

Victims of a white man's war: Blacks in concentration camps during the South African War (1899 - 1902)

by

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1 Extension of the Concentration camp system to the black communities

Traditionally the South African War was depicted in the historiography as almost exclusively a white man's war. Prior to 1980 books contained very little information on black participation in the war and blacks were perceived as being mere spectators during the war.¹ In the last twenty years historians have increasingly given attention to the participation by blacks in the South African War. These historians have proved that blacks were active participants who played a significant role in the war.²

It is a well-known fact that a concentration camp system was introduced in 1900 as part of the British military strategy to end Boer resistance during the

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1. See D. DENOON, "Participation in the 'Boer War': people's war, people's non-war, or non-people's war?", B.A. OGOT, (ed.) *War and Society in Africa* (Frank Cass, London, 1972), pp.109-13.
2. The standard work in this field is P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983. Other significant contributions were made in S.B. SPIES, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer republics January 1900-May 1902*, (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1977); P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, (Longman, Burnt Mill, 1980); F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog* (Nelson, Cape Town, 1985); B. Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War: A black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991); H.J. BOTHA, *Die moord op Derdepoort, 25 November 1899: nie-blankes in oorlogsdien*, unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1965; J. MOHLAMME, *Black people in the Boer Republics during and in the aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1985.

guerrilla phase of the South African War.³ Boer women and children were removed from the land and brought into concentration camps. By the end of the war there were more than 40 camps for whites with a population of over 116 000.⁴

What is less well-known is that an equally large number of blacks were also accommodated in concentration camps situated close to the railway lines for transport, communication and labour convenience. The number of blacks in concentration camps increased rapidly during 1901 and continued to grow right up to the end of the war. Official statistics show that at the end of the war in May 1902 no fewer than 60 004 blacks in 33 concentration camps fell under the control of the Orange River Colony administration, while 55 696 blacks in 37 camps were under the Transvaal administration.⁵ Therefore, at least 70 concentration camps for blacks with a total population of 115 700 existed by the end of the war. According to Stowell Kessler, who has done comprehensive research on this topic, there were about 89 black concentration camps with a population of more than 120 000 if the 'informal' camps are included.⁶ Statistics reveal that the camp population was, at any given time, composed of more than 50 per cent children, more than 25 per cent women and under 20 per cent men.⁷

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3. For more details on the introduction of the concentration camp system see P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, pp.167-8; *Beeld*, 30 January 1997.
 4. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 169.
 5. Free State Archive Repository (FSAR), Bloemfontein, Colonial Office (CO), vol. 78, ref. 2150/02: Report by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC, May 1902, 3 Jul. 1902; National Archive Repository (NAR), Pretoria, Transvaalse Koloniale Publikasies (TKP), vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 5. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 145,148-9; F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p. 80; Devitt, p. 20.
 6. Cited in *Beeld*, 30 January 1997. See also S.V. Kessler, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, p. 15.
 7. These percentages were calculated from the statistics in the monthly NRD returns.

2. The Native Refugee Department: Establishment and administration

During the first half of 1901 black concentration camps were controlled by the superintendents of the white camps⁸, but because of the rapidly increasing camp population these superintendents soon could not cope with the situation. Realising that the number of blacks in the camps was “likely to increase beyond expectations”⁹ the British authorities established the Native Refugee Department (NRD) in June 1901 to take over the administration of black concentration camps in the Transvaal. The department was headed by a Canadian, Major G.F. de Lotbinière. On 1 August 1901 his responsibility was extended to black camps in the Orange River Colony.¹⁰ From the content and style of his reports it seems as if De Lotbinière, though not free from colonialist racial prejudice, was probably more enlightened than most of his contemporaries in his attitude towards black Africans. Empathy for the blacks placed under the care of his Department, understanding of their plight, and a strong sense of fairness are revealed in his reports.

