and native Africans.¹⁸⁵

Left Liberals discussed Germany's colonial efforts in Southwest Africa as well, but placed limited emphasis on what they considered to be universal ideals of humanity. Their views were of a "practical humanity," not a "sentimental cosmopolitanism."¹⁸⁶ The language of the party's views was consistently couched in terms of the separation of the races. Ernst Müller-Meiningen, who had been a prominent party member since 1898, stated:

Would it not be possible, much as we have reservations for wild animals, much as we have Indian reservations in North America, to build reservations for the natives in the interest of the native groups whom culture does not easily penetrate?... [I]f the blacks are

¹⁸² Bley, *South-West Africa Under German Rule*, 157.

¹⁸³ Quoted in Smith, "The Logic of Colonial Violence," 216.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, "The Logic of Colonial Violence," 216.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Smith, "The Talk of Genocide," 114.

to be preserved alongside the whites, then it is indispensable to sharply separate the two races from one another.¹⁸⁷

The National Liberals and Conservatives were also willing to grant the native Africans a degree of humanity, at least in terms of their ability to undergo “cultural raising.” But, these two parties, more than any of the other groups, strongly emphasized distinctions based on a racial hierarchy. Hartmann von Richthofen, a National Liberal deputy, claimed, for example, “The native who is supposed to learn from the white must see him as a being who stands far and powerfully above him.” Conservative Wilhelm Lattmann maintained that “a reasonable humanity must be paired with a reasonable stance of domination... the black race, even when it accepts Christianity, cannot from the standpoint of race be considered to be of equal worth to the white race.”¹⁸⁸ In response to Bebel’s assertion that the Herero constituted a *Volk*, Lattmann responded, “A more backward conception of colonial affairs... does not exist.”¹⁸⁹ Overall, the National Liberals and Conservatives did not share the views of other groups in ascribing any degree of inherent human rights to native Africans – if they stood in the way of “progress” (that is, the progress of white civilization), they would be dealt with accordingly. Under no circumstances should they be granted any semblance of equality with whites. If violence was necessary to further the progress of German colonial interests, then it was necessary and justified violence: “Common to both [parties],” Helmut Smith argues, “was the increasing willingness to accept brutality in the service of an idea and the increasing blindness to the violence done, not to nations or classes, but to humans. And this was possible... because – increasingly – they did not see the individual humans involved were quite as human as a white man or white woman.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Smith, “The Talk of Genocide,” 114-5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 115-6.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Smith, “The Logic of Colonial Violence,” 217.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, “The Talk of Genocide,” 123.

Some political groups criticized the brutality that occurred in Southwest Africa, but the formation of a concerted opposition that could stem Germany's cruel colonial practices never materialized. Bebel was certainly the most critical of the situation, but even his arguments were tempered by the racial views that permeated German politics. However much the Herero were considered as deserving of human rights, there was a solid undercurrent among all groups that supported the idea of a racial hierarchy. Criticism of the treatment of Africans by the German colonial apparatus faltered when faced with these views of native inferiority. Violent action was regularly promoted, accepted, or excused, depending on the party, in pursuit of this ideal.

Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow responded quickly after the Reichstag began debating the conduct of the war. In a communication to Governor Leutwein early in the conflict (March 1904), he stated: "Press reports of letters from the protectorate cause me to point out that steps are to be taken to prevent violations against humanity, against enemies incapable of fighting, and against women and children. Orders in this sense are to be issued."¹⁹¹ Although documentary sources indicate that orders to this effect were never actually conveyed, this occurrence provides evidence of von Bülow's opposition to harsh tactics in the formative period of the conflict and provides context for his reactions to later developments.¹⁹²

Von Bülow strongly opposed the appointment of von Trotha as military leader in Southwest Africa.¹⁹³ He was well aware of the brutality that defined von Trotha's previous track record as a colonial commander. Von Bülow responded to the Extermination Order issued by von Trotha by drafting a report that he presented directly to the Kaiser. The report centered around five major points, both moral and pragmatic: (1) generally, the order was "contrary to the principles of Christianity and humanity"; (2) "a complete and systematic annihilation of the

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 17.

¹⁹² Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 17.

¹⁹³ Sarkin, *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*, 191.

Herero would exceed all the demands of justice and of the reestablishment of authority”; (3) the plan was unachievable and extremely expensive; (4) it would cause irreparable damage to the colony’s economy; and (5) it “will demolish Germany’s reputation among the civilized nations and feed foreign agitation against us.” His report implored the Kaiser to issue to a new proclamation that would offer clemency to those who chose to surrender.¹⁹⁴ Von Trotha strongly opposed the suggestions outlined in von Bülow’s report, which meant it could not have a significant effect until von Bülow was able to secure the approval of von Trotha’s military superiors (i.e., General Alfred von Schlieffen, Chief of the General Staff, and Dietrich von Hülsen, Chief of the German Imperial Military Cabinet). The Kaiser would only support the plan once it had the backing of these key officials.¹⁹⁵ Von Bülow was able to persuade von Trotha’s superiors, and in early December 1904 a telegram from the General Staff cancelled the Extermination Order, stating that the Kaiser wanted “to treat mercifully those Herero who voluntarily surrender and to spare their lives, except for those directly guilty and their leaders.”¹⁹⁶ This telegram came in the wake of charged comments by von Bülow in the Reichstag, where he stated that “we are not so cruel and we are not so stupid as to think that the only means of restoring orderly conditions is to be found in shooting down those half-starved Herero bands, dying of thirst, who are streaming out of the desert. Of this there can be no question.”¹⁹⁷

Later developments ultimately served to complicate the legacy of von Bülow with regard to the treatment of the Herero. Once the Extermination Order was rescinded, a strategy needed to be developed to deal with the Herero still alive. Von Bülow sent a communication to von Trotha

¹⁹⁴ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 64.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 65.

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in I. Goldblatt, *History of South West Africa, from the beginning of the nineteenth century* (Cape Town, South Africa: Juta, 1971), 132.

that outlined the establishment of “concentration camps where the rest of the Herero people would be placed and kept for the time being.”¹⁹⁸ However, at this juncture, it was unlikely that von Bülow had the ability to foresee the full extent of horror and death that would come to define the camp system. In fact, von Bülow’s orders to von Trotha specifically referenced that efforts to provide adequate support for imprisoned Africans should be priority when establishing the camps: “[W]e need to take up the offer of the Mission [to provide relief]... This arrangement appears not to be done without, especially in regard to the women and children.”¹⁹⁹ This statement suggests that von Bülow recognized the danger that his new policy, under the direction of von Trotha, could result in the continuation of the latter’s exterminatory tactics. This led him to specifically reference the only organization in Southwest Africa actively engaged in relief efforts.

