

The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War
1899-1902: Shifting the paradigm
from *sole martyrdom* to *mutual suffering*

by

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1. The Paradigm of Sole Martyrdom

F.A. Van Jaarsveld opened a lecture to the Afrikaans Cultural Council of Pretoria, almost four decades ago, with these words:

At the present time one is frequently confronted with assertion that the Afrikaner people has been assigned a place in the southern corner of Africa for a 'purpose' and to fulfil 'a mission'.¹

Concomitant with this idea of the Afrikaner and his calling and mission is the idea that the Afrikaners are just like Old Israel, i.e. a chosen people of God. Van Jaarsveld saw the sacred history² of the Afrikaners as a series of suffering events experienced by the Afrikaner people, and out of which arose a belief in themselves as the Chosen People of God, called to a mission. It was because of their suffering that they knew that they were chosen people.

All nations actually engage in myth making to explain how they came to be who they are. And many nations have a chosen people ideology which undergirds their national myth and their sense of superiority over other nations

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1. F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1861-1881* (Cape Town, 1961), p. 1.
2. Sacred History, as the term is used in this paper is based on T. DUNBAR MOODIE, *The rise of Afrikanerdom: power, apartheid and the Afrikaner civil religion* (Berkeley, 1975). See particularly his presentation of the 'history', especially pp. 1-10.

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and races. This was true of the Puritans of the Plymouth Settlement as it was true when American settlers removed the indigenous peoples from millions of acres of their ancestral lands and committed genocide in the name of their own sense of God's calling to them. It was also true at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, and just before, that in the name of *Manifest Destiny* the Americans took the last two colonies of Spain, Cuba and the Philippines on the other side of the world in the guise of liberating the people of Cuba from harsh military tactics of Spain, notably the *Reconcentrados* [concentration camps], and other repressive measures Spanish during the Second Cuban Insurrection against Spain. Ironically the United States built concentration camps in the Philippines and condoned water torture of captured insurrectionists later in that same War.³

In the State of Louisiana in 1878 A former black slave led a great exodus of emancipated slaves to the west. He was referred to by his followers who thought of themselves as a chosen people as the 'Black Moses' Afro-Americans have often depicted themselves as sharing the experience of the Hebrews in slavery under the Pharaoh. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the final speech of his life just before his assassination, evoking a chosen people language, proclaimed, "I have seen the promised land".

Cecil Rhodes, Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Alfred Milner were all 'British Race Patriots'. In the *Confession* of Cecil Rhodes is a statement that both Chamberlain and Milner could easily adopted as their own confession:

I contend we are the finest race in the world and the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race.

Thus Rhodes' dream of a railway from the Cape to Cairo and Milner's resettlement program. It was the deeply held belief of many British imperialists that the beautiful African continent should be populated by the only race that was worthy of it. As Rhodes expressed it:

The one race approached God's ideal type, *his own Anglo-Saxon race*.⁴

Thus he urged the Cape Parliament 'to annex land not natives'.⁵ Lord Herbert Kitchener recommended that the Boer people be sent to Mozambique or Ceylon to eliminate them from South Africa.

These examples are cited to show that such self aggrandising ideas are not unique to the Afrikaners. And, indeed, the other major white race, and their opponent in the struggle to be the dominant white race in South Africa also had a very strong Chosen People image of themselves. However, what the Afrikaner nationalists and the Broederbond did with this Chosen People

3. H. W. BRANDS, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York, 1992) p. 57.

4. B. WILLIAMS, *Cecil Rhodes* (London, 1938) p. 50. Cited in Van Jaarsveld.

5. I.R. ROTBERG, *The founder: Cecil Rhodes and the pursuit of power* [in collaboration with M. F. Shore], (Johannesburg, 1988), p. 150.

theology to raise the Afrikaner awareness and to foster Afrikaner Nationalism was quite unique and would have significant impact on the history of South Africa.

The death of more than 28 000 Boer women and children and older men in the white concentration camps forms one of the suffering events in the sacred history of the Afrikaners. This history presents a series of events in which it was argued that the Boer people were the victims of black and British broken promises, deception and persecution, ending in martyrdom. This martyrdom is associated with the status of being a chosen people. It can be said that this is a paradigm of *Sole Martyrdom*⁶ at the hands of two enemies, the black tribes and the British Imperialists. In one way or another all the suffering events of the sacred history involve these two implacable enemies. This history looks back to the Great Trek, and particularly to the Battle of Blood River, as the *Sitz im Leben*⁷ where the call to be the chosen people of God was given to the Afrikaners.

However, there is no evidence that the early Voortrekkers considered themselves a chosen people. That they were biblical fundamentalists and a believing people there can be no doubt. Although there is evidence that they were not a very religious people at that time.⁸ Rather, I have argued in another place,⁹ following André du Toit, that this concept that they were a chosen people of God is a backward projection of neo-Calvinism, particularly that of Abraham Kuyper of the Free University of Amsterdam as expressed by his former students and followers in South Africa.

This would especially be true of the Kuyperians at *The Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education* in the Broederbond¹⁰ 'think tank'.¹¹

6. The term *sole martyrdom* originates with the author.

7. "The place and time".

8. Daniel Lindley, a missionary sent to evangelise the Zulu people, delayed his mission to them and obtained permission to minister to the Voortrekkers on the basis that they were such terrible spiritual condition and without a minister. Lindley was their "preacher" for seven and a half years.

9. S. V. KESSLER, *The Suffering Afrikaners and their Civil Religion: The theological roots of apartheid* (Unpublished MA, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1986).

10. C. BLOOMBERG and S. DUBOW (Eds.), *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Broederbond in South Africa, 1918—48* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1989.), pp. 11, 217.

11. This concept of the backward projection of the Chosen People Concept is based primarily on the work of A. DU TOIT, "No Chosen People: The myth of the Calvinist origins of Afrikaner nationalism and racial ideology" in *American Historical Review*, 88, 1983, pp. 920-52 and especially in "Captive to the Nationalist Paradigm: Professor F.A. Van Jaarsveld and the historical evidence for the Afrikaner's ideas on his Calling and Mission" in *The South African Historical Journal*, 16, 1984, pp. 49-80.

Included in this group of Broederbond intelligentsia was the great Afrikaans poet Totius, J.D. du Toit¹² who was the Rector of the *Gereformeerde Kerk Seminary*, informally known as the *Doppers*. The university was, itself, modelled after the *Free University of Amsterdam*, which was part of the Christian Nationalist movement in Holland. This movement, like the brand of Afrikaner Nationalism fostered by the Broederbond, was based in part, on the kernel of Kuyperian thought that 'in isolation lies our strength'. According to Irving Hexham this theological concept may have been a forerunner of the political system of Apartheid.

Charles Bloomberg and Saul Dubow in their very important work, *Christian Nationalism and the rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond*, state that "Professors and teachers from the neo-Calvinist Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education played a key role in the Broederbond's history".¹³ One of the most prolific writers in the Kuyperian Group at Potchefstroom was L.J. du Plessis. Who served as Chairperson of the Broederbond from 1930-32, later becoming a professor at Potchefstroom.¹⁴ J.C. van Rooy, another professor at Potchefstroom University, served as the Broederbond leader from 1942-1952.¹⁵ The Broederbond arose out of the repression of Afrikaner aspirations by the British postwar policies in South Africa. The organisation of the Broederbond was a logical response to these policies and was a patriotic effort to foster the interests of the Afrikaners.¹⁶

F.A. Van Jaarsveld in his most famous essay, "*The Ideas of the Afrikaner on His Calling and Mission*" argued that the early Afrikaners reading the Old Testament in the isolation of the Great Trek saw themselves like "Ou Israel," as the Chosen People of the Lord. This belief grew into a form of mysticism.¹⁷ By their suffering in fulfilling the Lords calling they would be purified. In this way they were being prepared to carry out the mission given to them by God. By historical method he proposed to substantiate that this was their belief. In this essay he argued that there were abundant sources from all periods of the Afrikaner history, and particularly during the early period, that would show that the Voortrekkers did, indeed, liken themselves to old Israel and did identify themselves as a chosen people of God in Southern Africa.

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12. C. BLOOMBERG and S. DUBOW (Eds.), *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Broederbond in South Africa, 1918-48*, p. 12.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
 14. I. WILKINS and H. STRYDOM, *The Superintendent Afrikaners* (Johannesburg, 1974), p. 48.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. For an interesting discussion of this idea see W. MINTER, *King Solomon's Mines Revisited*, (New York, 1986), Especially Chapter 8.
 17. F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1861-1881*, p. 10.

André du Toit wrote a very damaging critique of this claim in his article, "Captive to the Nationalist Paradigm." du Toit tackled head on the basic proposition of the essay regarding the sources:

A critical survey of Van Jaarsveld's actual use of source material in his essay presents a rather different picture. Even a rather cursory glance at the nature of the sources of his documentation reveals some significant features. Thus he readily refers to secondary works with little or no attempt to question their provenance or ulterior purposes. More important his references to primary sources, which include a very large number of letters or other items in the newspapers, range widely over the whole period from the 18th century to the 1960's, but emphasis is largely on the later periods. On analysis it appears that of about 100 such references 38 pertain to the 20th Century, a further 36 come from the period after 1870 and only 24 are from the earlier period.¹⁸

Du Toit then goes on to show that these earlier sources have been used somewhat questionably. For example, take the idea of some Afrikaners that blacks are inferior. In the course of two paragraphs he cites eight instances of such beliefs ranging from 1703-1960 in which Van Jaarsveld states that "our records are dotted with pronouncements that support this contention".¹⁹ Du Toit comments on this assertion. With two exceptions, these references all come from the 1890s or later. And of the two earlier references, one involves a *rejection* rather than an endorsement of belief, and the other turns out not to be a primary source after all, but a secondary report.²⁰

Perhaps one of the best writers in the Potchefstroom Group, who carried out this work of backward projection into the sacred history, was the Afrikaans poet and neo-Calvinist, J.D. du Toit, who took the pen name of Totius. His father was S.J. du Toit the father of the Afrikaans language movement. He urged his son to become a Dopper. Taking his father very seriously he studied under Abraham Kuyper at the Free University in Amsterdam and then became the 'predikant'²¹ of the Potchefstroom Congregation and finally the Rector of the Gereformeerde Kerk Seminary at Potchefstroom. It can truly be said that his poetry had more influence than his many profound theological writings.²²

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18. A. DU TOIT, "Captive to the Nationalist Paradigm: Professor F.A. Van Jaarsveld and the historical evidence for the Afrikaner's ideas on his calling and mission," in *The South African Historical Journal*, 16, 1984, pp. 53-56.
 19. F.A. VAN JAARSVELD, *The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1861-1881*, p. 6.
 20. A. DU TOIT, "Captive to the Nationalist Paradigm: Professor F.A. van Jaarsveld and the historical evidence for the Afrikaner's ideas on his calling and mission," in *The South African Historical Journal*, 16, 1984, p. 26.
 21. The Afrikaans term for an ordained minister of religion.
 22. J.D. du Toit was so respected as a theologian that in a very important heresy trial he was called as an expert witness by the NGK.