The head offices of the NRD in the two annexed territories were in Johannesburg and Bloemfontein. In both territories the senior staff included a chief and assistant superintendent, a chief camp inspector, a chief accountant, a chief storekeeper, a chief clerk and travelling paymasters. The support staff at the head offices included a few typists, clerks, messengers and servants. The pay of the NRD staff ranged from £60 per month for the chief superintendent to £2 per month for the black servants.¹¹

De Lotbinière himself, with the aid of his most senior staff members, inspected all camps on a monthly basis and reported important matters to the wartime administrators of the annexed territories. Monthly cash advances to cover the costs of the work of the NRD were made by these administrators, who in return received monthly accounts from De Lotbinière’s office. The

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8. See J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902, deel V* (Staatsargiefdiens, Pretoria, 1990), pp. 43:4-8 for details on some camps for blacks prior to the establishment of the NRD.
 9. NAR, MGP, vol. 222, ref. 8917, letter Gen. Maxwell (Military Governor, Transvaal Colony) - Kitchener, 25 July 1901.
 10. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 149.
 11. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the NRD of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 6; NAR, Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA), vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902. See also FSAR, CO, vol. 32, ref. 3078/01. Report by Major Henderson regarding taking over of refugee camps, 27 August 1901.

paymasters visited camps once a month to inspect books and stores, to pay salaries and other expenses, and to collect monies received from the blacks. With the approval of the British military command De Lotbinière implemented measures to make the black population of the camps more self-sufficient. The success of these measures is reflected by the fact that while the original estimates were that the cost of the camps would be 4,5 pence per head per day it was brought down to approximately two pence in the ORC¹² and less than one penny in the Transvaal.¹³ The total monthly cost to the British government of the NRD camps in May 1902 was £7 202 12s. 4d. in the ORC¹⁴ and £5 236 2s. 8d. in the Transvaal.¹⁵ The nett cost for the Transvaal NRD for the entire period of its existence from June 1901 to December 1902 was £57 590 15s. 2p.¹⁶

For the administrative purposes of the NRD the territories were divided into districts. Transvaal had four districts, one for each railway line. In the ORC the original three districts were later increased to six. Each district had a district inspector. These inspectors visited the camps in their districts at least twice a month and were also expected to keep in touch with military commanders and their requirements. The staff of each camp was headed by a camp superintendent, assisted in most cases by an assistant superintendent, clerks and issuers.¹⁷ Suitable staff for the black concentration camps were hard to find. De Lotbinière noted the scarcity of persons who would 'deal

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12. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
 13. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the NRD of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 5.
 14. FSAR, CO, vol. 78, ref. 2150/02: Report by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC for the month of May 1902, 3 Jul. 1902.
 15. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 5.
 16. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 7.
 17. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 6; NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.

honestly' with the blacks and understood their language and customs for appointment as camp and assistant superintendents.¹⁸

Initially the transportation of blacks to the camps was a major task of the NRD. At an average of about twenty families per ten ton truck thousands of blacks with their goods and sometimes even livestock had to be transported by railway carriage.¹⁹

A type of indirect rule system, in which language and ethnicity played a role, was introduced in the camps for blacks. Where feasible, camps were organised according to ethnicity and people speaking the same language were automatically grouped together. Evidence exists showing that groups such as the Zulu and Mfengu complained when they were mixed in the camps. Blacks in the camps had to choose their leader from the ranks of their chiefs or headmen.²⁰

3. Functions of the camps for blacks

The camps were alternatively called 'refugee camps' in official British sources and 'concentration camps' by many historians. Indeed, they reflected the characteristics of both refugee camps, it is to give protection to defenceless and vulnerable persons, and concentration camps, it is to concentrate the civilian population in order to prevent them from providing aid to enemy forces.

3.1 Accommodation of refugees

According to the official British version the camps for blacks were intended to protect black civilians. To some extent the function of providing refuge was indeed fulfilled by the camps. By mid-1900 the British military administration was faced with a black refugee problem in the war zone when an exodus of blacks from tribal areas and farms into municipal and government locations and even beyond the frontiers of the annexed Transvaal

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18. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
 19. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902. See also J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:19.
 20. FSAR, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01. Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 November 1901, 26 Nov. 1901. See also F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p. 80.

and Orange River Colony took place. The administrators could not simply turn them away and was faced with two immediate problems. The first was to alleviate hardship and destitution among those blacks whose livelihood had been destroyed by military operations. Secondly protection had to be given to black communities in danger of suffering at the hands of the Boer commandos for the assistance they had given to the British forces.²¹ Fear of the Boers existed among some black communities and urged them to seek refuge in British camps.²²