Comparisons

Opposition voices in Britain benefitted from a relatively open forum to provide their arguments for public consumption. This was demonstrated, in part, by the fact that even the nationalist *Times* was willing to print critical pieces. Individuals and groups both foreign and domestic saw their opposition appear in its pages. In addition, Emily Hobhouse was able to put together a very successful speaking tour, despite several instances of severe opposition. Overall, the conditions in the Boer camps were attacked publicly by many opponents. In the case of Germany, missionaries provided the only concerted public activism. Negative press appeared predominantly in southern Africa, and most often in non-German outlets. By and large, the true facts of the situation in the Boer camps gained much more exposure in the United Kingdom than those in Southwest Africa did in Germany.

¹⁹⁸ Quoted in Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting*, 165.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Erichsen, “*The angel of death*,” 22.

Emily Hobhouse's detractors criticized her supposed excessive sentimentality toward Boer women and children and railed against any veiled claims that the death in the camps was encouraged by the British administration. They sought to portray Boer sources within the camps as liars, but they were hard pressed to deny the mortality rates and firsthand observations present in both the accounts of activists and official government sources. When the system's proponents mounted a defense, they focused their arguments on the necessity of the policy as a response to the intransigence of the Boers, stressing the "humanity" they believed was inherent in a strategy ostensibly designed to "protect" civilians. The majority were willing to admit to the camps' haphazard organization and expressed regret about the high death rates. In contrast, the language in German responses to criticism consistently evoked a view of Africans as a commodity, not people. They made no claims that the camps were created for humanitarian purposes, and maintained that the Herero deserved to be brutalized and forced into slave labor as punishment for resisting their colonial masters. Camp supporters relied on references to the Herero's "barbaric" nature, a viewpoint based on sensationalized, stereotypical accounts. In fact, it is well documented that the Herero treated captured German women and children extremely well.²⁰⁰ The key difference between discussion about the concentration camps in Britain and Germany was the presence, at least to some degree, of regret in the arguments of the system's supporters. The policy was deemed necessary in both cases, yet in South Africa, it took on the distinct tone of a necessary evil.

The popularity of literature in Germany that glorified the brutality of the Herero campaign provides an excellent window onto the reasons for this lack of regret. Frenssen's *Peter Moor* painted the conflict as a race war in which the heroic colonial power was destined to conquer the savage natives. The Herero were to assume their subservient place in a new *German*

²⁰⁰ Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting*, 150; Silvester, *Words Cannot Be Found*, 100-1.

Southwest Africa or be unequivocally destroyed. Frenssen focused heavily on ideas of racial inferiority and their role in creating an insurmountable rift between German and Herero, one which made coexistence impossible. The native Africans’ “primitive,” “low” culture meant that they must wholly submit to the “progressive” German influence or face elimination. According to this school of thought, the Herero were not marked for death only because of their decision to revolt, but also because they had “dug no wells.”²⁰¹ Surely, camp supporters in Britain also painted the Boers as uncivilized (or, at the least, less civilized than their British counterparts), but they largely focused on issues like medicine and hygiene as an explanation for high death rates, and consistently maintained that colonial authorities were doing everything possible to protect the Boer inmates. The importance placed on representing the camp system in South Africa as a humane measure was entirely absent in the case of Southwest Africa. Overall, sources of support in both cases considered camp occupants as deserving of imprisonment, but only the Herero deserved to die en masse.

While extreme racial views in support of brutality against the Herero were widely shared in German political circles, they were not all-encompassing. Certain groups voiced their opposition to exterminatory policies as detrimental to the overarching German goals in Southwest Africa. August Bebel and the Social Democrats were certainly the most vocal, and their campaigning shared many commonalities with that of Henry Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal Party in Britain. Bebel and Campbell-Bannerman levied accusations that struck at the highest levels of colonial and home-country leadership and used similar language in referring to the “barbarity” inherent in their respective nation’s methods of warfare. The major difference between the two situations was the inability of German political opposition to reach a level that could force the hand of home-country authorities in a significant way. Even in the case of the

²⁰¹ Frenssen, *Peter Moor’s Journey*, 233-4.

Social Democrats, the group that most vocally opposed annihilative German policies, there was a racist component to their language and views. While less prevalent in the opinions of the Social Democrats than other German political parties, there was an overall resistance to make assertions that Africans deserved the same treatment and considerations that whites would in the same situation. Additionally, voices of political opposition in Germany did not have a vocal firsthand observer around which to rally. While Hobhouse was not the only voice of public dissent in Britain, her detailed report supplied extensive political ammunition and was consistently referenced. In the case of Southwest Africa, the report of Dr. Fuchs could have provided a galvanizing effect similar to that of Hobhouse, but Fuchs did not publicly expose the Herero's dire situation. This was likely due to the potential of losing his position – his original mandate from Deputy Governor Tecklenburg was to investigate the matter “discreetly and without saying why.”²⁰² The report failed to inspire change because it ultimately existed only within the realm of the colonial administration, and it lost any potential influence when it was cast aside by Tecklenburg.

Critical politicians in Britain did not have to account for race in their arguments, and they benefitted from the fact that the British had lived alongside the Boers in numerous South African colonial situations for nearly a century and developed strong relationships. In addition, a significant pro-Boer contingent existed both in Britain and on continental Europe, and the Boers' cultural heritage dictated a strong connection with the Netherlands. Germans had only existed alongside the Herero in Southwest Africa for a short period of time. Their history together, while not plagued with the excessive brutality of the period following the rebellion, was defined by exploitation, claims of African inferiority, and unwillingness on the part of the German settlers to attempt to live peacefully side-by-side. Negative opinions of the Boers were certainly prevalent,

²⁰² Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 76.

but tended to focus on their “primitive” hygienic practices, use of holistic medicinal remedies, and invocation of guerilla warfare. Their way of life was considered less modern, but their essential humanity was not denied. As shown by the both the political and international response to Hobhouse’s account, the image of a white woman and her children suffering, starving, and dying evoked a much more sympathetic reaction than in the case of native Africans. Thomas Pakenham astutely observed that the “conscience of Britain was stirred by the holocaust [sic] in the camps.”²⁰³

A key difference in these two situations was the level of importance accorded to a potential breakdown in relations between the colonizer and the colonized. British activists and politicians who criticized wartime practices presented their arguments from the standpoint that the future of South Africa, even with a British victory, entailed the British and the Boers living alongside each other. While some did argue that the poor planning of the Boer camps and the subsequent mortality tended toward a policy of extermination, it was clear that an outright policy to this effect was never a consideration. German voices of opposition had to deal with the contention, held by the highest level of colonial authority (i.e., von Trotha), that German Southwest Africa would benefit from the complete removal of the “savage” presence. However, the example of Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow showed that resistance did have the ability to effect change when those in positions of power felt compelled to exert their influence. Opposition only had an effect when humanitarian arguments were mediated by pragmatic concerns such as the maintenance of a strong labor force, the potential loss of international reputation, and the expense involved in the continuation of current practices. It was in this way that von Bülow was able to apply effective pressure on the colonial leadership and achieve an end to the official policy of extermination.

²⁰³ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, xxii.