Poetry is an excellent medium for the expression of intense religious or patriotic feelings. In all nations we find poetic expression of national myth and history. However, in Afrikaner Nationalism, poetry takes a very prominent role, particularly in the post war period. Indeed, André du Toit sees the role of Totius as distinctive in the development of Afrikaner nationalism. Beyond that he sees a direct relationship between Totius and neo-Calvinism and the development of Apartheid.

In [the] complex story of how modern Afrikaner Nationalism came to power in 1948 and set out to restructure South African Society in terms of the ideology of apartheid the Potchefstroom variant of Neo-Calvinism played a distinctive, but minor role. S.J. du Toit's son, the Afrikaans poet Totius, was seminal figure in the early stages of the shaping of Afrikaner Nationalist consciousness after the Anglo-Boer War.²³

Totius wrote nine collections of poetry.²⁴ We can note that his first collection, written in 1908, *By die Monument* was about the white concentration camps. Quickly following this collection was *Potgieter's Trek* in 1909. Both of these collections concern suffering and Afrikaner nationalism. It may be just a coincidence but the first collection concerned the Boer women and children who died in the white concentration camps during the war and the second collection, *Potgieter's Trek* concerned the Great Trek. These two events inspired the two most sacred monuments in the Afrikaner civil religion.²⁵ The order of the writing of these two poetry cycles is the same order as the building of these two paramount monuments. The proceeds from the sale of *By die Monument* were contributed to the Vrouemonument at Bloemfontein which was dedicated on 16 December 1913.

December 16th is the Day of the Covenant when the sacred history, and other histories, state that at the Battle of Blood River the people made a Covenant with God vowing that if God would protect them and deliver the enemy into their hands they would 'observe the day, and that date, as a day of thanksgiving like the Sabbath, in his honour...'. They vowed to build a 'temple' to his honour where they could worship Him and that they would enjoin their children

23. A. DU TOIT, "No Chosen People: The myth of the Calvinist origins of Afrikaner nationalism and racial ideology" in *American Historical Review*, 88, 1983, pp. 920-52.

24. In this section of this paper I am heavily indebted to IRVING HEXHAM for his extensive work in his book, *The irony of apartheid : the struggle for national independence of Afrikaner Calvinism against British imperialism* (New York, 1981). His work was the basis of my thesis at Princeton Seminary and which has inspired my own attempts to understand the Afrikaner culture, history and people, one of whom I married in 1991.

25. T. D. MOODIE, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p. 18. *Historia*, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 110-47.

to take part with them for all posterity.²⁶ The vow was not kept for many years and no 'temple' or church was built until much later. Paul Kruger lamented that this was the reason the war was lost. This effectively ties the white concentration camps to the chosen People theology. Interestingly enough, the Voortrekker Monument was not dedicated until 1949. The cornerstone was laid in 1938 as the culmination of the Broederbond's most successful public effort, The symbolic Ox Wagon Trek of 1938.²⁷

The white concentration camps and the Battle of Blood River along with other events of suffering and martyrdom in the sacred history were woven together to form a tapestry of Boer martyrdom. But more than that, these events have a common thread of betrayal of agreements between Afrikaners and their two enemies, the black 'hordes'²⁸ and the British imperialists. A good example of this is the massacre of the Voortrekker Piet Retief and his party. Even though the British settlers did not participate in the murders of Piet Retief and his followers, they had received a grant of land from the Zulu Chief. This shows a coalition by their two enemies. The massacre of the women and children at a site near the Blaaukrantz and Bushman's river immediately following the massacre of their men is an event that is a reminder, in later times, of the suffering of innocent women and children in the white concentration camps.

The contributors to the sacred history sometimes engage in a kind of poetic lament, rather than utilising historical method.

The grass was matted with the noble blood of women, girls and tiny babies. The wagons were smashed and burned, the earth white with feathers from the bedding. Infants nursing at their mother's breasts were pierced with tens of *assegais*—so that both bodies were fixed together. Children were seized by their legs and their heads smashed against wagon wheels. Women's breasts were severed, their bodies mutilated and ravished. Vultures circled over the *Laager of yesterday*...²⁹ wrote Gustav Preller.

Preller writing in 1909 only seven years after the war is here undoubtedly referring to the white concentration camps when he intones poetically, *The Laager of Yesterday*.³⁰ I assert this because this Laager of yesterday was a place of death and suffering of innocent Boer women and children and babies.

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26. Cited in J. A. TEMPLIN, *Ideology on a Frontier* (Westport, Connecticut, 1984), p. 108.
 27. I. WILKINS and H. STRYDOM, *The Superintendent Afrikaners*, p. 97.
 28. J.D. du Toit uses the term 'hordes' in a very negative way in contrasting the righteousness of the trekkers, who were just like another Israel, with the "fierce vermin... stark naked black hordes" in Potgieter's Trek.
 29. Gustav Preller, cited in T. D. MOODIE, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p. 7.
 30. The British in their official correspondence also at times referred to the concentration camps as Laagers.

However, the white concentration camps do not fit the paradigm of sole martyrdom very well, when set in the context of true historical milieu of the war. Since both the black and white concentration camps were a creation of the British Army, and since black people also suffered and died in these camps, the paradigm of sole suffering cannot be sustained in the face of *two laagers of suffering*. In view of the fact that the paradigm presents the Afrikaners as victims of the British and their black enemies, how can the sole martyrdom paradigm be sustained?

The theological basis of apartheid was directly rooted in the Calvinist *doctrine of election*, which has been distorted to apply to a whole nation rather than applying to the individual believer, which is the orthodox Calvinist position. By means of this heretical reformulation it was proclaimed that the Afrikaner nation had been elected by God rule over the black people of Southern Africa who were represented as the reprobate, i.e., as those not elected to salvation and as *chaos*, which in the Bible is a symbol of evil.³¹ The sign of being elect, or the chosen People of God is to suffer martyrdom. Thus the theological foundation of apartheid in Christian Nationalism relies on the Paradigm of Sole Martyrdom. By this suffering the Afrikaners could know that it was the will of God that they have been chosen to perform this calling and mission. Thus the Paradigm of Sole Martyrdom must be sustained. In order to do this, two conditions had to be met.

The first was to show that the Boer families were the sole sufferers, and the second that the black peoples were the enemy and that they, with the British invaders, were the perpetrators of the atrocities and the terrible suffering which the Boer women and children endured. The latter was achieved by emphasising the role of blacks hired by the British Army to burn and loot the farms and to carry off the Boer women and children to the concentration camps. There is some evidence that some of the women were harassed and molested during the removal phase. Emily Hobhouse relates being told by an English officer that black soldiers were allowed to loot Boer farms because the British had no money to pay them a wage.³² Nevertheless this was done under the supervision and with the sanction of the British officers. There are also indications that British soldiers sexually molested Boer women.

Generally, my research has shown that there is a loss of national memory about the black concentration camps. Interviews with large numbers of people have consistently shown that very few persons, in any of the racial groups, know that these camps ever existed. Despite the excellent work by S.B. Spies and

31. Paul Kruger's favourite biblical passage was Psalm 89 which depicts the Serpent Rehab in the sea as chaos. Yahweh through the King of Israel calms the chaos of the sea and tames the serpent Rehab. This taming of chaos and the serpent are analogous to the Afrikaner rule, which was seen in part as keeping peace between the black tribes.

32. R. VAN REENEN (Ed.), *Emily Hobhouse: Boer War Letters* (Cape Town, 1984), p. 110.

Peter Warwick and others, as long as twenty years ago, there is still a real denial. Notwithstanding the very significant loss of records that are known to have existed, there is ample evidence of the existence of the black camps. Even when the existence of the black concentration camps is acknowledged the argument is made that these camps were established for humanitarian reasons, and that unlike the white camps the black refugees were not compelled either to enter or stay in the camps. And, in addition, the black concentration camps, are said to have been much less harsh than the white concentration camps. This study attempts by historical method to refute all these myths.

This loss of historical memory of the black concentration camps was obviously necessary if the paradigm of sole martyrdom was to succeed. There is no evidence of a deliberate policy to suppress this part of the history.³³ However, Leonard Thompson points out that the history taught to different population groups during the apartheid era was crafted to teach a view consistent with white domination. Regarding African education, during what Thompson calls the *Segregation Period*, 1910-1948, those African students who did receive more than a primary education had to

conform to officially prescribed syllabuses and textbooks, in particular, expressing the dominant view and the assumptions of the period [which]...treated the history of South Africa as the record of white settlement and had no empathy with African culture, the African side of conflicts, or the condition of Africans since the conquest.³⁴

This period was also a time of great activity by the Broederbond historians in their efforts to build Afrikaner nationalism.

An overview of the reasons the black camps were formed and the historical development of the camps will serve well as a corrective, and is essential in shifting the paradigm of *sole martyrdom* to one of *mutual suffering*.

In order to sustain the sole suffering paradigm it is necessary to demonstrate that the black camps were intrinsically different. This study attempts to demonstrate that both the black and white concentration camps were formed for the same reason and were part of the same anti-guerrilla warfare strategy. Further the paper presents evidence that the vast majority of black inmates, were like the great majority white inmates, compelled by military force to enter the camps and were also constrained by military force of arms to stay there. Black inmates who ran away were called deserters. White inmates doing the same thing were called absconders. But were the conditions black camps basically the same as in the white camps? A brief overview of the numbers and causes of death in the black camps will show that they were not the same. In

33. An interesting area of research would be to study the Syllabuses of the Department of Public Instruction regarding the subject of the concentration camps.

34. L. THOMPSON, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, 1990), p. 173.

order to fit the *Sole Martyrdom* paradigm it would be necessary to prove that they were much less harsh and much less severe.

2. Reasons for the establishment of the black concentration camps

S.B. Spies in *Methods of Barbarism*, cites an incident in which the British Ambassador to Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, raised questions with Hermann Goering regarding the concentration camps in Nazi Germany. Goering replied by reading from an encyclopaedia article entitled *Konzentrationslager*, "...first used by the British in South Africa."³⁵ Of course the Nazi concentration camps were quite different in intention as well as numbers of dead. There is absolutely no evidence that the British Army or the British Government ever had a policy to exterminate the Boer people.