Most of the black refugees were accommodated in camps in the ORC and Transvaal, but some 20 000 were settled in Basotholand and Natal.²³

From the British side the humanitarian aspect of the camps was emphasised. Superintendent Strong of the Kafirfontein Native Refugee Camp wrote in his report for March 1901:

To have to leave their homes seems hard on the surface, but to be fed and sheltered and protected without remuneration amply atones for all.²⁴

The impression created by British official records that blacks were voluntarily flocking to the camps, is not entirely true. Many blacks in the rural areas, who would in normal conditions be able to provide for themselves, were made destitute by British military strategy and forced to find refuge in camps. Most of the camp inmates were not true refugees, but were swept off the land against their will. Therefore, the suggestion that the camps for blacks had a humanitarian purpose is refuted in some circles.²⁵

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21. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 146. See also Charlotte Searle, *The history of the development of nursing in South Africa* (Struik, Cape Town, 1965), p. 211.
 22. Various interviews conducted by the Institute for Advanced Social Research (IASR) at Witwatersrand University reflect this. See those with Rebecca Mogoai, 6 Nov. 1979, ref. 012; Motshubelwe Moloko, 20 Nov. 1979, ref. 013; T.R. Mmolotsi, 13 Apr. 1980, ref. 027; Jim Madiga Nkadameng, 22 Oct. 1979, ref. 011. According to Sophie Skhosana, 21 Oct. 1979, ref. 010 blacks referred to the Boers as "that cruel tribe". It must be stated, however, that these interviews were conducted more than 70 years after the war and that the memories of the interviewees regarding the war were evidently vague.
 23. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 157-8.
 24. Cited in J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:7.
 25. S.V. KESSLER, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, pp. 2-3.

3.2 Concentration and control of the black population

Kitchener found it necessary to deny the Boer commandos support by internment of the rural civilian population, whites as well as blacks, in camps. In terms of military strategy these camps should be called 'concentration camps' rather than 'refugee camps'.²⁶ They were intended to concentrate the population in order to control them efficiently. Kessler argues that Kitchener formed the NRD for the express purpose of putting the black population under military control.²⁷ This viewpoint is confirmed by archival records such as the following statement by General Maxwell, the Military Governor of the Transvaal Colony, in July 1901:

If ploughing and cultivation of mealies and Kaffir Corn is generally to be stopped, except within our immediate lines, and under our supervision there will be a famine, and natives will be forced to come in - especially the natives kraaled on Boer farms.²⁸

The aspect of population control was explicitly stated by De Lotbinière in his refusal to grant permission to black families to leave the camps to go to Johannesburg to live with their relatives.²⁹

During the scorched earth phase of the war huge sweeps of the countryside were made by the British forces in order to clear it of all inhabitants. Those rounded up during these sweeps were transported to camps where they were interned for the remainder of the war. When he issued orders on 21 December 1900 that all districts were to be cleared of inhabitants, Kitchener ruled that his columns were to bring in only those blacks who were living on

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26. See P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p.167.
27. S.V. Kessler, "A shilling a day: the impact of the South African War on the black family", paper, SA Historical Society conference, Pretoria, July 1997, p. 18.
28. NAR, MGP, vol. 222, ref. 8917, letter Maxwell-Kitchener, 25 July 1901.
29. NAR, SNA, vol. 29, ref. 1088. Letter, G.F. de Lotbinière cited in S.V. Kessler, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, p. 6.

Boer farms.³⁰ However, at the start of the intensive drives in January 1901, blacks were removed not only from Boer farms but from their kraals, villages and even mission stations.³¹ In the course of that year the burning of kraals by British columns became a standard practice.³²

Blacks were forcefully removed and concentrated in the camps in terms of British military strategy mainly for three reasons.³³

3.3. Prevention of assistance to Boer commandos

Kitchener's strategy was to make the countryside an unfavourable environment in which the Boer commandos could not carry out their military activities against the British army. This was to be achieved by removing every living person, animal and sustenance giving plant from the veld. In this context black families were confined in camps to prevent them from giving information, cattle, foodstuffs or any other aid to the Boer commandos.³⁴

3.4. Labour supply

Another function of the camps for blacks was to have a pool of labour available to supply in the needs of the British war effort.