SECTION IV: CHANGE AND STAGNATION IN THE PRACTICES OF THE COLONIAL POWERS

South Africa: A Sanctioned Report and its Results

Growing public and political opposition regarding the concentration camps led the British government to take action. The War Office established a Ladies' Commission which it sent to South Africa to inspect the camps. This action had already been suggested in both houses of Parliament. In response to Emily Hobhouse's report, MP William Redmond asked the government leadership

to inquire if the charges which have been made are true. How can that be done? It can only be done by sending a fair and impartial Commission to South Africa... Let them inquire into the conditions of these camps, and if that Commission reports against the system, in the name of God and for the sake of Christianity I ask you to abolish that system and to restore these people to the comforts and the decencies of ordinary civilised life.²⁰⁴

Shortly thereafter, Lord Windsor stated: "I hope it may be possible for the Government to appoint a commission, including ladies, to visit the camps and report upon their condition. Before we apportion any praise or blame to those responsible we ought to know the full facts."²⁰⁵

Led by Millicent Fawcett (a political activist best known for her efforts to gain women's suffrage), the Ladies' Commission was charged with establishing an official account of camp conditions. Despite her pleas, Emily Hobhouse was not included in this group of women. Ultimately, the women selected for the commission had public credibility, but the War Office took care to pick those they believed would support the policy and discredit Hobhouse's allegations.²⁰⁶ Fawcett and Dr. Jane Waterson, one of the physicians attached to the commission, had previously expressed open criticism of Hobhouse. Fawcett wrote an article which accused

²⁰⁴ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, col. 618.

²⁰⁵ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 97, col. 373.

²⁰⁶ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 182.

Hobhouse of misrepresenting the situation in the camps, essentially using Hobhouse's words against her. For example, she quoted select passages from Hobhouse's account that created the illusion that authorities had the situation well in hand. Waterson had referred to Hobhouse's campaigning as "hysterical whining" in the *Cape Times*, scoffing at the thought that food and supplies should be diverted from British soldiers to feed the "ungrateful" Boers.²⁰⁷

The eventual report of the Ladies' Commission established the following three main reasons for high mortality rates in the camps: (1) "The insanitary condition of the country caused by the war," (2) "Causes within the control of the inmates of the camps," and (3) "Causes within the control of the administration."²⁰⁸ While the commission's report heaped significant blame on the Boers and their cultural practices, it also presented key admissions of mismanagement by colonial authorities. According to the report, the establishment of the camps under the military meant that proper attention was not paid to the differences in supplies and accommodations necessary to care for women and children, as opposed to soldiers. The report highlighted the poor planning of sites for several camps, particularly with regard to the proximity of a potable water supply. Although the commission did outline significant problems with sanitation, refuse removal, and the provision of hygienic facilities, such as bath houses, they excused these issues by touting the initial view of the camps as a short-term solution. The report also presented a critical view of the procurement of qualified doctors and nurses for the camps. The commission derided the government's delays in sending medical staff, especially with the development of massive outbreaks of measles, pneumonia, and related diseases:

It would have been well if the Concentration Camps Department in each colony had, from the very beginning of serious illness in the camps, set about the formation of a

²⁰⁷ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 176-7, 184.

²⁰⁸ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Report on the Concentration Camps in South Africa by the Committee of Ladies Appointed by the Secretary of State for War Containing Reports on the Camps in Natal, the Orange River Colony, and the Transvaal* (London, UK: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1902), 14.

reserve of doctors and nurses, so as to throw quickly into any camp, which required it, extra help to enable the existing staff successfully to combat the disease.²⁰⁹

The supposed “excessive sentimentality” of Emily Hobhouse’s account was certainly absent from the report of the Ladies’ Commission, which was a calculated, dispassionate statement of facts regarding mortality in the camps that did not include any extended interviews with the camps’ inmates. The choices for quotations on the part of the Boers were selective and pro-British. One inmate purportedly stated: “Look at this beautiful bread, look at my bag of meal left over from our last rationing day. Can we complain? I say that if we grumble it is for the sake of grumbling.”²¹⁰ With regard to the camps’ schools, an elderly Boer man supposedly “exclaim[ed] that he believed the British must be God’s chosen people after all, for he had never heard of any other nation paying for the education of the children of their enemies.”²¹¹

Far from sympathizing with the Boers, as Hobhouse did, the report placed a significant amount of blame for high mortality rates on Boer culture, particularly with regard to hygiene and medicine.²¹² While many of their criticisms were valid, such as those about dangerous home remedies, the report carried a consistent tone of superiority, maintaining an assumption that indigent Boers should possess the same level of medical knowledge as upper-class English. This tone was particularly evident in the commission’s lengthy treatment of the “fouling of the ground,” and the refusal of many Boers to use provided latrines:

It should be remembered that this habit, which is such a source of danger in camp life, where 5,000 or 6,000 people may be gathered together in a comparatively small area, is comparatively harmless in the life to which the average Boer is accustomed, where family is separated from family by miles of open country. Their inability to see that what may be comparatively harmless on their farms becomes criminally dangerous in camp is

²⁰⁹ Fawcett, *Report on the Concentration Camps*, 17-8.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 3, 5, 9, 14-7.

part of the inadaptability to circumstances which constitutes so marked a characteristic of the people as a race.²¹³

The report essentially criticized the Boers for continuing their normal day-to-day practices. Of course “fouling the ground” near and in living quarters contributed to the spread of disease. It was presumptuous, however, for the commission to assume that the Boers, used to living on farms many miles apart, would immediately understand the importance of changing their daily habits because of the situation of concentration. In the end, the Boers received blame for high mortality rates because they had failed to quickly adapt to the completely unfamiliar living situation which was forced upon them.

Upon the Commission’s arrival in South Africa, a group of women from the Committee for the Relief of Sufferers of the War called on Millicent Fawcett, outlining their current efforts in the camps and inquiring how they might assist the work of the commission. They sought to educate the commission on the best way to interact with Boer women with tactics gleaned from their extensive experience in the camps since the system’s inception, but they were rebuffed, and Fawcett later misrepresented their comments after her return to England, claiming, “From the pro-Boers they got no help whatever.”²¹⁴ C. Murray, a member of the group that met with Fawcett, responded to Fawcett’s comments in a Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, which provided a summary of the commission’s mentality:

We hoped for some good to come from this commission. I believe that hope has not altogether been disappointed, but those who are anxious to form correct impressions must remember one thing, and that is that, in the choice of people sent out officially to South Africa since this forceful policy began, one quality has always been carefully excluded, and that is sympathy, which is the key to understanding and real success.²¹⁵

²¹³ Fawcett, *Report on the Concentration Camps*, 16.