In fact, however, the British did not invent the idea of forced concentration of civilian populations in wartime. General Valeriano Weyler of Spain had first used concentration camps in both of the Cuban insurrections against Spain. Some of Weyler's methods may have been conceived when he was the Military Attaché in Washington during the American Civil War where he is alleged to have become an admirer of the Union Army General, William Sherman who utilised scorched earth tactics during his infamous march through Georgia.³⁶

It is estimated that between 125 000 to 500 000 Cuban civilians of those who were forced into the Cuban 'Fortified Towns', died of disease and malnutrition. Research shows that a reasonable estimate of the number of deaths was probably closer to 200,000 deaths.³⁷ *The Cape Argus* in early 1897 called Weyler's methods in Cuba 'a disgrace to civilisation'.³⁸

Despite this widespread condemnation, a London newspaper, *The St. James Gazette*, citing the failure of Lord Roberts policy of allowing surrendered Boer soldiers to return to their farms, recommended these very same methods in an article published on 20 August 1900.³⁹ Spies points out that there is no way of knowing whether Lord Roberts ever saw this article or if it, directly or indirectly, influenced his way of thinking.⁴⁰ It seems very unlikely, however, that Roberts and Kitchener were unaware of Weyler's methods since the model

35. S. B. SPIES, *Methods of barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, (Cape Town, 1977), p. 296.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

37. C. MORRIS, *The American War With Spain: A Complete History of the War of 1898* (London, 1899, p. 94.

38. S. B. SPIES, *Methods of barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, p. 147.

39. W. T. STEAD, *How Not to Make Peace* (London, 1900) pp. 76-7.

40. *Ibid.*

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they adopted was almost identical. Both used a combination of block houses, barbed wire squares and *Reconcentrados* [concentration camps].⁴¹

As early as May 1900 General E.Y. Brabant had suggested that surrendered Boer soldiers (Burgers) be allowed to live in some sort of camp or laager near the Orange Free State border until they could be allowed to return to their farms.⁴² Just a few weeks prior to the *St James Gazette* article, on the second day of August, H.R. Abercrombie a British intelligence officer wrote a memo to G. V. Fiddes, Lord Roberts' 'political secretary'.⁴³ His concern was that innocent Boer farmers were being punished for acts they had not committed. Abercrombie suggested that all surrendered farmers and their families should go into laagers and that the same policy should apply to natives. His reasoning was that in addition to preventing punishment of innocent surrendered Burgers that this would give the British forces a good fighting environment. *We should take note that this very early suggestion to form concentration camps included the black farm workers on the surrendered burger's farms.* Lord Roberts was very resistant to forming Hands Uppers camps, but finally on 21 September 1900 allowed two such camps to be formed in the Free State, Bloemfontein and Kroonstad, and one in the Transvaal, the concentration camp at Irene.

It was not until Lord Herbert Kitchener became Commander-in-Chief that the full implementation of the concentration camp policy took place. Just 24 days after assuming his duties Kitchener, in what is probably the most significant document in the history of both the black and white concentration camps, Army Circular No. 29, laid out his master plan to end the guerrilla warfare of the Boer forces. This instruction to his field commanders refutes any suggestion that the black concentration camps were a humanitarian effort to rescue the black families who were starving after the removal of the Boer farmers and their families from the farms.

In fact, Army Circular No. 29 makes it clear that this was not the motive that lay behind the forced removals of black people into the concentration camps. It is important to note that British apologists for the camps, where more than 28 000 Boer women and children and older men died, also said this was done for humanitarian reasons.⁴⁴

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41. A.M. DAVEY, "The Reconcentrados of Cuba" in *Historia*, 5(3), 1960. pp. 193-5.
 42. NATIONAL ARCHIVES BUREAU, PRETORIA (NAB) Ascension A1643, Vol. 31, p.185, T26, Gen. E.Y. Brabant to Gen. Rundle, 13 May 1900.
 43. G. V. Fiddes had formerly been Lord Milner's Imperial Secretary. Fiddes acted as Milner's man in Robert's staff and it is generally accepted by historians that he was sent down to keep an eye on Roberts. Milner was very concerned about the governing of the former Boer Republics by the military authorities.
 44. A.C. MARTIN, *The concentration camps, 1900-1902: Facts, Figures and Fables* (Cape Town, c. 1904), p. 21.

The very first sentence of AG Circular No. 29 states Kitchener's reason for this strategy. It was purely a war measure.

The General Commanding-in Chief is desirous that *all* possible means be taken to stop the present guerrilla warfare.

And what specifically is to be done?

Of the various measures suggested for the accomplishment of this object, one that has been strongly recommended, and has lately been successfully tried on a small scale, is the removal of all men, women and children and *natives* from the districts which the enemy persistently occupy. This course has been pointed out by surrendered Burgers, who are anxious to finish the war, as the most effective method of limiting the endurance of the Guerrillas, as the men and women left on the farms, if disloyal willingly supply. Burgers, if loyal dare not refuse to do so... With regards to the natives it is not intended to clear the Kafir locations, but only such Kafirs and their stock as are on Boer farms....They will be available for any works undertaken, for which they will receive pay at native rates.⁴⁵

It is therefore misleading and a distortion of the history to see the reason for the establishment of the British concentration camps as a *humanitarian effort* to provide black people with housing and food, or solely for the development of a *work camp strategy*. The reason the black camps came into existence was basically for the same reason that the white camps came into being. And that reason was a military strategy based on an *anti-guerrilla warfare master plan* that consisted of three chess game-like interlocking pieces: (1) Block houses and interconnecting barbed wire squares; (2) Black and white concentration camps; and (3) Massive sweeps by British flying columns. The use of the massive and rapid sweep was the one innovation not used by Weyler. The sweep is the reason that Kitchener finally succeeded and Weyler did not. The goal was to make the veld such a barren and hostile environment that the Boer commandos would be unable to continue their very successful guerrilla warfare against the British forces.

The black and white camps were both part of what may be described as an *entrapment system*.⁴⁶ which had as its goal to remove *every living person, animal and sustenance giving plant from the veld*. Both Boer women and children and black women and children were removed from the veld by force to prevent them from giving aid in the form of livestock and foodstuffs or

45. NAB, CD 453, AG Circular Memorandum No. 29 dated December 21st 1900.

46. George Arthur in his biography of Lord Kitchener explains the entrapment system as follows: "Much as the Indian Khoddah's elephants are driven up rapidly narrowing jungle lanes and compelled into a stockade, Kitchener's far stretching columns were to sweep in all the outlying Boer Commandos and chase them right up to the Northwestern portion of the Orange River Colony..."

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intelligence information, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to the Boer forces. In addition the Boer families were being held as *hostages* in the belief that that this would hasten the surrender of their family members still on Commando. Likewise the black families were *confined* to prevent them from giving food supplies or intelligence to the Boer Commandos. The only difference was that the *natives were to be self supporting*. The utilisation of black concentration camp inmates for labour by Army Departments was an added benefit, but this was not the motivation for the burning of their kraals and their forced removals to the black concentration camps. It should be noted that the Army had already established a black labour system by the creation of the *Army Labour Depot* system.

It was also Lord Kitchener's order that the black house servants of the Boer women should be placed in the white camps with them.⁴⁷ This is evidenced by the statements of Emily Hobhouse⁴⁸ and the *Committee of Ladies-Concentration camps Commission*.⁴⁹ Thus is shown the mutual interdependence of blacks and whites. From the very first day of the war black servants were in camps with their white mistresses. In the *Women's Laager* in Mafeking on the very first day of the war

there were 188 white women, 315 children and 150 native servant girls.⁵⁰

There are numerous telegrams indicating that both black and Boer families were swept from the farms into the camps together. Although sometimes they were also removed separately. A typical telegram:

About two hundred native refugees have been brought in...by Pilcher's column....⁵¹

In one of the most spectacular drops of refugees by the British military columns during the Anglo-Boer some 3 000 black and white refugees were swept off the veld and dumped down on the ground at the Brandfort camp in the Orange River Colony. We would never have known that some of these refugees were black except that a doctor examined the refugees and in his report mentioned that he had examined some black refugees among them. It seems apparent that some telegrams did not give a racial breakdown.

Kitchener's original vow not to remove the regular locations which existed prior to the outbreak of hostilities was abandoned as the guerrilla warfare

47. NAB, AG Circular Memorandum No. 31.

48. J.H. BALME, *To Love One's Enemies* (Cobble Hill, British Columbia, Canada, 1994), p. 138.

49. NAB, CD 893, The Committee of Ladies-The Concentration camps Commission, p. 172.

50. NAB, A1643, Vol. 4, Resume of Report on the Siege of Mafeking by Baden-Powell, p. 167.

51. VAB, SRC, Vol. 10, 3424 /01.

continued, despite the massive squares of barbed wire and block houses which formed a massive grid, but which failed to contain the Boer forces. Although it is true that this system did attenuate their ability to attack the British forces and to destroy the railway and other infrastructure. Large self supporting black locations were removed, and in several cases kraals, were burned to the ground and the residents compelled to enter the black concentration camps because it was felt that the Boer Commandos would utilise these kraals for shelter. It was also feared that the enemy would commandeer their livestock. In one very interesting case 'natives' were removed after they had sought the protection of the Army inside a ring of military posts and had already planted crops.⁵² Thus the myth that regular locations were left in tact is refuted. This is important because it shows that removals were not for humanitarian purposes but were purely military in nature because such military posts often had to be abandoned to strengthen other areas under enemy attack.

Contrary the opinion of some, not only were black families compelled by military force to enter the camps, but they were compelled to stay in them, except to go out and work or spy for the British Army. The British Army used black men both inside and outside the camps as spies. A notable example of this was a large black camp at Winburg in which 4 000 black inmates were part of a massive spy and scouting operation under an Afrikaner, one Mr. Bergh.

Requests for the release of black camp inmates, even elderly inmates, appear to have been denied on the basis that they needed to be kept in the black concentration camps where they could be controlled. The Chief Superintendent of the DNR writing to the Secretary of Native Affairs in regards to an old black man whose family had requested his release to live with them in Johannesburg, stated

(I) have steadily refused all applications for bringing native refugee families to Johannesburg. By keeping these families in the camps I can control them.⁵³

Even when the war was over black families were not allowed to leave the camps until some white employer took responsibility for them. At war's end lists of black concentration camp inmates were prepared by listing the name of the Boer farmer for whom they had worked prior to removal and then placing their names under his name. The Boer farmers were then notified that they could come pick up their former black workers. Many blacks had been promised that for their loyalty to the British side they would be given the Boer farms when the war was over. Instead they were sent back to their former masters. This was not done because the British favoured the Boers. Rather it was done, according to British documents, because it was the fastest way to get the farms going again so that they could provide food for the country, and

52. NAB, MGP, Vol. 136, 15774A/01.

53. NAB, SNA, Vol. 29, The Chief Superintendent of the Department of Native Refugees to the Secretary of Native Affairs, 27 May 1902.