When the British troops occupied Johannesburg in June 1900 the gold mines were temporarily closed. Most of the 15 000 black mine workers who were guarding and maintaining the Rand mines at that stage were enlisted by the

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30. S.B. SPIES, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer republics January 1900-May 1902*, pp. 227-8. See NAR, SNA, Kitchener's confidential circular memorandum no. 29, 21 Dec. 1900 cited in J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:2 and S.V. KESSLER, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, pp. 2-3.
 31. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 204; C. SAUNDERS (Consultant ed.), *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa: the real story* (The Reader's Digest Association, Cape Town, 1988), p. 256.
 32. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 149-50; F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p. 80.
 33. S.V. KESSLER, researcher, interview with B.E. Mongalo, Bloemfontein, 16 May 1996; Col. F.J. Jacobs, Director of the War Museum of the Boer Republics, interview with J.A. du Pisani, Bloemfontein, 23 September 1996.
 34. N. KANHEMA, "How Boer War historians tore out the page on blacks", *Saturday Star*, 14 September 1996. Kessler views Kitchener's anti-guerrilla military strategy as the primary motive for the establishment of both white and black concentration camps. See S.V. KESSLER, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, p. 3.

British army or recruited to work for the Imperial Military Railways. This re-employment was done on the understanding that as soon as the mines were allowed to resume work, black mine labourers would be returned to their former jobs. When gold production was resumed Kitchener issued instructions in June 1901 that former mineworkers had to be discharged from the army. At this point black concentration camps became a crucial source of labour for the British army. The main incentive for the establishment of the NRD, which occurred precisely at this time, was to recruit labourers in the camps in order for the miners who were engaged in military service to be released to mines as initially agreed.³⁵

The NRD considered the supply of black labour to the British army as its first priority.³⁶ Departments requiring labour from the camps for blacks in the Transvaal had to apply to the Army Labour Depot in Johannesburg or in the case of the ORC to the Chief Superintendent of the NRD in Bloemfontein.³⁷ The NRD achieved remarkable success in replacing the workers who had returned to the mines. Most black men in the camps were channelled into paid labour for the British army and by the end of April 1902 over 13 000 blacks were on the pay roll of the British military in the Transvaal and the ORC.³⁸

A wage of one shilling a day plus rations was paid to those who accepted military employment. In addition their families in the camps could buy mealies at half cost price. Black workers were paid in full, with no deductions being made. Monies for the maintenance of their families were recovered by their respective Camp Superintendents. Monthly returns of wages paid were sent by employers to the Chief Superintendents of the NRD.³⁹

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35. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 1. See also J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:1.
 36. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 204; P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p.150.
 37. FSAR, CO, vol. 29A, ref. 2758/01. AG circular memorandum no. 50: Cultivation of crops, etc., by native refugees, 12 August 1901 (signed by Major-General W.F. Kelly, Army Headquarters, Pretoria).
 38. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 204; P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 150; F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p. 78.
 39. FSAR, CO, vol. 35, ref. 3377/01. NRD ORC: Government notice to employers of native refugee labour, 20 September 1901.

Many of the blacks in military service were engaged in local defence works and stayed with their families in the camps. Workers who were obliged to leave the camps for military employment elsewhere were enlisted for three months at a time to enable them to return to their families in the camps at intervals.⁴⁰ To ensure their continued support of their families in the camps the Deputy Administrator of the ORC gave instructions that a standard wage of 30 shillings a month be paid and that 20 shillings be deducted to defray the cost of feeding their families.⁴¹ This arrangement applied only between June and September 1901.⁴²

Black labour from the concentration camps was not supplied only to the army, but also to private employers in the neighbourhood of the camps. Those blacks in the camps whose labour was not needed by the military, were provided with jobs such as sanitary workers, cultivators, watchmen or messengers by individuals or groups of business people.⁴³

Black women and children were also employed. In the ORC the NRD opened a register for female servants, for which there was a great demand in Bloemfontein.⁴⁴ In some cases black children in private employment were separated from their families. In Johannesburg an agency was opened to employ black children in domestic work and 276 boys and 133 girls found work in this way.⁴⁵ Black girls were needed as servants to work in places such as the Caledonian Hotel in Johannesburg. Girls from different camps were employed under very strict conditions regarding their transport and