²¹⁴ “The War,” *Times* (London), March 22, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

²¹⁵ C. Murray, “The Concentration Camps,” *Times* (London), March 25, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

While the report furnished by the Ladies' Commission laid less blame on the authorities for the plight of the internees than Hobhouse's account, it did provide a vivid description of the suffering and death. The report also included extremely detailed statistical information, broken down by each specific camp the commission visited, an aspect that was largely absent from the writings of Hobhouse.²¹⁶ In the end, the commission's report failed to furnish significant evidence of declining death rates and improved conditions and was unable to refute Hobhouse's allegations.

The sitting in the House of Commons on March 4, 1902 dealt extensively with the report of the Ladies' Commission.²¹⁷ Liberal politicians had been clamoring for information about the conditions in the camps since early in the previous year, and many expressed their outrage at the lack of improvement outlined in the report. A major grievance was the disparity between the account of the Ladies' Commission and the consistent claims of the leadership, particularly St. John Brodrick, that Hobhouse's allegations were extremely exaggerated. Several MPs specifically referenced details of the report that showed the camp administration's failure to act on recommendations made by Hobhouse roughly nine months earlier. According to Francis Channing, the "list of the items of stupid neglect is appalling."²¹⁸ Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain and certain Nationalist MPs did their best to deflect the opposition's arguments by emphasizing the report's limited examples of improved conditions, but they were unable to refute the endemic problems that continued to plague the camp system as a whole. Liberal MP Arthur Humphreys-Owen was correct in his recognition that the findings of

²¹⁶ Fawcett, *Report on the Concentration Camps*, 39-208.

²¹⁷ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 104, cols. 402-67.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, col. 417.

the Ladies' Commission established "the point that the country at large was misled by optimistic reports, and that it never practically knew the truth until this Report was issued."²¹⁹

Historians have differing views on the relative importance of the roles of Hobhouse and the Ladies' Commission in bringing about improvements in the camps. Brian Roberts viewed Hobhouse as the paramount factor in eventual reform. He believed that the chief role of the Ladies' Commission was to buy time. Government authorities recognized the impossibility of rapid improvement and dispatched the commission in order to gain breathing room.²²⁰ Paula Krebs elevated Hobhouse and, to a great extent, discounted the role of the Ladies' Commission with her argument that the commission's findings were unimportant because they served only to confirm what Hobhouse initially exposed.²²¹ These contentions, which identify Hobhouse's activities as the singular force in bringing about reform and largely discount the work of the Ladies' Commission, pose significant difficulties. Essentially, as Marouf Hasian astutely recognized, "the status of the messenger [i.e., a government sanctioned commission, as opposed to a single independent observer] was just as important as the message."²²² Camp supporters consistently presented Hobhouse's arguments as a "hysterical" woman's overreactions to wartime conditions. They supposed that she was overcome by emotion and lacked the ability to dispassionately assess the inherent brutality of war. This characterization sought to discount her by implying that she was ignorant of the sacrifices inherent in maintaining the glory of the British Empire.²²³ It was ultimately the report of the Ladies' Commission that put the onus on the British government to take action. Hobhouse's report could be written off as the rant of a radical

²¹⁹ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 104, col. 407.

²²⁰ Roberts, *Those Bloody Women*, 182.

²²¹ Paula M. Krebs, "The Last of the Gentlemen's Wars': Women in the Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy," *History Workshop*, no. 33 (Spring 1992): 51.

²²² Hasian, "The 'Hysterical' Emily Hobhouse," 155.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 151.

pro-Boer, but when its findings were confirmed by a sanctioned commission, the facts were undeniable. Furthermore, although suggestions for improving camp conditions appeared in both Hobhouse and the commission's accounts, the Ladies' Commission ascribed a portion of the blame to the Boers' sanitary practices. This fact allowed authorities to act while deflecting blame from their own actions. Ultimately, the Commission's findings provided the opportunity to make changes in the camp system without having appeared to concede to Hobhouse.

Medical advancements, including increases in the number of nurses and improved nursing practices, were a major component in reform within the camps. Roughly 140 certified nurses were recruited in Britain and sent to the camps at the end of 1901. The Colonial Office acted on recommendations from the Ladies' Commission and created camp matrons. The matrons developed pervasive day-to-day practices to monitor sanitary conditions and "inculcate habits of cleanliness."²²⁴ Effective nursing worked in tandem with other medical improvements in the camps, drastically improving the lot of imprisoned Boers. Reform efforts also included improvements in the system of probationers. These were young Boer women who essentially served as nursing assistants, providing an intermediary between British doctors and nurses and inmates. Camp authorities increased their numbers and began formal training programs. By April 1902, the major camp at Klerksdorp had fifty-three probationers in its hospital.²²⁵ Greater provision of medical supplies and the growth of hospital facilities within the camps also contributed significantly to the reduction of mortality rates. Colonial authorities made drugs more readily available, including vaccines against smallpox. They also shipped significant amounts of medical hardware, particularly thermometers, to the camps. By the end of the war, the Transvaal camps even had their own onsite laboratories for the analysis of food and water. In

²²⁴ Quoted in Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 213.

²²⁵ Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 221-2.

certain cases, medical authorities instituted convalescent camps to provide for weak inmates (usually children) who were not currently suffering from any specific ailment. Most camps also developed isolation sections for newly arrived inmates.²²⁶

From an administrative perspective, the change from military to civilian control was a chief factor underlying improvements in the camps. Sir Alfred Milner, High Commissioner and head of the civilian administration in South Africa, had returned to England in May 1901. Previously, although the camps were ostensibly under Kitchener's control, Milner acted as a voice of reason in civilian affairs and had worked to soften Kitchener's purely military viewpoint. Upon Milner's departure, Kitchener became the singular source of authority over the camps. In November 1901, Milner returned and civilian control was reestablished under his direction. Overall, as S.B. Spies argues, there

can be little doubt that Kitchener regarded himself first and foremost as a soldier and considered that his military duties should take precedence over civil affairs. It is virtually certain therefore that he did not, in his capacities as administrator and high commissioner, give the concentration camps the attention which they would have received from Milner if he had stayed in South Africa – and what is more, which they did receive from Milner after his return.²²⁷

Advances in education were one of Milner's top priorities after returning to South Africa and a significant reform in the camp system in late 1901 and early 1902. The goals and requirements Milner set for the schools led to an active search for British teachers as 1901 drew to a close. Press sources indicate that extensive experience (four to five years) working with infants was a prerequisite for educators sent to South Africa.²²⁸ The call for educational professionals extended

²²⁶ Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 228-30.

²²⁷ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 222.