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especially the thousands of mine workers who were already working the mines for more than a year before the South African War came to an end. They reasoned that these black farm workers knew the farms that they had lived on and therefore would be best at farming that land.⁵⁴

Even on a daily basis black inmates were confined and not allowed to leave the camps when the military authorities felt it was possible that they would in some way aid the enemy.⁵⁵ Some shop keepers complained that black inmates were not allowed to come to their shops outside the camps. They were told that stores had been opened inside the camps to prevent this. Because the military commandants objected to their being allowed out of the camps,⁵⁶ De Lotbiniere informed the Deputy Administrator of the ORC that he had

developed a *compound system* providing everything the Natives may require in the camps themselves...keeping the Natives together in the camps as far as possible.⁵⁷

One black camp Superintendent had to order more fuel because Army Intelligence objected to black inmates collecting wood outside the camp.⁵⁸

3. The historical development of the black concentration camps

Sole Martyrdom requires that the suffering be confined to one person or group. And in the case of the matter at hand it requires that this group be a people chosen by God who either suffer at the hands of the enemies of God as righteous, innocent and pure victims as in the passion of Jesus Christ, or as a means of chastisement, as in the case of the people who had not observed the vow made at Blood River. The historical development of the black concentration camps was one of mutual development which was intrinsically related to the historical development of the white concentration camps. Indeed the whole history of South Africa is a history of mutual interdependence between black people and white People. The scope of this paper does not allow a detailed presentation of the historical development. I trace here the outline of that development.

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54. NAB, SNA, Vol. 31, 1170/02 , The Chief Superintendent Department of Native Refugees to the Secretary Of Native Affairs.
 55. VAB, SRC, Vol. 9, 3155, Superintendent Fairview camp to Chief Superintendent. Department of Refugees, Orange River Colony, 11 July 1901.
 56. VAB, CO, Vol. 56, 483/02, The Chief Superintendent DNR, ORC to the Secretary of the ORC Administration, 22 February 1902.
 57. VAB, CO, Vol. 55, Chief Superintendent DNR to Deputy Administrator, ORC Administration., 18 January 1902.
 58. VAB, SRC, Vol. 9, 3155, Superintendent Fairview camp to Chief Superintendent, Department of Refugees, ORC, 11 July 1901.

i. The black concentration camps under the supervision of the burger camps in the Transvaal

In the beginning, and even before the establishment of the first hands uppers camps, the black farm workers from the Boer farms who were being displaced from their kraals began to cluster and loiter in the towns now occupied by British Army garrisons. Some were whipped for refusing to work as in Brandfort. In some of these towns, refugees found shelter in locations that had existed before the war. Some earned food in return for cleaning and working. Individual Army commanders were given authority to hire black labour as they needed to.

When the white camps were organised and even before British columns began dumping the farm workers of the Boers along the railway where they clustered near the white camps. Very soon the black refugees, both voluntary refugees and those swept off the veld, found work in the white camps cleaning latrines, doing hospital service work or cleaning the camp grounds.⁵⁹ In the beginning they worked in exchange for food. In time the mutual dependence was developing to the point where the white camp superintendents began to take some informal responsibility for the black satellite camps that were forming around their camps. But as the British flying columns dropped more and more black and white refugees it became necessary to put some structure into the relationship. As stipulated by Lord Kitchener's orders some black servants swept from the veld with their Boer mistresses were residing in the white camps. We know this to be the case because their names show up on the death registers of the white camps, even though their names do not appear on the monuments to the dead that have been erected at some of the white concentration camps. In the Transvaal black people swept from the veld by force were in most cases just left to fend for themselves. They squatted along the railway and tried to survive.

Even after the black camps were in operation some refugees found their way to the 'Regular Locations'.⁶⁰ In Bloemfontein the Waai Hoek location became very overcrowded due to an influx of refugees and as a result posed a health hazard. The city officials ordered that the refugees who had moved into the location be moved to the Bloemfontein black concentration camp in March 1901.

Economics also governed the process of developing a formally structured relationship. In Brandfort this process is very evident. A 'Native Headman', Peter, was appointed Superintendent of the black concentration camp by the white camp Superintendent. In a letter to the Chief Superintendent he justified his actions by saying that

59. CD 893, p. 79.

60. Regular locations were those which appeared on the maps as "Native Locations" prior to the beginning of hostilities.

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(I)t was with a view to economy that I proposed him to you.⁶¹

By this appointment £60 a year was saved. Peter later died of Enteric and was replaced by a white superintendent because the infant mortality rate was so high.⁶² It was felt that a white Superintendent would be better able to cope with the sanitation and medical problems. The relationship of mutual dependence fostered the administrative relationships and there were many ways in which the British and the inmates of the white concentration camps used the black camp inmates to carry out menial tasks. In return the black inmates earned income and food and the white camps took an increasing responsibility for the general welfare of the black inmates. Eventually they were paid for their work in the white camps. Black men were hired by the Army Departments and money was deducted from their monthly pay to defray the costs of feeding their families in the concentration camps.

This relationship was about to come to end and the black camps would become part of a new system of concentration camps. They would be moved away from their location near the white camps and would become part of the newly formed DNR. This would impact on the white camps as they no longer would have the assistance of the inmates of the black camps. Only then did the mutual interdependence of the white and black camps become vividly apparent. The servants of the Boer women would remain in the white camps. The white camp superintendents were quite concerned about who they could get to clean the latrines and to perform other menial tasks. They did not feel it was appropriate to ask the white inmates to do this kind of work. One superintendent asked the Chief Superintendent, ORC if he could hire the black servants of the Boer women to clean the latrines for which he would pay them.⁶³ This was approved. The black inmates had also been doing sanitation work in the towns adjacent to the camps. Requests were then made to obtain the services of prison labourers in place of the black camp inmates who had been moved to abandoned farms.⁶⁴ Prison labour was used to bury the dead from the Bloemfontein white concentration camp.

This move of the black concentration camps to abandoned farms when the DNR was established on 15 June 1901 in the Transvaal Colony and 1 August 1901 in the Orange River Colony brings us to a very serious question regarding the deaths in the white concentration camps. One of the questions regarding the deaths of the 28 000 Boer civilians in the camps is: *Could the British Army*

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61. VAB, SRC, Vol. 2, 476, Superintendent Brandfort Camp to Chief Superintendent Department of Refugees, ORC, 5 March 1901.
 62. VAB, SRC, Vol. 4, 1101, Monthly Report for March 1901, Superintendent Brandfort Camp to Chief Superintendent, ORC, 2 April 1901.
 63. VAB, SRC, Vol. 11, 4172, Chief Superintendent, ORC to Superintendent Vrededorf Road white Camp.
 64. VAB, CO, Vol. 30, 2913/01, The Commandant Edenburg to the Secretary of the ORC Administration, 16 August 1901.

have done more to provide adequate food, medicine and housing supplies to the white camps? The single track railway from the ports of Durban and the Cape were a logistical nightmare. Supplies for the camps were, of course, given a lower priority than troops and ammunition and other military supplies. Given that reality could more have been done to provide adequate railway trucks to supply the camps? If so, many who died would have survived. Rotten meat and spoiled vegetables and just too little food were a major cause of death due to lower immunity due to malnutrition. In addition the lack of adequate tents, huts and sanitation supplies caused the rampant spread of disease and high death rates.

The railway space allotted to the white and black concentration camps had to be shared with the *South African Constabulary* (SAC) because the British Army refused to supply the SAC out of their Field Canteen supplies despite the fact the role of the SAC was a military one in guarding the protected areas. In October 1901 the Director of Civil Supplies, ORC received an allotment of 30 trucks per week to supply both the black and white concentration camps, the food contractor and the SAC as well the total civilian population of the Orange River Colony. There was some starvation among the population in some of the towns in the ORC. In addition soldiers sometimes drew on this supply. As a result sanitation projects were deferred, sheep were rotting due to a lack of medicine to treat animal diseases, seed to plant crops was not shipped.⁶⁵ This was the situation during the whole war. And in fact as little as 10 trucks a week were available in earlier periods. Requests for additional trucks were often concurred with but were not provided because 'they are not available'. Lord Kitchener maintained personal control over the allotment of railway trucks and was very reluctant to grant increases in truck space.

The movement of the 18 500 black camp inmates to the farms would take a very large number of railway trucks. At first requests for railway trucks were refused. Later just a few 'wagons' were offered.⁶⁶ With intervention, probably by Lord Milner, 100 trucks were allocated to move the Orange River and Kimberly camps to Dryharts.⁶⁷ De Lotbiniere, the Chief Superintendent of DNR, stated in a report to Milner:

With one line of railway, burdened with the strain of military moves and supplies, the Imperial Military Railways rendered me such assistance as enabled me to move and transport about 18 500 Native

55. VAB, CO, Vol. 40, 8819, The Assistant Director of Civil Superintendencies to the Assistant Director of Railways, Bloemfontein, 14 October 1901.

56. VAB, CO, Vol. 30, Resident Magistrate to Deputy Administrator, ORC 14 August 1901.

67. NAB, SNA, Vol. NA 23/01. Chief Superintendent DNR to The High Commissioner.

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Refugees with all their household goods and chattels, food, grain and housings...without raising difficulties.⁶⁸

Taking the figure of 18 500 Refugees who needed to be moved, and using the figures given in the case of the Kimberly and Orange River camps with a population of 2 822⁶⁹ requiring at least 100 trucks plus separate shipment of livestock, we arrive at requirement of 656 railway trucks for the 18 500 refugees.

All this was accomplished in one month's time in spite of troops concentrating, shortage of trucks, etc.⁷⁰

We should point out here that many luxury items were shipped on the railway during this period. For example from 10 June to 9 July £62 315 of alcoholic beverages were sold on permits granted by the Military Governor of Pretoria. Thus we can conclude, that with some effort, many more railway trucks could have been made available for the more critical needs of the inmates of the concentration camps.