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40. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 1. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 149; F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p.80.
 41. FSAR, SRC, vol. 8, ref. 2268/01, letter Deputy Administrator ORC-Chief Superintendent NRD, ORC, 31 May 1901 cited in S.V. KESSLER, "A shilling a day: the impact of the South African War on the black family", paper, SA Historical Society conference, University of Pretoria, July 1997, p. 17.
 42. J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43-12.
 43. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 150.
 44. FSAR, CO, vol. 78, ref. 2150/02, Report by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC, May 1902, 3 Jul. 1902. For regulations regarding the employment of servants see NAR, SNA, vol. 8, ref. NA 1008/02.
 45. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 3.

registration in order to guarantee their safety and reunification with their families.⁴⁶

The number of black refugees in employment reached its highest level in May 1902. The employment figure for Transvaal camps in that month was 10 052 (8 207 men, 955 women and 890 children), which constituted 18 per cent of the total camp population of 55 696. Of these 6 703 were in the employment of the British government outside the camps, 2 214 were in private employment and 1 135 were employed in the camps.⁴⁷ In the ORC camps the employment figure was 6 934 (6 382 men, 310 women and 242 children), 11,6 per cent of the total camp population. Of them 5 312 were in government employment, 374 in private employment and 1 248 were employed in the camps.⁴⁸

Paid employment of blacks in the camps benefited both the British authorities and the blacks who found employment. It was in accordance with the policy of self-sufficiency of the camps. When he initially ordered in December 1900 that black refugees be channelled into paid employment by the army Kitchener stated that this would enable them to support themselves and their families.⁴⁹

Poverty propelled blacks to accept work with the British army. The disruption of the migrant labour system at the outbreak of the war temporarily deprived many blacks of an income. The return to the rural areas of thousands of men normally absent at work increased the pressure on food resources. In the overpopulated districts of Zululand and the Transkei, where the war was accompanied by a drought and meagre harvest yields, famine rapidly spread. For starving blacks the war was a blessing in disguise. In order to alleviate the destitute circumstances of their families many men enrolled as military workers with the British army.⁵⁰

3.5. Food supply

Another purpose of the camps for blacks was to cultivate crops for the camp population and the British army. Food supply was an important aspect of the

46. NAR, SNA, vol. 8, ref. NA 1008/02, Circular no. 46, 30 April 1902, Instructions re native servant girls.

47. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 3.

48. FSAR, CO, vol. 78, ref. 2150/02, Report on the Native Refugee Camps in the ORC for the month of May 1902 by Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 3 July 1902.

49. Cited by Kessler in N. KANHEMA, "How Boer War historians tore out the page on blacks", *Saturday Star*, 14 September 1996.

50. S.V. KESSLER, interview, 16 May 1996.

camp administration. Needy blacks in the camps, particularly women without husbands and children without fathers, were able to draw free rations of mealie meal at the rate of 1,5 pounds per day for those over twelve years of age and one pound for those under twelve years of age. This was supplemented by small weekly rations of meat, coffee and sugar.⁵¹ A quarter ounce of salt per head per day was supplied free of charge to the entire camp population, while milk was later provided at the recommendation of the doctors who periodically visited the black camps. At first food supply was rather precarious, but it was gradually placed on a sounder basis with some reserve on hand.⁵²

Blacks who were employed or who had financial support had to buy their own food in the camps. There were complaints that they, who were the 'children of the government', had to pay for their food, while the Boers were fed free of charge in the concentration camps.⁵³ However, the purchase price of mealie meal was only a penny per pound, less than half cost, but restricted to half a bag at a time. Some of the blacks could afford war-time luxuries such as sugar, tea, coffee, syrup, corned beef, candles, matches and tobacco. Stores were opened which sold these items at cost price.⁵⁴ That such articles were for sale had the additional benefits of improving the health situation in the camps and serving as an incentive to paid labour.⁵⁵

Self-sufficiency was the rule in the black camps. It was according to De Lotbinière the purpose of the NRD to encourage the population of the camps to be self-sufficient in order to