²²⁸ "The War," *Times* (London), November 6, 1901, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 12, 2014).

to other British territories in March 1902.²²⁹ At the end of 1901, a correspondent for *The Times* noted that

when the war broke out the Transvaal, according to its own showing, was giving education to 14,700 children. Last month the number on the registers of schools opened under British auspices nearly equaled that total, which will apparently be exceeded at the end of the present month. In the Orange River Colony, there are about 8,000 children in the various Government schools. The concentration camps have been utilized to bring children under educational influences who would have been much more difficult to reach if scattered about on farms. No compulsion has been used.²³⁰

The number of students eventually rose to 17,000 in the Transvaal and 12,000 in the Orange River Colony. These amounts greatly exceeded those attained during the tenure of the Boer republics.²³¹ During the parliamentary debate on March 4, 1902, camp supporters, faced with the grim reality evident in the bulk of the Ladies' Commission's report, consistently focused on these educational advances in order to deflect from issues like living conditions and mortality rates.²³²

In December 1901, Kitchener officially ended the influx of people into the camps. In her extensive social history of the Boer concentration camps, Elizabeth van Heyningen analyzes the significant effects of this measure for the camp inmates. The haphazard, inefficient, and unscheduled arrivals of new inhabitants were an enormous contributor to squalid living conditions. Once the population of the camps became static, it became an easier task to implement significant improvements in health and living conditions in order to reduce mortality rates. Relief also came through the construction of new camps along the coast. From the outset, the construction of these new "model camps" proceeded with the lessons learned in the early operation of the system. Housing and other camp facilities were far more substantial and the sites

²²⁹ "The War," *Times* (London), March 6, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

²³⁰ "We have news this morning," *Times* (London), December 27, 1901.

²³¹ Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 257.

²³² *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 104, cols. 422-6, 447.

were carefully chosen. The new housing included systems for improved air circulation to foster more hygienic living conditions. Although the new camps suffered from issues inherent in the close concentration of large populations, they provided much better living conditions than their predecessors. They also helped decrease the amount of new inmates sent to the interior camps, allowing reforms to be more readily implemented.²³³

Southwest Africa: Slave Labor and Legal Discrimination

The character of German colonial rule in Southwest Africa changed with the outbreak of the revolt and the ascension of General Lothar von Trotha, which put the colony firmly under the control of German militarism. Whereas Leutwein was a civilian governor designated (briefly) to oversee military operations in the direct wake of the revolt, von Trotha was an iron-fisted general (as evidenced by his earlier campaigns), whose appointment included oversight of civilian affairs, a task for which he was wholly unsuited. While the results were indicative of von Trotha's solely militaristic viewpoint and inability (indeed, unwillingness) to deal with civilian affairs, but they also shed light on the "polycratic" nature of Wilhelminian government, which "consisted of separate, vertical units, integrated, if at all, by the Kaiser, who would choose which unit would dominate policy in a given situation."²³⁴ Management of the revolt, which was seen as a security threat, was entrusted wholly to the military and taken completely out of the hands of the civilian leadership. When von Trotha assumed power, it effectively ended significant civilian influence in the administration of Southwest Africa. Any subsequent actions, including those that dealt with non-military affairs, were addressed solely from a military perspective, and were subject to the ultimate control of a military leader who regularly failed to differentiate between combatants and noncombatant in the development of his tactics.

²³³ Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 203-7.

²³⁴ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 12.

While rare, there were particular instances of resistance to von Trotha's measures from within the military itself. Military commander Ludwig von Estorff strongly opposed the tactics of extermination, viewing them as the key obstacle to bringing about a resolution to the conflict. His beliefs led him to issue a proclamation to the Herero which was in direct opposition to von Trotha's overarching tactics: "I speak the truth, I do not lie. [Upon surrender,] I will send you there where you previously were... I will issue letters to you so that nothing will happen to you on the road or at the settlements."²³⁵ Tribal leader Zacharias Zeraua sought to take advantage of von Estorff's proclamation. He had negotiated terms with von Estorff and officially surrendered in January 1905. Per the proclamation, von Estorff recommended to von Trotha that Zacharias and his followers be returned to their homeland in Otjimbingwe. Von Trotha responded, "Are these then the circumstances in which the end of this unheard revolt is to be achieved, that now with our promises we have to beg for peace? This position is the cause of the revolt."²³⁶ Zacharias was ultimately imprisoned and charged with initiating the murder of German settlers, while his people were used as slave labor.

Von Estorff also officially lodged complaints with the administration of the concentration camp on Shark Island. In his report to the Colonial Department, von Estorff stated that if the prisoners "remain on Shark Island they will be facing a slow but certain death... 1,032 out of 1,795 natives have died on Shark Island. I am not prepared to assume responsibility for the killing nor can I except [sic] my officers to do so."²³⁷ He strongly recommended that the prisoners be shipped off the island and back to the mainland. His efforts met with opposition from Oskar Hintrager, the governor's deputy, who stated that a transfer of prisoners – at this point emaciated and starving – back to the mainland constituted a security threat. In the end, von

²³⁵ Quoted in Gewalt, *Towards Redemption*, 218.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

²³⁷ Quoted in Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting*, 212.

Estorff was successful in transferring a limited number of women and children from Shark Island. A report on the subsequent condition of these prisoners indicated significant improvements in their state of health.²³⁸

The example of Estorff shows the inability, even of an officer high up in the military apparatus, to effect change on colonial policy that would provide some form of relief for native Africans. Despite von Estorff's status, the structure of the colonial administration in Southwest Africa dictated that his recommendations required approval at the top level of colonial authority in order to be implemented. Von Trotha consistently refused to show leniency toward the Herero, and this viewpoint was continued by his successor, Governor Friedrich von Lindequist, to whom Oskar Hintrager served as deputy.²³⁹ Faced with a colonial leadership whose fundamental beliefs were in direct odds with his initiatives, von Estorff was unable to gain support.

Resistance to von Trotha's campaign of wholesale annihilation ultimately led to the repeal of the Extermination Order in December 1904, but the tactics of slave labor that replaced those of extermination were no less detrimental. Exterminatory policies were ultimately deemed irrational not because the Herero were human beings deserving of natural rights, but because Germany's colony needed a labor force. Rather than being killed outright, the Herero were to be punished for their intransigence in the crucible of the concentration camps and forged into a docile, productive workforce. According to Deputy Governor Tecklenburg, the Herero had to undergo a "period of suffering" so that they would not "be tempted for generations to repeat the uprising."²⁴⁰ Postwar policy focused on "actively reconstituting them [the Herero] as a

²³⁸ Drechsler, *Let us Die Fighting*, 212-3.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁴⁰ George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 205.

deracinated, atomized proletariat.”²⁴¹ Paul Rohrbach, the Commissary for Settlement between 1903 and 1906, succinctly summarized the overarching goal of post-Extermination Order policy: “Our task is to divest this tribe... of their specific... national characteristics and to gradually meld them with the other natives into a single colored work force.”²⁴² By the end of 1905, roughly 8,800 Herero were housed in the camps and employed as slave labor. Lindequist, von Trotha’s successor, established collection stations (*Sammelstellen*) with an official proclamation to the Herero that they “would be less coercive than the concentration camps and that ‘no white soldiers [would] be stationed’ there.”²⁴³ Some 12,500 Herero lived in these stations by March 1907. Lindequist’s promises proved to be intentional lies. Once these Herero were gathered together, they were sent to the concentration camps and employed as slave labor to build railroads. Many were even distributed to civilian companies, some of which created camps of their own. No efforts were made to provide adequately for the Herero laborers, which led to widespread death because of overwork. One company even created a specialized stamp for its registers that read “dead due to exhaustion.”²⁴⁴

Limited resistance in public and political spheres contributed to the curtailment of outright exterminatory policies against the Herero, but did next to nothing to stem mortality rates. Death from overwork replaced death from a bullet or slow starvation in the Omaheke Desert. The German government sent no commissions to assess the living and working conditions of the Herero and suggest remedies, and made no attempts to improve medical facilities or sanitation, even though these efforts would serve to promote the maintenance of a

²⁴¹ Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting*, 203.