I. The establishment of the Department of Native Refugees (DNR)

On 7 May 1901 some of the gold mines on the Rand were allowed to resume operation by Lord Kitchener on a small scale. Lord Milner had been trying to get the mines reopened for almost a year. The very successful attacks on the railway infrastructure had made it impossible to allow the return of the British

68. NAB, SNA, NA 23/01, Chief Superintendent Department of Native Refugees, 30 September 1901.

69. The exact population moved from these two camps is not apparent.. What the record does show is that the populations increased rapidly after the camps were moved. According to the figures recorded in SNA, Vol. 20, 519/02 ...the population of the DNR camps in the ORC grew from 22,713 to 45,987 from August through December 1901. The moves were completed by September 30th having begun in August. The figure of 2,822 is as of 30 September which is the earliest return that we have. Even if we hypothesise that these two camps may have had more material goods to move and estimate a total of 400-500 trucks for all the camps that is still a large number of truck space. In consideration of the problem at hand which is the numbers of trucks used compared to the normal allotment for all the white camps which was no more than fifteen trucks per week or less. Whether it was 400 trucks, 500 trucks or 600 trucks does not matter. It is clear that more food medical and sanitation Superintendentplies and tents and building materials could have been transported to the camps. We can wonder how many lives could have been saved if the weekly number of trucks had just been doubled. The black camps only received four trucks each week.

70. NAB, SNA, Vol. 20, 519/02, Chief Superintendent DNR to Deputy Administrator, ORC.

refugees, most of whom were the former skilled mine workers needed to reopen the mines. In addition several hundred Boer families had been left behind in Pretoria and Johannesburg who had to be fed and cared for. These supplies could have been used to feed the British refugees. It was especially annoying that the Boer Commandos were destroying the railway making it difficult to take care of the Boer families and to stockpile enough food to reopen the mines. Lord Roberts tried to return these families to the Boer commandos as a means of alleviating the needs for food and supplies. In addition and more importantly, Roberts used this project of returning the Boer families as a means of pressuring the Boer leaders to agree to end the war. Milner and Chamberlain were unable to get Roberts or Kitchener to agree to reopen the mines. Milner finally convinced Kitchener by arguing that such a measure would demoralise the Boer guerrilla forces still in the field as they would see that despite their sacrificial continuance of the war the British would now be able to achieve their goal of getting the gold out of the ground which had been the primary cause of the war in the first place. In addition this newly mined gold would to help pay for the war as well as reconstruction, in the aftermath of the war.

There would be a tremendous need for black labour and in fact very extensive recruiting had been carried out during the war in Mozambique and other African nations. When the British Army entered Johannesburg on 31 May 1900 they found 15 000 black mine workers guarding and maintaining the mines. They had been left there by the Boer government to protect the mines. Soon after the entry into Johannesburg the British Army established the *Johannesburg Army Labour Depot* just as they had done in De Aar and Bloemfontein on their march northwards. Some 6 000 of these former mine workers were loaned to the Army Labour Depot who channelled them to the various Army Departments with the understanding that they would be returned to the mines when they reopened.

Major De Lotbiniere, a Royal Engineers Officer from Canada, who had been with the Imperial Military Railway from the early days of the war, was asked by Kitchener to form the Department of Native Refugees (DNR). The 6 000 mine workers who had been lent to the Army Departments were now returned to the mines. De Lotbiniere took over the staff and the working structure of the Army Labour Depot which was now closed and the DNR replaced it as the new entity to provide labour to the Army Departments. But there was more to it than that.

In the Transvaal, unlike the Orange River Colony where black farm workers swept off the veld had been organised into structured camps, 2 500 black families were found along the railway where they had been dropped by the British columns and left to fend for themselves. A few had been absorbed by the white camp administration at places like Middelburg and Balmoral. All of these refugees in both the ORC and the Transvaal were now moved to abandoned farms and the farms of loyalists and organised into camps where they were required to grow crops for themselves and the Army Departments.

So is it not true that we now have a series of labour camps?

The Military Governor of Pretoria, General Maxwell wrote a letter to Lord Kitchener on 25 July 1901 which is probably the most important document in the history of the development of the black concentration camps with the exception of AG Circular 29 mentioned above. He begins by saying:

The question of the organisation of Native Refugee Camps is an important one, and likely to increase beyond expectations.⁷¹

General Maxwell seems to be of the opinion that the black camps that existed prior to the establishment of the DNR were not really structured camps. In the case of the Transvaal that was the case. But most interesting is the phrase, "... and likely to increase beyond expectation". It is clear that what he refers to is the massive sweeps which were at that very moment beginning engulfing both the white and black camps. It is quite obvious that the return of 6 000 black mine workers to the mines is not the primary reason that the DNR camps were formed. De Lotbiniere, the Chief Superintendent of the DNR pointed out to the High Commissioner the real problem. He explained:

By the middle of July [1901] the number of Native Refugees had increased to 20,000. I feared that the number might in time be doubled, as the country was being laid to waste and the Natives would perforce have to come in.⁷²

Indeed, getting beyond this colonial bureaucratic language thousands were at that very moment being brought in by the British flying columns at the point of the gun.

The plan for the new DNR camps was that the black camps now under the supervision of the white camps would be moved to abandoned farms and that the black women and children would be required to grow food for themselves. To induce their participation they were informed that they would have to pay a higher price for their food if they did not cooperate. Those who had no money would be fed *gratis*. But no longer would black men working for the Army Departments for a shilling a day be required to pay £1 each month to defray the cost of feeding their families in the concentration camps. It was pointed out by one official that there was great upsettness about these deductions form their pay to feed their families. After all, they argued, the Boers who had started the war did not have to pay for their rations. It is interesting to note that some Boer men on Commando sent money to concentration camps to pay for their families food. Some white camp inmates had bank accounts and there was some debate among the British officials regarding the possibility of forcing the white families to pay for their rations.

71. NAB, MGP, LB 222, 8917, General Robert Maxwell to the Commander-in-Chief, 25 July 1901.

72. NAB, SNA, Vol. 59, 2097, Chief Superintendent DNR to the High Commissioner, 30th September 1901, p. 93.

The Military Governor of Pretoria requested oxen for ploughing, tools and seed for planting. Lord Kitchener did not wish to do very much. In fact, he said in response that this would cost a fortune he would not give any of the things requested, not even railway trucks to transport the black refugees to the farms where they would grow crops for themselves.

The only thing that he says he will give is the land and the Kaffirs must do the rest.⁷³

His real interest was to find a cheap way to take care of the black refugees and thus he would compel the black women and children to grow food for themselves and for the Army Departments. This had always been the scheme of the mining companies to hire mine workers whose families would support themselves. This allowed the mining employers to pay lower wages. That is why the mines preferred migrant labour.

In his final report on the work of the Department of Refugees De Lotbiniere says that the reason the DNR was formed, was because everything that might assist the Boer [Commandos] to prolong the war had been commandeered.

*Besides the burger's families, their servants and farm labourers, together with all stock were brought in.*⁷⁴

De Lotbiniere says that it was not until Kitchener needed 'native' labour that the question received close consideration.⁷⁵ So were not the DNR camps just simply labour camps? It seems so until we look further at what General Maxwell says to Kitchener. After stating the need to organise the Native refugee camps and that the problem was likely to increase 'beyond expectations' he goes on to say that if the growing of crops is to be stopped on the Boer farms there will be a famine then the "natives will be forced to come in, especially the natives kraaled on the Boer farms". The fact is that the massive sweeps would remove all the inhabitants of the farms in districts where the Boer Commandos are active. So that in addition to those black refugees who had been accumulating along the railway for the past year there was the problem that many more thousands of black and white refugees would be swept off the veld by the British Columns. No wonder that the decision was made to compel the black women and children to grow food for themselves and the Army Departments. De Lotbiniere stated that the aim of this policy was to save £10 000 a month in feeding costs.

Eventually there would be 38 black concentration camps in the Orange River Colony and 28 black concentration camps in the Transvaal Colony. The black camps were moved to farms in areas with a better annual rain fall. The plan was not as successful as hoped because the rainfall was not good in some areas

73. NAB, MGP, Letter Book 222, pp. 772-73, The Military Governor to the Chief Superintendent of the Department of Native Refugees, 20 July 1901.

74. NAB, TKP, Vol. 135, p. 1.

75. *Ibid.*

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and because as the superintendents complained so many of the family members were sick and unable to work. Enough grain was harvested to feed the families and assist in feeding the Army Departments as well as enough grain to feed the black refugees for one year after their release back to their Boer masters. Ironically the Boer families returning to their farms were only given one months supply of grain and rations.

5. The numbers and causes of death

The numbers of Boer women, children and older men and prisoners of war who died in the white concentration camps can be determined with a fair degree of scientific accuracy by researching the relatively rich government archives, museums and private collections of death registers and published official returns.⁷⁶ There are also various unofficial published and unpublished materials available from non-governmental sources.⁷⁷ In addition there are the accounts and letters and reports of investigators such as Emily Hobhouse⁷⁸ and the *Lady's Commission on the Concentration camps in South Africa*.⁷⁹

Despite this relatively significant amount of resource material there is still some disagreement about the numbers who died in the white camps. Byron Farwell in his study, *The Great Anglo-Boer War*⁸⁰ says of the numbers of deaths in the white camps that the exact number of Boer children who died is unknown and that conservative estimates put the figure at 16 000. However he states that the

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76. The British Blue Books published for the Parliament-CD 819, CD 853, CD 934, CD 936 among others contain statistics of populations, births and deaths as well as some of the official correspondence and reports on conditions in the concentration camps.
 77. Unofficial lists of deaths compiled by Chaplains, church archives, various genealogical lists available from such organisations such as the Church of Latter Day Saints (commonly known as the Mormon Church) and the Red Cross and diary accounts and letters written by inmates and official observers.
 78. Emily Hobhouse's observations are very accurate. In addition to her official reports such as "A Letter to the Committee of the South African Women and Children's Distress Fund." There are two books written by Miss Hobhouse: *The Brunt of the War and Where it fell* (London, 1902), and *War without glamour, or, Women's war experiences written by themselves, 1899-1902* (Boemfontein, c. 1924). There are also many excellent collections and accounts of her work. The latest of these and by far the most comprehensive and well written is by Jennifer Hobhouse Balme, *To love one's Enemies*.
 79. NAB, CD 893. The reports of this commission contain very valuable information, although they also contain some opinions that reflect an apologetic and justification for the high death rates in the camps which tends to engage in blaming the victims. The recommendations were excellent and very similar to those of Emily Hobhouse.
 80. B. FARWELL, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York, 1976), p. 392.

number is actually closer to 20 000. Farwell does not frame the death statistics properly for our purposes as they do not include the deaths of the thousands of Boer mothers and prisoners of war, as well as old men too old to fight.

G.H.L. Le May states

The Boers estimated that 26 000 died in the Camps, the British Blue Books gave the figures at 18 000.⁸¹

S.B. Spies cites the work of the 'former republican official and archivist, P.L.A. Goldman' who established by detailed research that the correct death toll in the white camps was 27 927. This estimate is based on the hard data of primary sources. He specified that 26 251 women and children and 1 676 men of which no fewer than 1 421 were older men.⁸² Leonard Thompson says that nearly 28 000 Afrikaner civilians, most of them children, died of dysentery, measles and other diseases in the camps.⁸³ It appears, therefore, that the numbers of Boer women and children and men who died in the British concentration camps are fairly well agreed upon. However I argue that this figure, which is accurately based on the record, is far too low. I say this for the following reasons.