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51. ORC ration scales cited in J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevallen van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:9.
 52. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
 53. FSAR, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01, Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 November 1901, 26 Nov. 1901. J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevallen van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:26 cites a complaint by Rev. Robert Matterson that blacks in the camps were treated less generously than Boers.
 54. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
 55. F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, pp.80-1.

avoid a heavy expenditure in relief, which may tend to create a spirit of laziness, and a pauperising of the natives.⁵⁶

He proposed a scheme to allow camp inmates to cultivate crops for their own consumption. It was approved by Kitchener in August 1901 and announced in two circular memorandums (nos. 44 and 50) issued by the Adjutant General's office.⁵⁷ The purpose was to enable

all native refugee families to grow sufficient grain for their own maintenance.⁵⁸

In some cases, especially in the ORC, this scheme necessitated splitting and shifting camps from larger towns to protected rural areas along the railway lines in order to bring blacks nearer to suitable cultivable lands. Large areas in the immediate neighbourhood of camps, in many cases deserted farms, were set aside for cultivation, which was a task left to women and children and those men considered unfit for army labour. Thus it did not interfere with the function of the camps to supply labour to the army. Each family was entitled to three acres of land for cultivation, which was done in the traditional way with picks and hoes. A few ploughs were supplied to each camp. It was made clear that the black cultivators would have the full benefit of the crops raised, but no claim to the land temporarily made use of.⁵⁹

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56. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902. G.H. Beak, cited in J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902, deel V*, p. 43:8, referred to the crop cultivation scheme as "an honest attempt to inculcate the principle of self-help, and to teach the Kaffir the dignity of labour".
 57. FSAR, CO, vol. 29A, ref. 2758/01, AG circular memorandum no. 50: Cultivation of crops, etc., by native refugees, 12 August 1901 (signed by Major-General W.F. Kelly, Army Headquarters, Pretoria). See also FSAR, CO, vol. 29, ref. 2758/01, Native Refugee Camps: Papers relating to Commander-in-chief's instructions that they be made self-supporting as far as possible by growing mealies.
 58. FSAR, CO, vol. 35, ref. 3377/01. Native Refugee Department ORC. Government notice to employers of Native Refugee labour, 20 September 1901.
 59. FSAR, CO, vol. 29A, ref. 2758/01, AG circular memorandum no. 50: Cultivation of crops, etc., by native refugees, 12 August 1901 (signed by Major-General W.F. Kelly, Army Headquarters, Pretoria). See also FSAR, CO, vol. 29, ref. 2738/01, Files relating to the shifting of camps for cultivation purposes; NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 4.

In spite of the drought of 1902 and initial difficulties in obtaining suitable land and cattle for ploughing, and in explaining the benefits of the cultivation scheme to the blacks to persuade them to participate, it was relatively successful. In many camps the scheme yielded a surplus production, which was sold to the military lower than the market price at a fixed 'kaffir price'.⁶⁰ Potatoes, pumpkins and fodder crops were produced to supplement British army supplies, while maize and sorghum (then called kaffir corn) were grown for black consumption. Nearly a third of the yield of the black camps was supplied to the army and the rest was consumed in the camps.⁶¹

De Lotbinière estimated the value of the crops produced under the NRD cultivation scheme in the 1902 season at £70 000 in the ORC alone, and at a further £100 000 for the black reserve Thaba Nchu, where a farming project was run with British assistance.⁶² If these estimates were correct the value of the crops produced would cover all the costs of the British administration with regard to the running of the camps for blacks. However, De Lotbinière's estimates were in all probability too optimistic. The official figures for the Transvaal camps for that season in the Transvaal Administration Reports reflected a yield valued at £13 000.⁶³

The availability of food supplies made the black camps a target for Boer raids. For protection armed black groups were organised to patrol crops and livestock at night. Despite this various successful raids were carried out by Boer commandos. The arming of blacks to protect their camps was eventually discontinued by the British, as it seemed to be inviting more Boer raids. By the end of the war there were 850 pickets engaged in guarding the black concentration camps.⁶⁴

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60. N. KANHEMA, "How Boer War historians tore out the page on blacks", *Saturday Star*, 14 September 1996, p. 13.
61. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 155; F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p. 81; J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, pp. 43:28-9.
62. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
63. Cited in J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:41.
64. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 155; C. SAUNDERS (Consultant ed.), *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa: the real story*, p. 256.