²⁴² Quoted in Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting*, 210.

²⁴³ Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting*, 205.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

consistent labor force. Even though they were no longer directly targeted for annihilation, they were subject to policies that had the same effect.

The most outspoken critics of German conduct in Southwest Africa were also the only ones to engage in relief efforts of any significance. The assistance provided by the Rhenish Mission was the only source of respite for the Herero, and this aid was not openly sought by the colonial authorities. When reports began to surface about the conditions in the camps, the Rhenish Mission undertook an initiative to gather supplies, including clothing, bedding, and food. Missionary Heinrich Vedder first approached colonial authorities in Windhoek, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Subsequently, missionaries distributed publications in Germany asking supporters to furnish clothing for the prisoners. According to Vedder, “The mission’s friends at home were not stingy. Very soon came boxes and boxes of clothes that were still, for the most part, in good condition. They were distributed. The emaciated figures at least had something warm to put on. There was a fall in the death rate.”²⁴⁵ Vedder also sponsored an initiative for the mission headquarters to collect money to buy food for the prisoners. The mission created rudimentary medical facilities in camps where it had a significant presence, such as Swakopmund: “Following requests by the station missionary [Vedder], a sick bay and a provisional chapel were erected in the prisoner Kraal, in which often more than 1000 [sic] prisoners were to be found.”²⁴⁶ The work of the Rhenish Mission should not be discounted, but it should be noted that it was essentially the only opposing force to the tide of brutality. They received no support from colonial authorities or the German government to enact their

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Joachim Zeller, “‘Ombepera i koza – The cold is killing me.’: Notes towards a history of the concentration camp at Swakopmund (1904-1908),” in *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and its Aftermath*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Monmouth, Wales: Merlin Press, 2008), 67.

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Gewalt, *Towards Redemption*, 247.

improvements in camps. Everything they provided for the Herero was given of their own volition and they bore the responsibility for distributing the supplies and creating the necessary facilities.

A major contributing factor to the lack of missionary influence on official government policy was a general reticence to engage in the political debate. Missionary leaders consistently maintained that commitment to their mission of spreading Christianity must exist separately from political goals steeped in nationalist beliefs. As early as 1886, *Missionsdirektor* Ernst Reichel argued for the defense of the mission's "godly,...international, and...[politically independent] character." He stated, "Colonization and mission must remain cleanly separate from one another."²⁴⁷ Colonization, especially in the case of German Southwest Africa, developed distinct exploitative tendencies, and the mission believed that maintaining a distinct separation from those tendencies helped preserve the integrity of their work.²⁴⁸

Discriminatory legal regulations established in 1906 and 1907 by Governor Friedrich von Lindequist, von Trotha's successor, served to solidify the place of native Africans in the future of the colony. The efforts undertaken by German officials during the revolt to establish a position of unquestioned dominance were clearly reflected in these efforts. Lindequist first enacted regulations that expropriated native land and cattle, effectively denying them the economic basis for their survival and firmly establishing their position solely as laborers. The most important development, however, was Lindequist's "order of the Governor of SWA pertaining to measures for the control of natives." The distinction made in this order between "whites" and "natives" was the first instance of official legal discrimination in German Southwest Africa. "Natives" had to apply directly to the Governor in order to breed cattle, a right uniformly denied in all cases during Germany's colonial rule. Additional regulations sought to deny further native Africans'

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Best, "Godly, International, and Independent," 595.

²⁴⁸ Best, "Godly, International, and Independent," 595.

chances for economic self-sufficiency and dismantle completely all means for intertribal cooperation. It became illegal for “more than ten native families or individual native labourers to live on one plot.”²⁴⁹

The order “relating to native registration” required all Africans ages eight or older to carry an identification card that was to be shown “to the police authorities or to any white man” upon request.²⁵⁰ Food and lodging were unobtainable without this card. Travel permits were also required, but granted only to those gainfully employed and traveling for work purposes. The regulations on “service and labor contracts with natives” completed the Germans’ position of dominance. They denied all legal rights to Africans without a labor contract. Africans could not leave their place of residence while under contract and they could be dismissed on the grounds of “repeated disobedience; incitement to disobedience; theft; desertion; lengthy incapacitation for which the African was to blame; illness of more than four weeks.”²⁵¹ During the allowed period of illness, employers garnished wages to allow for decreased productivity. The regulations of 1906-1907 exacerbated the dire situation brought upon the Herero and other tribes during the brutal suppression of the rebellion. The German administration denied them all means of self-sufficiency and destroyed any hope for legal security. The preceding regulations institutionalized the practices of slave labor first introduced in the concentration camps. These practices continued until the end of German rule in Southwest Africa.

In 1919, the German Colonial Office distributed a response to the British *Blue Book* of 1918, and its arguments vividly illustrated the extent to which the beliefs that had engendered brutality against the Herero continued to permeate German colonialism in Southwest Africa far into the twentieth century. The so-called “White Book” maintained views of native laziness,

²⁴⁹ Bley, *South-West Africa Under German Rule*, 172.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

stating, “Of real work the Herero had no conception.”²⁵² The Herero were still considered “poor, primitive creatures who have no conception of the nature of an oath” and their actions were considered to be motivated by “barbarous impulse.”²⁵³ The *Blue Book* had attacked legal practices in Southwest Africa, and the “White Book” responded:

In those cases in which the courts of South-West Africa have uttered a more rigorous sentence upon natives than whites, the reason is... in the fact that the character and natural disposition of the natives conditioned severer disciplinary measures in order to maintain law and order and protect the population against excesses. The natives of South-West Africa still stand upon a very low mental and moral plane.²⁵⁴

While the language of the White Book provided evidence of the continuation of racially-based characterization of native Africans, it also attempted to recast some of the most widely criticized aspects of colonialism in Southwest Africa to stem international opposition. It denied the official issuance of the Extermination Order, claiming, “It is not unlikely that an order of this sort, even though not a *formal* [sic] order, *may* [author’s emphasis] have been temporarily issued during the Herero war.”²⁵⁵ It then argued that most German detachments “simply and silently refrained from carrying out the command of General von Trotha.”²⁵⁶ The account admitted to certain instances of particularly vicious treatment, but colored them as exceptions to the general character of German rule.²⁵⁷ Essentially, practices that were shown as widespread in a multitude of other sources were deemed exceptions in the White Book. The language in this book served as a tacit admission of German brutality and a confirmation of the belief system that supported it, presented in a manner that sought to deny the worst excesses in order to cull favor in the

²⁵² German Colonial Office, *The Treatment of Native and Other Populations in the Colonial Possessions of Germany and England: An Answer to the English Blue Book of August 1918: “Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany”* (Berlin, Germany: Engelmann, 1919), 37.