The numbers who died on the way to the camps during the forced removals from the farms must have been a very significant number.⁸⁴ During high death rate periods camp death records were not kept.⁸⁵ For example in a study I did with Bruce Fetter⁸⁶ of the numbers and causes of death in the Barberton and Nylstroom camps,⁸⁷ the death registers of the Barberton camp shows no deaths

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81. G.H.L. LE MAY, *British Superintendence in South Africa, 1899-1907* (Oxford, 1965), p. 106.
 82. S. B. SPIES, *Methods of barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*, p. 264.
 83. L. THOMPSON, *A History of South Africa*, p. 143.
 84. In 1986 I conducted oral history interviews with survivors of the white camps. Most of their testimony regarded the experiences of hardships on the way to the camps. One interview with the daughter of a concentration camp inmate revealed the death of her father who died under a wagon after becoming very sick.
 85. S. KESSLER, "The Numbers and Causes of Death in the concentration camps in the South African War." Unpublished paper delivered at the Second Annual Exposition of the Anglo-Boer War, Kimberly, 9 October 1997.
 86. Chair of the History Department, The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. His field is African studies and has written in the area the medical history in Africa as well as other subjects germane to African studies. I am very indebted to him for advice and instruction in the writing of history.
 87. B. FETTER and S. KESSLER, "Death by concentration: The Burger camps at Barberton and Nylstroom" A paper presented at the Joint Meeting of the Canadian Association of African Studies and the African Studies Association, Toronto, 1994.

were registered between 26 July and 11 August 1901. There is another gap in the register until 23 August when no deaths were registered. There were deaths registered after that every day until the end of month. The Barberton Camp Death Register shows only 31 deaths for the Month of August. But CD 819⁸⁸ shows that 69 children, 5 women and 1 man died in the Barberton camp for a total of 75 deaths. Keep in mind that overall the Blue Books only show a total of 18 000 deaths. A close study of the records of the other white camps will undoubtedly produce a higher record of deaths. It is apparent from the register that there was an epidemic of measles at Barberton and that record keeping went by the wayside. Even though the Blue Books show a lower of deaths overall in this case the death register is missing 41 per cent of the deaths that the Blue Books claim occurred. It needs to be remembered that July and August are the coldest winter months when some of the highest death rates were recorded, in part due to the fact that measles is often followed by pneumonia which is the actual killer in measles epidemics.

Finally, and most important, we do not have the record of deaths which occurred between the opening of the white camps in September 1900 and the take over of the camps in February and March 1901 by civilian administrators. It should be pointed out that the appointment of civilian administrators was done because it was felt that the military officers in charge at the time were not properly trained to carry out their duties competently. Furthermore the camps in their early stages were not properly equipped and sanitation and medical service were not yet fully developed. These missing statistics may be significant but there is no way of knowing.

The numbers of deaths of black and coloured people in the black and white⁸⁹ camps

Sole martyrdom requires that it be shown that suffering and death were much less than in the white concentration camps. Further the death rate is an indicator of the living conditions in the camps. That is very important as we can by this means get some sense of how bad or good the conditions were. Unfortunately we have very little descriptive material on life in the black camps.

The most controversial and disputed aspect of the research results of my work has been my estimate that at least 20 000 black people died in the black and white concentration camps. Since making that very conservative estimate in

88. CD 819, Reports, Etc. On the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal, November 1901.

89. The reader is reminded that the black and Coloured servants of the Boer women were, by order of Lord Kitchener, placed in the white camps. Despite this order the servants were not provided with rations.

1996 the research has revealed additional verifiable deaths that bring the hard statistics to 17 182 deaths. This is an increase of 3 020 verified deaths over the usually stated figure of 14 154.⁹⁰ This figure is based upon British documents, primarily death lists and returns of death statistics by the black camp superintendents to their superiors. Every death is extracted from those documents. Eventually more deaths will be added to this compilation of statistics.

Some historians have expressed the death toll lower than the actual figures by setting certain limits. Farwell only gives the death statistics for the children who died in the white camps. Peter Warwick in his pioneering work, *Blacks in the South African War* limits the death toll by only considering the black camps of the DNR which leaves out the blacks who died in the camps under the white camps Administrations prior to June 1901 and by stopping the death count in the DNR on the last day of the war.⁹¹ Such limiting of the total numbers who died in the camps is not wrong in itself. However when attempts are made by others to use these incomplete death statistics as an argument against the higher figures that can be documented then that is quite poor scholarship and a very misleading distortion of the history. Those who wish to maintain the sole martyrdom paradigm are very resistant to raising the death toll in the black camps.

Several very important factors underlie this estimate and it is important to briefly list them. First of all the record of the black inmate deaths has substantially disappeared, particularly in the case of the Transvaal camps. Secondly there are no death registers extant in the very poor documentation of the (DNR). However the monthly returns to the civilian authorities contain death statistics which Warwick partially utilised and I have used to increase the overall count. The figure of black concentration camp deaths calculated by Warwick is based on the very poor record that was available to him. The DNR camps were operating until the end of November 1902.⁹² During that interval DNR recorded 984 deaths for a total of 15 138. In addition the research has gleaned 579 more names of the dead from the records of Burger camps in the Transvaal Colony and the Department of Refugees in the Orange River Colony.

Before concluding this section we need to look at some other factors which have greatly affected the ascertainment of the true number of black deaths in the camps. When the DNR was formed in the Transvaal Colony Captain De Lotbiniere the Chief Superintendent of DNR wrote to the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, regarding the work of organising the camps in the Transvaal. He acknowledged that unlike the black camps in the Orange River Colony which

90. P. WARWICK, *Blacks in the South African War* (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 151.

91. *Ibid.* p. 150.

92. NAB, SNA, Vol. 98, 253/03, Return for the Month of November 1902 for the Department of Native Refugees in the Transvaal."

Historia, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 110-47.

were quite structured and being provided with food, housing and medical care the situation in the Transvaal in comparison was quite chaotic and disorganised.

On 5 June there were about 15 000 Natives representing 2 500 families in *temporary camps* along the railways where they had been left by our troops. A Superintendent was sent to each of these temporary camps. His first duty was to register all the families, introduce sanitary and medical arrangements and consider the question of food supply.⁹³

In these temporary camps where black farm workers were dumped at the terminal points along the railway the death rates must have been very high since these 'refugees' were left to fend for themselves. In some cases the women and children were left along the railway track while the men worked in the mines. It is obvious that these temporary camps did not have medical service or a proper sanitation system or a regular food supply.

March 13, 1901. Much sickness in refugees camp Heidelberg. There are six hundred Coloured people in the camp here. Many suffering from the fever⁹⁴ aggravated by want of proper food. ...*They are mostly living on the carcasses of animals dead of lung sickness.* [Emphasis is mine]⁹⁵

It is clear that the death rates must have been higher than in the Orange River Colony where generally such severe deprivation did not exist. Because these black farm workers were not swept into organised camps there were no death registers. Certainly there must have been several hundreds or thousands of deaths in these temporary camps. The British Army also operated army labour depots where several thousand black workers were contracted out to the various Army Departments. Their living conditions and rationing were similar to that in the DNR. There are no death registers or statistics for these depots and ancillary camps. While these depots were not, in a purist sense, concentration camps they were the forerunners of DNR and were closed when the DNR was established.

In August 1901 British Columns began sweeping black farm workers and small tribal settlements from the Orange River Colony into the Natal Colony.⁹⁶ Some refugees from the Transvaal also were driven into the Colony. The Natal authorities decided not to form concentration camps in view of the disastrous

93. NAB, SNA, vol. 1, NA 23/01, Chief Superintendent DNR to the High Commissioner, 20 September 1901.

94. This comment about fever probably refers to Enteric Fever which is usually a sign of poor sanitary facilities and usually involved water supplies that were Enteric thus spreading the disease rapidly.

95. NAB, MGP, Vol. 78, 2713A/01, Medical Officer of Health for the Transvaal Colony to the Military Governor of Pretoria, 13 March 1901. Note that the telegram was not sent to the Superintendent of the Burger Camps.

96. VAB, SRC, Vol. 11, 4289, Telegram, GOC Natal to Deputy Administrator Orange River Colony, 17 August 1901.

results in the concentration camps in the former Boer Republics. Instead they farmed the Refugees out to the various tribes and also allowed them to take refuge in caves and other available land. Their solution to the problem appears to have been modelled after the DNR scheme of placing refugees on abandoned farms where they were to raise crops.

The Natal DNR provided very few services or food. They kept track of the location of the refugees and repatriated them back to the Orange River Colony after the war. The total known population was 6 648.⁹⁷ Certainly some of these refugees must have died but there is no way of estimating how many as no death records have been found.

Finally it is clear that many black people who died in the white camps were not registered. I say this because some white camp death registers show the names of black servants and their children in the camp death registers; while others do not show any. Since Lord Kitchener ordered black servants placed in the camps with the Boer women they had served on the farms then there must have been some in each camp. It appears likely that some superintendents decided that the death of black inmates need not be registered. This was also a problem with the Registrars of Births and Death appointed by Lord Roberts in October 1900. Some Registrars, according to the archival records asked, if they were to register births and deaths of 'natives'. Even though the answer given was in the affirmative the question kept arising. The Medical Officer of Health in the ORC, Dr. Pratt Yule, who kept excellent statistics on deaths in the white concentration camps stated that a record of black births and deaths was not kept as no money was allocated for this purpose. It seems reasonable to state that several thousand deaths of black people swept off the veld or voluntarily seeking shelter and food were not recorded.

4. The causes of death in the black and white concentration camps

Emily Hobhouse and others recognised that the various concentration camps were all different. It is, therefore, difficult to generalise about the causes of death. Some camps had very high death rates and a study of those camps reveals certain contributing factors such as a contaminated water supply or improper sanitation of latrines, etc. The past 11 years of comprehensive research have, however, revealed certain general problems which led to high death rates. For the purposes of this study the focus is on the question of whether everything that could reasonably be done to save lives. Space does not permit the detailed analysis of the causes of death or a breakdown of death rates by age sex and race which the research has revealed. From the point of view of our concern regarding the sole suffering paradigm we do need to ascertain to what degree the black camps were laagers of suffering and death.