4. Conditions in the Black concentration camps

Because of a lack of sources, it is almost impossible to accurately reconstruct life in the camps for blacks or the impact it had on black communities. Apart from the occasional reports on conditions in the camps by camp inspectors and health reports by visiting doctors, almost no contemporary records on the daily routine or conditions in the camps for blacks exist. This is in contrast with the abundance of diaries and memoirs reflecting the experiences of Boer women in concentration camps during the war. The mostly illiterate black inmates of the camps could not record their own experiences and whites did not pay much attention to the plight of blacks in the camps. Emily Hobhouse, who exposed the bad conditions in the white camps, never visited a camp for blacks. Even the representatives of the Society of Friends who visited the camps overlooked the real plight of the inmates in their report.⁶⁵

Being in charge of the NRD it was De Lotbinière's intention to create

as near normal conditions (in the camps) as the military state of the country would permit.⁶⁶

He believed that if a 'compound system' was introduced and everything that the blacks might require, especially food and clothing, was provided at as near cost price as possible it would help to keep the blacks together in the camps.⁶⁷

NRD inspectors were mainly concerned that good order should be maintained in the camps. The impression is created in their reports that blacks in the camps were content and well cared for. Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent of Native Refugees in the ORC, claimed after a tour of inspection in January 1902 that blacks wanted to stay in the camps for as long as they were permitted.⁶⁸

This positive evaluation of the black camps seems to be confirmed by the report of William Alexander and Lawrence Richardson on behalf of the

65. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 146.

66. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.

67. *Ibid.*

68. FSAR, CO, vol. 54, ref. 326/02. Report to Major De Lotbinière on tour of inspection through native refugee camps in January 1902 by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 3 Feb. 1902. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 155.

Society of Friends, which stated that conditions in the camps regarding health, labour and education were satisfactory.⁶⁹

Blacks were seemingly grateful for the protection afforded them in the camps against starvation and Boer assaults. The Cape-based South African Native Congress later thanked the Imperial Government for protecting, housing and feeding blacks in the concentration camps.⁷⁰

Conditions in some of the less crowded camps seem to have been satisfactory indeed. However, missionaries who visited the camps, and viewed them from a humanitarian rather than a military point of view, did not arrive at the same happy conclusion as the officials. Reverend W.H.R. Brown who visited the black camp at Dryharts in the Northern Cape remarked that the blacks in the camp had lost everything and were living in great poverty and misery. No political party was interested in their destiny.⁷¹

In a few cases protests by the camp inmates about conditions in the camps were recorded. Desertion, which occurred despite police supervision of the camps, was a form of protest.⁷² In the ORC camps a total of 522 desertions were recorded to the end of the war in May 1902.⁷³

What was daily life in the camps like? In an interview Phillip Mokgong Masike disclosed that the daily routine of blacks in the camps was to wake up early in the morning and go to work for their masters. They built houses with bricks they made of clay mixed with dung.⁷⁴ According to Motshubelwe Moloko men were made to load wagons with stones from the mountains and had to pull the loaded wagons themselves. With the stones they built fences around the camps of the Boers for security purposes. Black women often did cleaning and washing jobs in Boer camps.⁷⁵

69. Cited in P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 146.

70. Cited in P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 146.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

72. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 156-7. See also FSAR, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01. Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 Nov. 1901, 26 Nov. 1901.

73. FSAR, CO, vol. 78, ref. 2150/02: Report by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC, May 1902, 3 Jul. 1902.

74. P.M. MASIKE, interview, IASR, Wits, OHP, 24 February 1980, ref. 22, tape 150A.

75. M. MOLOKO, interview, IASR, Wits, OHP, 20 November 1979, ref. 13, tape 165B.

These interviews and other information seem to indicate that the life of the black people in the camps was the typical life of a manual labourer in the case of men and either a domestic servant or a crop cultivator in the case of women. In all probability the camp authorities were instructed to see to it that the camp inmates did not become idle, as this might lead to restlessness and trouble.