²⁵³ German Colonial Office, *The Treatment of Native and Other Populations*, 57, 119.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 85, 113, 141.

international community and assist in Germany's efforts to retain its colonies in the aftermath of World War I:

It must be clear to every thinking judge of colonial-political questions that it was useless to expect that such primitive savage tribes as the Hereros and most of the other aboriginal breeds would make room for the requirements of modern commercial development without being forced to do so by outward compulsion and regulative force.²⁵⁸

Comparisons

The appointment of the Ladies' Commission was the most significant aspect of the British government's response to criticism, and ultimately represented a key difference between the situations in South Africa and Southwest Africa. Although British colonial authorities had previously allowed some degree of civilian involvement in and external observation of the camp system (e.g., Emily Hobhouse), the Ladies' Commission was something new altogether. It was created by the Secretary of War and allowed virtually unfettered access to the camps while the region was still embroiled in conflict. Even before publishing its findings, the existence of commission had represented a degree of government submission to the criticisms levied by Hobhouse and other activists. A commensurate situation was impossible in Southwest Africa. German authorities had already made it abundantly clear that they were not willing to sacrifice resources to care for imprisoned Africans when they could scarcely supply their own soldiers. Missionaries were allowed to provide relief, but received no official support, such as supplies or necessary personnel. In addition, the change to complete military control with the arrival of von Trotha effectively ended opportunities for civilian oversight of the situation.

In addition to its political ramifications, the report of the Ladies' Commission provided a comprehensive, pragmatic account of the major problems in the camps (medicine, sanitation, housing, etc.) and provided detailed potential solutions. The implementation of these solutions

²⁵⁸ German Colonial Office, *The Treatment of Native and Other Populations*, 41.

helped achieve a significant decrease in mortality. This situation points to another major difference in the colonial power's characterization of its enemy. Following the recall of the Extermination Order, von Trotha – as well as his successor Lindequist – considered African prisoners expendable tools, to be used up and discarded as cheap labor. The absence of a commission comparable to the British one – even one comprised of officials within the military apparatus – illustrates this point. Von Trotha's military administration did not view prisoner mortality as regrettable and was not pressured by the type of significant public and political opposition that occurred in Britain, resulting in a lack of compulsion to document conditions in the camps. A detailed report akin to that of the Ladies' Commission would not only have been beneficial to the prisoners, but also to the Germans themselves in terms of maintaining a reliable labor force. Essentially, predominant views about the value of native Africans on the part of the German colonial leadership dictated a position that did not consider reform in the camp system a priority, even when it might provide better material prospects for the future of the colony. Although the official policy of extermination was at an end, death continued to permeate Southwest Africa to the detriment of both the colonized and the colonizer.

Ultimately, change did occur in both situations. In South Africa, it was a gradual process that improved conditions in the system and employed strategies that attempted to transform the Boers in the British image. Beginning in the waning stages of the war, the camp system became geared toward “modernizing” Boer society. Education was a huge part of this effort. The Boers were considered to be “redeemable,” but the manner of their redemption had to be carefully orchestrated in order to buttress British authority in the region. The colonial administration focused heavily on influencing the minds of young Boers, and through this effort strove to build acceptance of British rule with Boer parents by showing tangible benefits in the form of

educational opportunities for their children. Multiple accounts in *The Times* heralded increased educational opportunities as the paramount contributing factor in securing good British-Boer relations in the postwar period.²⁵⁹

Additionally, although many of the early reports from the camps derided Boers for sanitary practices, authorities also engaged in efforts to instruct on proper hygiene and brought Boer women into the fold as camp medical officers. In order to instruct these women, the home government sought “‘ladies,’ exemplifying the values of the British middle class that Britain was hoping to inculcate in its new colonial subjects.”²⁶⁰ In Southwest Africa, the establishment of the camps themselves was the major shift that “improved” the situation of the colonized, if only by the fact that they were no longer shot on sight. The camps were originally envisioned by von Bülow as a temporary measure to house the remaining Herero after he fought for and achieved the repeal of the Extermination Order. But the refusal of the authorities to provide adequate support meant that the system was doomed to fail, and it rapidly lapsed into a continuation of the previous policy.

In the end, the extent of “change” in German policy consisted of a shift from extermination to enslavement, tied together by the belief that native Africans could occupy a place in the renewed German colony, but only as a homogenous group of laborers (indeed, the only role they were deemed fit to occupy). However, the colonial administration refused to commit to providing the resources necessary to maintain this labor force and proceeded with a strategy that essentially continued the annihilation. Additionally, official legal regulations in

²⁵⁹ “Education In The Orange River Colony,” *Times* (London), September 6, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, May 14, 2014); “The Peace,” *Times* (London), July 19, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014); “South African Colonization Society,” *Times* (London), May 14, 1903, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014); “The telegram from Lord Kitchener,” *Times* (London), February 27, 1902, *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed through the University of Michigan, September 24, 2014).

²⁶⁰ Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 216.

postwar German Southwest Africa deprived native Africans of any agency, rights, or control over their own labor. It was possible, however, for opposition in Southwest Africa to occupy roles that provided relief, such as in the case of Chancellor von Bülow (i.e., in his efforts to rescind the Extermination Order) and the missionaries, or else the policy of outright extermination would likely have existed until the Herero population was completely wiped out.

CONCLUSIONS

It is undeniable that the sequences of events in South Africa and Southwest Africa shared similarities from a high-level perspective. Both situations arose from the encroachment of colonial powers into regions with existing populations that were resistant to measures that threatened their land and rights, and that ultimately felt compelled to respond by means of force. At a certain point in each conflict, both colonial powers deemed it necessary to invoke tactics that targeted noncombatants, culminating in the use of concentration camps, and in neither case were these tactics completely free from scrutiny. Variations in the manner in which civilian-focused tactics were implemented, the core beliefs that supported these tactics, and the level of public and political opposition and its tangible effects, however, clearly emerge as representations of the two country's markedly different views of their enemies.

The initial adoption of civilian-focused measures by the British in South Africa was represented by scorched earth. This policy exemplified a view that the Boers should be held to the same standard of military conduct as the British. There was a general expression of anger that a civilized nation had resorted to the use of uncivilized, dishonorable tactics. Scorched earth entailed extensive property destruction and the displacement of Boer families, but its intent was not outright extermination. The policy was loosely managed, making it subject to excesses that often resulted in the indiscriminate burning of farms, but its core intention was presented as a desire to eradicate the material and informational support supposedly being provided to Boer commandos by the farms' inhabitants. Civilian-focused measures in Southwest Africa, however, were a focus of German military policy once the Herero rebellion began, and were consistently backed by a philosophy that derided the audacity of an "inferior" people to rise in revolt against their colonial superiors. When German forces failed to achieve a quick, decisive victory, they

used tactics that went far beyond removing sources of support for African combatants, instead choosing a course that sought annihilation. This course did not only strive to end the Herero's capability to continue resistance, but also expressed a larger desire for the complete removal of their presence in Southwest Africa.