97. NAB, NA, Vol. 296, vol. 296, 1963/02, The Secretary for Native Affairs to the High Commissioner, 19 June 1902.

Historia, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 110-47.

i. Medical Service

The Royal Army Medical Corps doctors were not well regarded by Emily Hobhouse or Lord Kitchener which is perhaps the only subject upon which they agreed. Medical service to the battlefield soldier was primitive and disease was rampant. Basically the British Medical Service due to inadequate transport, lack of preparation and inadequate medical supplies could not at times even provide bed pans and rubber sheets for its soldiers dying of enteric fever by the thousands.⁹⁸ As a result the Medical Service was forced to practice a kind of deliberate neglect especially in the case of the black camps. Medical Service to the black camps was very low level and sporadic. In many cases it was non-existent. In addition it is apparent that Lord Kitchener was reluctant to do even what was possible. Basically, as in other areas the black concentration camps, the inmates had to fend for themselves when it came to medical care.

Diaries of nurses, doctors and chaplains in the white camps show how terrible the situation was in those hospitals and how exhausted they became.⁹⁹ However, there were no nurses in the black concentration camps at all. Medical doctors were only there on a catch as catch can basis. In the white camps there were serious problems with medical staffing. And there were serious interpersonal problems between medical staff. There was some jealousy on the part of British doctors regarding the Boer doctors working in some of the camps. In some cases there was a certain degree of alcoholism. Many nurses assigned to the white camps were British Uitlander refugees with very negative attitudes towards the Boer families.¹⁰⁰ There was a severe shortage of nurses. Many of the white camps utilised young Boer women as nursing assistants. There appear to have been no doctors assigned the black camps prior to the formation of the DNR. Some doctors who worked in the white camps drew extra duty pay to provide care to the black camps.¹⁰¹ The Chief Superintendent of DNR in his final report noted that the nearest military doctors were paid by the Department to attend the camps, which were visited daily in the majority of cases. Like many of the reports by British officials there was a tendency to paint a far rosier picture to upper echelons than was the case on the ground. Inspectors visiting the DNR camps often noted the lack of any medical service.

It may appear that the camp Administrations as well as the Medical Officers in the individual camps learned the hard way how to cope with the problems of disease spread and prevention and that they eventually developed the medical

98. CD 453, Report of the Royal Commission..., On The Care and Treatment of the Sick and Wounded During the South African Campaign, 1901, pp. 25-27.

99. Vide: J. BRANDT, *Het Concentratie-Kamp* (Amsterdam, 1905).

100. J. HOBHOUSE BALME, *To Love One's Enemies*, p. 120.

101. VAB, SRC, Vol. 2, 543/01, Superintendent Edenburg Black Concentration Camp to Chief Superintendent Department of Refugees, ORC, 25 February 1901.

expertise and technology to cope with the problems. This school would argue that this is why the death rates went down and life in the camps improved so dramatically. There may also be a tendency to blame the doctors and nurses who, it appears in most cases, did the very best they could.

However, the facts argue to the contrary. The British medical knowledge was the best in the world at that time. The British doctors, especially those in the Royal Army Medical Corps, were part of a very advanced medical institution. Granted that the best and the brightest may not have been assigned to the concentration camps. However all the technology was understood and available. All of the procedures and equipment recommended by Emily Hobhouse and the *Ladies' Commission* were known before hand and in practice in the Army hospitals. The problem did not lay with the doctors, but with the Imperial British Government, especially the War Office. Basically the British Army had in this war, as in all previous wars, not prepared to save the sick and wounded, but rather to kill the enemy.

Both Emily Hobhouse and the Ladies' Commission on the concentration camps, made recommendations regarding sanitation and prevention of disease. They both, despite their differences, saw immediately that the camps were ill equipped and were not able to deal with such contagious diseases as enteric fever and measles because of this. It may be thought that they were bringing forth suggestions based on medical knowledge unknown to the British Army Medical Service. On the contrary the British military doctors were some of the most advanced in the world, particularly in the area of the newly discovered germ theory and its application to army field sanitation. The British Army had extensive experience in overseas environments and learned much about operating camps with concentrated populations with their own troops and in the famines in India. All the medical technology and equipment necessary to overcome the deficiencies noted by investigators of the white camps were on the ground and in use in the South African War before any of the concentration camps were formed.

The Portland Military Hospital was the first civilian hospital to arrive in South Africa. The ship carrying the hospital landed at Cape Town on 28 December 1899 and detained at Bloemfontein on 14 April. All medical comforts, medicines and surgical equipment as well as boilers for laundering disease contaminated clothes and stool destructors for sanitising enteric waste were in the list of equipment of the Portland Hospital. Even more important the medical staff of doctors and nurses understood the diseases at hand and the necessary procedures. This hospital had everything needed to save a significant number of lives in the concentration camps. We have already shown that transport was available and this hospital shows that the British Medical Service had the equipment and the knowledge to save lives.

Now the question arises as to the reasons that the concentration camp hospitals did not have the equipment required. The Portland Hospital was a state of the art hospital donated by the Duke of Portland and 250 other subscribers at a cost of £13 690. Some of the British Army hospitals were ill equipped. *Historia*, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 110-47.

Incredibly the Royal Hospital Commission argued that it was not necessary to equip the Army hospitals as well as hospitals like the Portland Hospital were equipped.

(The private hospitals) were very well equipped and did excellent work. The equipment of some of them was in excess of and rather heavier than that allowed for the ordinary military hospital. The extra equipment no doubt enabled some additional comforts to be given to the men, but in our opinion, the usual equipment allowed for the military hospitals is sufficient.¹⁰²

However, this comment must be placed in context. This same report points out that the medical staffing and equipment was only sufficient for about two army corps instead of the more than six army corps and more who would come later. Many colonial officials practice that old saw that when you ask them where they have been they tell you where they are going.

This deficiency was due to lack of preparation for the war, which was a general problem due to the failure of the War Department to spend sufficient funds in preparing for a war that they thought would never happen. The white camp hospitals had little to work with. Many of the black camps had no hospitals at all, and no medical staff. Basically there was very little medical service in the black camps. The archival record after exhaustive research shows no indication of any medical service in the black camp structure, with the exception of the Bloemfontein black concentration camp. Black camps which had any medical service at all had doctors on a part time basis, no nurses at all, and very inadequate sanitation, if any at all.

ii. Diseases

Next to the high death rates due to measles followed by pneumonia in the white camps the scourge of both the British Army and the concentration camps was enteric fever (typhoid fever) and other water borne diseases. Much of the epidemic in the camps was due to the use of the dry system of human waste disposal or the "night soil system". This system used pails to catch the human faecal material. These pails were then emptied and disinfected. Very often the camps were devoid of Any disinfectants or other sanitation supplies. The contaminated soil was then replaced with clean soil. In the 1880s the British Medical Service suspected that the dry system was a source of Enteric. In 1895 a study in England showed that typhoid fever was twice as common in homes using the dry system as with water closets.¹⁰³ If these experiments did not seem to justify changing to a water system, which was probably not possible in most

102. NAB, CD 453, The Royal Hospital Commission Report, p. 14.

103. P. D. CURTIN, *Death by migration* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 112.

of the camps,¹⁰⁴ it was understood that typhoid was contagious and that it was most readily transmitted by faecal material.

The latrines in many camps were very poorly constructed with the seats being too close to the ground. In the Brandfort white camp women and children had to sit on two logs as there were no toilet seats. When wood was requested for seats the answer came back that no wood was available. That same Public Works Department was at that time putting a new wooden balcony on the Bloemfontein Post Office. Some of the black camps had no latrines at all.

At present the natives [of the Brandfort concentration Camp] report to a wooded kloof a mile across the camp for purposes of nature.... (It does not seem advisable to make exceptions in dealing with natives & I should recommend the trench system be installed without delay.¹⁰⁵

A month later the Chief Superintendent of the Orange River Colony inspected the camp and found that no substantial latrines had been dug.¹⁰⁶ In contrast the black concentration camp staff at Aliwal North was ordered to whip those black inmates using the streams and ground for a toilet.¹⁰⁷

Pneumonia was a very serious cause of death among both white and black camp inmates. Pneumonia was often the real cause of death following measles. It was the most prevalent cause of death of black inmates. Since medical care for black inmates was very limited and often non-existent it may be that measles was not diagnosed. Given that black inmates worked in the white camps cleaning latrines and working in the camp hospital it is noteworthy that measles did not seem prevalent among black inmates. The research has shown that black people in the camps and in the Rand gold mines seem to have a high propensity for respiratory illness. It must be conceded that both these environments were conducive to pneumonia, influenza and other respiratory illnesses. In the ORC black concentration camps pneumonia was the highest cause of the highest number of deaths. In the Bloemfontein black camp pneumonia accounted for 61 per cent of all deaths. This is confirmed by the death of black mine workers in the Rand mines where it was the cause of 34 per cent of the deaths, which was the highest number of deaths due to any single disease.¹⁰⁸

104. Some camps did not even have piped water for drinking when the war came to an end.

105. VAB, SRC, Vol. 5, 1304, Medical Officer of Health, Orange River Colony to Chief Superintendent of Department of Refugees, 15 April 1901.

106. VAB, SRC, Vol. 7, 1938A, Chief Superintendent Department of Refugees, Orange River Colony to the Deputy Administrator, ORC.

107. VAB, SRC, Vol. 5, 2746, Chief Superintendent of Refugee Camps, ORC to Superintendent Aliwal North, 18 June 1901.

108. The 1903 Report of the Department of Native Affairs.

Historia, 44(1), May 1999, pp. 110-47.

iii. Housing

As stated above the number of deaths in the black camps due to pneumonia was very high. The fact is, that black families being herded into the black camps were often provided with no housing at all and were expected to create their own kraal hut out of whatever materials they could find, which was often none at all. There seems to have been a policy that black inmates should pay for their food, receive little or no medical care and provide their own housing. That reality of their status is shown by a memo written to the Superintendent at Brandfort regarding tents he was sending him.

Tents allowed to you are only for white camp and are not to be given to Natives.¹⁰⁹

At the Edenburg black camp there was a very serious housing problem. The Superintendent of the black camp wrote to the Chief Superintendent in Bloemfontein.

As regards shelter, a good many of the Refugees have no means to buy anything to build a hut with...could you send me about ten tents?

The answer came quickly.

(Y)ou should construct by some means of sacking and wood scantlings, which you are authorised to purchase locally as cheaply as possible.¹¹⁰

Part of the problem was that there was a shortage of tents. The tents in the white camps were, old frayed and rotted. Sometimes two or three tents were erected one on top of the other.¹¹¹ Emily Hobhouse described the tents at Bloemfontein,

Wet nights, the water streams down through the canvas...and wets the blankets as they lie on the ground.¹¹²

Finally 2 000 tents were ordered from India.