The concentration camps in South Africa suffered from a lack of proper planning and a shortage of resources, which resulted in high mortality rates and dismal living conditions for camp inmates during their initial period of operation. British authorities considered the camps to serve a temporary purpose, and did not foresee the amount of support necessary to allow them to function effectively as their populations steadily increased. This represented, however, profound ignorance, not malicious intent. The creation of concentration camps in Southwest Africa, conversely, continued the previous work of extermination through different means. German authorities committed no meaningful resources to these camps, and the inmates were considered a commodity to be used for slave labor.

In both cases, opposition to the conduct of the colonial powers arose in the public and political spheres. In Britain, this opposition developed into a powerful sequence of cause and effect that inspired governmental action and led to meaningful change, while in Germany, it consisted mainly of punctuated instances of resistance that led to policy adjustments, but ultimately failed provide significant relief for the Herero. Liberal politicians in Britain pressed for information on conditions in the camps early in their existence, and were provided with significant evidence to challenge the government when Emily Hobhouse's report was published. Foreign opposition became widespread as the public exposure of camp conditions grew, which inspired concerns in Parliament and the press regarding Britain's international prestige. Supporters of the camps became defensive and hinged their responses on justifications for the

creation of the policy itself, but the mounting evidence of the mortality rates and living conditions created a situation in which they were essentially forced to commit to further investigation of the situation. Criticism of the Herero camps did not share this type of incremental development. Activism in the colony itself was limited to a singular group, the Rhenish Mission, and this group's desire to retain autonomy from political concerns kept it from engaging in public campaigning. The report of Dr. Fuchs presented a dismal account of camp conditions, but the structure of the administration in Southwest Africa kept it from inspiring meaningful change – it lost any potential effect when it was ignored by his superiors. Chancellor von Bülow achieved the most significant reform when he maneuvered to force von Trotha's hand and have the Extermination Order repealed. The retention of von Trotha as the ultimate power in the colony, however, meant that subsequent measures (i.e., the concentration camps) would not proceed in the spirit of reform suggested by the decision to repeal the order. Authority still rested with von Trotha, and the camps essentially continued his previous policies.

The existence of an official government response to criticism was a key divergence between these two cases. Following the growth of public and political criticism, British authorities were compelled to officially evaluate the conditions. Even if the hope of the Ladies' Commission was that its findings would disprove Hobhouse's report and the claims made in Parliament, it existed as an admission that the issue of camp conditions was significant enough to require official investigation. Unlike Dr. Fuchs's report, it was not ignored or suppressed when it was clear it represented a dire situation, but was disseminated and used as evidence by politicians to argue for further change. Authorities acted on its suggestions and significantly improved conditions in the camps. German authorities were not compelled to similar action by critical forces, and their policies, even after the departure of von Trotha, continued to embody previous

views regarding the place of Africans in German colonial society. Official regulations legally established their subservient position and divested them of any remaining property and rights. The camp system continued its brutality unabated and grew in scope as native Africans were increasingly sent out as disposable labor for private enterprise.

Ultimately, change in the treatment of the Boers by the British proceeded with a constant theme that the future prosperity of the region, even under British colonial control, would entail effective co-existence. The camps were increasingly seen as “sowing the seeds of discontent,” and reform must occur to ensure the effective functioning of the colony following the war.²⁶¹ Even Joseph Chamberlain, who strongly supported the war, scorched earth, and the establishment of the concentration camp system, stated in Parliament: “We have... expressed our hope, our intention, our expectation, as soon as possible to grant to the people whom we have conquered full political rights, and meanwhile, we have promised them that from the first they shall have equal justice and equal privileges.”²⁶² The Boers were seen as valuable contributors, exemplified by the commitment to education, both in the camp schools and with regard to medicine. Certainly, reform efforts emphasized modernizing Boer society in the British image and strove to inculcate British values, but the Boers were considered “redeemable” – their decision to revolt did not entail their removal. In Southwest Africa, the possibility for co-existence only existed in the formative years of the colony during the governorship of Theodor Leutwein. He sought to use tribal leaders to his advantage and keep them in power in order to create a balance that would be beneficial to the colony’s prospects. His tactics focused on the retention of certain elements of native society. The belief that concessions were being made to the supposed “savages” sparked massive resistance from those that had the most daily interaction

²⁶¹ *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 95, col. 621.

²⁶² *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. 101, col. 378.

with the Herero (i.e., the German settlers), and created a situation which inspired revolt. The conciliatory stance was replaced with one of brutal subjugation (with the appointment of von Trotha), and native intransigence became a justification for violent action and extermination. Native Africans were never again considered to occupy a meaningful place in the colonial society, and their only value was considered to be their role as expendable slave labor.

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ABSTRACT**“BY ANY MEANS, FAIR OR FOUL”:
THE TACTICS OF BRITAIN AND GERMANY IN COLONIAL SOUTHERN AFRICA**

by

DAVID J. MOORE**May 2015****Advisor:** Dr. Andrew Port**Major:** History (Modern European History)**Degree:** Master of Arts

This thesis investigates the use of noncombatant-focused tactics by European colonial powers through the comparison of two specific instances of colonial conflict in southern Africa at the turn of the twentieth century: the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa and the series of conflicts commonly referred to as the Herero Wars in German Southwest Africa. It maintains that the propensity for meaningful shifts in the treatment of noncombatants depended greatly on the nature of the victims (i.e., whites of European descent, as opposed to native Africans) and the prevailing viewpoints on their roles in the respective colonial societies. Moreover, it argues that policy change was dictated mainly by differences in the presence, character, and effect of opposition in the public and political spheres and the structure of the administration within the colony carrying out the policy.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

David J. Moore received his Bachelor of Arts in Education, with concentrations in Secondary History and Social Studies, from the University of Michigan in 2008. He began pursuing of his Master of Arts in Modern European History and Graduate Certificate in Archival Administration in 2011. His professional and scholarly efforts are firmly focused on a passion for historical preservation and the goal of increased access to archival materials. During his graduate studies, he served as an intern for the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History in Detroit, Michigan, completing the initial processing work for the collection of labor and civil rights luminary Horace Sheffield, Jr. (one of the largest collections ever taken in by this institution). His article regarding this experience was published in the newsletter for the Midwest Archives Conference (MAC) in January 2014. He has served as Supervisor of Youth and Museum Programs at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, and is currently engaged as the Resident Archivist for Carhartt, Inc., a Michigan-based clothing company that was formed in 1889.