In the end lack of adequate housing would contribute to the greatest annihilation of black camp inmates. To save £10 000 a month and to provide black labour to the Army Departments the women and children in the ORC and the Transvaal black camps were moved in open railway trucks and by ox wagons to abandoned farms in the areas of high rainfall. There black women and older men were pressured to raise crops for themselves and for the Army Departments. The women and children were moved in cold winter weather in

109. VAB, SRC, Vol. 11, 4118, Chief Superintendent, ORC to Superintendent Brandfort Concentration Camp, 13 August 1901.

110. VAB, SRC, Vol. 2, 478, Superintendent Edenburg black concentration camp to Chief Superintendent, Dept of Refugees, ORC, 4 March 1901.

VAB, SRC, Vol. 4, 1136, Chief Superintendent Department of Refugees, ORC to Chief Ordnance Officer, Bloemfontein. 9 April 1901.

112. R. VAN REENEN (Ed.) *Emily Hobhouse: Boer War Letters*, p. 49.

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open railway truck to farms where no preparations for medical service, housing or sanitary facilities appear to have had been made. It appears from one document that only four days were given to prepare the DNR camps in the ORC.¹¹³ The deaths in the first four months were as follows:

The Orange River Colony DNR Camp Deaths

Month	Men	Women	Children	Totals
September	23	125	139	287
October	52	90	489	631
November	105	19	1119	1243
December	131	194	1346	1671
Totals	311	428	3093	3832

The Transvaal Colony DNR Camp Deaths

Month	Men	Women	Children	Totals
September	17	30	394	441
October	35	69	583	687
November	39	83	834	956
December	67	114	979	1160
Totals	158	296	2790	3244
GRAND TOTAL	469	724	5883	7076

The DNR recorded 15 423 deaths during the 17 months of its operation. *In the months of September 1901 - December 1901 7076 deaths occurred or 45.88 per cent of all the recorded deaths in the history of the DNR camps occurred.* The DNR was operating pretty much the way its parent organisation, the *Army Labour Depots* had operated. The move, and its aftermath, were responsible for these deaths. In addition malnutrition was most likely a factor.¹¹⁴ To prevent Boer Commandos from raiding these new camps three bags mealies per fifty families each day was given to each of these camps.¹¹⁵ The reason that the move was done without any significant preparation of the camp sites was because the aim was to get the crops planted so that there would be a harvest within a few months. After all the purpose was to save £10 000 a month and to provide food for the British Army. No thought was given to providing fresh vegetables to the white concentration camps who were in such desperate need for them.

It should be noted that the move itself did not result in the major portion of the deaths. The death rate climbs as the months go along. I believe the lack of housing and sanitary facilities were the problem. Unfortunately we have no

113. VAB, CO, Vol. No. 32, 3078/01, Chief Superintendent Department of Native Refugees, ORC to the Secretary of the ORC Administration.

114. I am indebted to Bruce Fetter for this insight.

115. VAB, CO, Vol. 29, The Chief Superintendent Department of Native Refugees to The Chief Superintendently Officer, Lines of Communication, Bloemfontein, 2 August 1901.

detailed record of the causes of death in the DNR camps. The record shows that even as late as February 1902 some camps did not have adequate housing and that inmates were expected to find their own materials for the constructing huts.¹¹⁶

One inspector explained the high death rate as a result of the housing the black inmates were able to build for themselves. It was his opinion that having been unable to build their kraal huts as well as they could at home where they could get adequate amounts of materials they were victims of the winds and cold coming through the sides of the huts due to the fact that there were spaces in the walls of the huts. Another inspector had the opposite view. He believed that these spaces allowed adequate ventilation and thereby kept the death rate lower than it might have been. Ventilation was recognised from the 1850s on by the British Medical service as a major way of improving the health of soldiers. This trend towards proper ventilation resulted in the rolling up of the tent flaps in the white camps, even on very cold days. This practice was in violation of the sanitary field manuals which only prescribed such practice in appropriate weather.

This abuse of the general policy may have resulted in measles spread as mothers took their children under the covers of their beds, thus incubating the measles and spreading the disease to other children. Furthermore such close contact would have increased the dose rate which in turn would cause a much more severe form of measles. In addition this practice may have increased the death rate due to Pneumonia that often follows measles. Some mothers lost as many as 10 children due to measles in the white camps.

The Chief Superintendent of the Department of Refugees, De Lotbiniere explained the high death rates as the result of the huts being located too close to each other due to the restricted areas under cultivation. In fact, the only restriction imposed by the military was that no cultivation could take place closer than one mile (1,6 kilometres) to a block house.¹¹⁷ Actually the arrangement of the huts was done for security reasons and not because of restricted space.

It is not proposed to spread the Natives in a thin line along the railway, but to group them into kraals of say 50 families each. Probably 4 kraals will be formed at each of the headquarters...By this means it is hoped the Superintendent at each of these

116. VAB, CO, Vol. 54, 326/02, Chief Superintendent of the Department of Native Refugees, ORC to the Chief Superintendent of the Department of Native Refugees.

117. VAV, CO, Vol. 33, 3180, Major W. E. Henderson, Chief Superintendent Native Refugee Location, ORC to the Secretary of the ORC Administration, 5 September 1901.

headquarters will be able to control the Natives in his area of cultivation.¹¹⁸

Once again we see that saving money was the reason that so many died.

According to De Lotbiniere in his final report,

Epidemics of Chicken Pox, measles, dysentery, etc., attacked the camps and the death rate rose very rapidly.¹¹⁹

Like much of the official reporting this explanation seems less than credible. I say this because the camps were moved *en-masse* to locations on the abandoned farms and the same inmates were broken up into small camps of no more than 600 inmates and these camps were separated from each other by considerable distance. Such separation of people who had lived in large camps would tend to decrease the contagious diseases listed. The absence of any respiratory diseases in the list such as pneumonia and influenza makes this statement suspect. Finally he says that medicines had little effect and that

We relied more on splitting up the camps, on improving water supplies, and better still the food supplies.¹²⁰

The camps had already been split up. Note that there is no mention of housing or sanitation facilities. There is no indication that any medical service was provided in the first few months after the move. Eventually military doctors in nearby military posts provided medical care on an extra duty basis.

When more than 7 000 black inmates died in the period September through December it was argued that such high rates were understandable given the situation. The situation was one that was created by the British Army in order to save £10 000 a month and to provide black labour for the gold mines on the Rand and to provide labour and food for the Army Departments. Based on the experience with the black and white concentration camps from September 1900 until June 1901, and the high death rates in those camps which were much better equipped, the British Army must have known that there was a high risk of the thousands of deaths that followed. It is my view that military decisions were made irrespective of the expected result. In other words this knowledge was not a factor in the decision making one way or the other.

6. Conclusion

The South African War has often been called 'The last gentlemen's war'. But when the smoke cleared from the battlefields, the burned out farms and kraals and all the soldiers had gone home the death lists revealed that the deaths of

118. *Ibid.*

119. NAB, TKP, Vol. 135, P. 146.

120. *Ibid.*

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women and children were almost twice that of combatants on both sides.¹²¹ Both black and white mothers and their children died like flies. They died of mal-nutrition, epidemic disease spread by concentration and poor sanitation facilities. Like all weapons of war disease knows no race or politics. In the British Army death lists, enteric fever and other waterborne diseases are listed most often as the cause of death.

The paradigm of sole martyrdom was created by a selective memory of the history of the war. The archival records of the concentration camps show that the Boer farms and all their inhabitants, both black and white were without discrimination swept into the concentration camps for purely military reasons. What is startling is to see how many books and pamphlets were written by historians in the aftermath of the war and down to the present time without any, or very much research of the official record.

The history of the concentration camps shows without question that the reason the black camps came into existence was the same reason that the white camps were established. Further the record shows that black and white women and their children were swept of the veld together along with their livestock, and that their homes and kraals were burned to deny the Boer Commandos the ability to continue the war. The record demonstrates that both black and white inmates of the camps were compelled by force of arms to enter the camps and that both were forced by the same means to remain incarcerated there. Finally the archival sources show that the black concentration camps were far worse in every respect than the white camps in all the areas of camp life such as medical service, sanitation, housing and food supplies. In every respect the conditions required to sustain the Paradigm of Sole Martyrdom fail. The history demands a shift of the paradigm to that of Mutual suffering.

Bertolt Brecht, the great German poet and dramatist, in a poem about World War I (1914-18) depicts a dead German soldier who was unearthed from his grave and paraded through the town to cause more young men to become soldiers and thus also take their place among the millions who died in that war. The dead are often used for political purposes. The tragedy of the paradigm of Sole Martyrdom is that the black people who died in the concentration camps were almost totally the servants of the Boer women and the farm workers on the Boer farms. The dead Boer women and children have been unearthed and used as a justification for Apartheid.

When the war was over the black farm workers and their families went back to the Boer farms from which they had been swept away to the camps. Some many thousands remained behind buried in various cemeteries now in most cases unknown and forgotten. One little girl eight years old died of enteric fever in the Middleburg camp. She was a little Khoi-Khoi girl. The death certificates of the Middleburg camp are in the National Archives in Pretoria

121. The number of black soldiers who died fighting on both sides is unknown.

neatly tied together in pink archival ribbon. Her death certificate reads “*Native-Hottentot Girl*”. On the back of each of the yellowed death certificates is a line upon which the Medical Officer or the Minister conducting the funeral wrote the name of the cemetery in which the dead person was buried. In every case of a black or Coloured person you will find written, ‘Native Cemetery’. But not on this certificate. There in heavy black cursive is written, “*White Cemetery*”. We will never know why. Perhaps this family loved her. She died in the white concentration camp at Middleburg during the Anglo-Boer War. Apartheid, and its myths have come and gone, but the dust that was her life still lies there.

Opsomming

Swart konsentrasiekampe van die Anglo Boereoorlog 1899-1902: Die Verskuiwende paradigma van alleen martelaar na gemeenskaplike lyding

Vanuit die premise dat Afrikaners vir hulself ‘n historiese mite rondom die Anglo Boereoorlog geskep het waarin hul lyding as dié van ‘n ‘alleen martelaar’ weergegee is, redeneer die skrywer dat ook die swartmense heelwat ontberinge deurgemaak het. Ondanks die rol wat hulle in die oorlog gespeel het en die ontberinge waaraan hulle blootgestel was, het beide blanke strydende partye in die oorlog, hulle letterlik oor die hoof gesien. In die studie word omvattende aandag aan die swart konsentrasiekampe gegee en die vraag word gestel of dit moontlik sal wees vir ‘n gevoel van ‘gemeenskaplike lyding’ om pos te vat.