Despite De Lotbinière's pledge to create 'normal conditions', the lives of the camp population were inevitably disrupted in the abnormal environment of the camps. This becomes clear when statistics and information regarding deaths and births are studied.

The main causes of death were linked to the appalling conditions in the overcrowded camps. De Lotbinière listed a shortage of milk, insufficiency of housing, and difficulty of the blacks to acclimatize as the main causes of the high death rate.⁷⁶ The camps were hastily put up, which frequently resulted in insanitary conditions. Kessler alleges that black war victims were in some cases deliberately denied shelter and assistance by the British.⁷⁷ Huts and tents, often made of grain bags, were not only too close to each other, but were inadequate at affording protection against wind and weather, because materials for roofing were scarce. Water, often scarce, was at times polluted and there was a shortage of firewood.⁷⁸

The diet of blacks, who were usually in a bad physical state when they arrived, lacked fresh vegetables and milk. Rations in the black camps were

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76. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
 77. Cited in N. KANHEMA, "How Boer War historians tore out the page on blacks", *Saturday Star*, 14 September 1996. See also S.V. KESSLER, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, p. 13.
 78. Problems regarding housing, water and fuel are reflected in NRD reports. See e.g. FSAR, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01. Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 Nov. 1901, 26 Nov. 1901; FSAR, CO, vol. 54, ref. 326/02. Report to Major De Lotbinière on tour of inspection through native refugee camps in January 1902 by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 3 Feb. 1902. See also P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902.*, p. 205; P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 152; F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p. 81; C. SAUNDERS (Consultant ed.), *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa: the real story*, pp.256-7; J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, pp. 43:33-4.

poorer and smaller than those issued in white camps, since blacks were expected to be self-supporting. Early in 1902 in the Orange River Colony the average daily ration of a white camp inmate cost 8.5 pence, while the equivalent cost for a black was 4.5 pence.⁷⁹ Lack of hygienic meat was another problem and it was reported that much of the illness was caused by eating rinderpest carcasses.⁸⁰

In the early stages of the existence of the NRD medical services were almost non-existent. Military doctors were expected to visit the black camps twice a week and received £1 1s. per inspection. Medicines were issued free of charge to the ill.⁸¹ Sometimes medical visits were much more infrequent. In February 1902 it was reported that blacks had not been visited by a doctor for over a month at Roodewal in the Orange River Colony.⁸² This was understandable considering the small number of doctors available. By the end of the war there were only 19 doctors to attend to more than 60 000 blacks in the ORC camps. Compared to the white camps the black camps were neglected in this regard. Medical care was given to blacks when doctors in the white camps had time and were paid extra for their service in the black concentration camps.⁸³

As in the white camps, the mortality rate in the black camps rose alarmingly in the latter half of 1901. Whereas mortality in white camps fell after October 1901, half of the deaths in the black camps occurred in the three months between November 1901 and January 1902. December 1901 was the worst month with 2 831 deaths recorded. This represented a mortality rate of 380 per 1 000 per year, exceeding the highest figure for white deaths recorded in

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79. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 153; Saunders, p. 256; J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, pp. 43:36-7.
 80. FAD, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01. Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 November 1901, 26 Nov. 1901. See also J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:10 citing a letter of 13 March 1901 by the Medical Officer of Health Transvaal to the Military Governor Pretoria.
 81. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
 82. FSAR, CO, vol. 54, ref. 326/02. Report to Major De Lotbinière on tour of inspection through native refugee camps in January 1902 by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 3 Feb. 1902. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 152
 83. *Sunday Times*, 13 August 1995; N. KANHEMA, "How Boer War historians tore out the page on blacks", *Saturday Star*, 14 September 1996, p. 13.

October 1901 at 344 per 1 000 per year.⁸⁴ It was nevertheless not regarded as excessive by NRD officials.⁸⁵

Though official figures are incomplete, they indicate that at least 14 154 blacks died in the concentration camps compared to a figure of 27 927 deaths in white camps.⁸⁶ Kessler estimates that, if those blacks who died in camps before the establishment of the NRD and after the signing of the peace agreement are added to this number, the actual death figure for blacks in camps and at work sites was closer to 20 000.⁸⁷ As was the case with whites, the majority of victims, more than 11 000 or about 80%, were children. Most of the rest were old people.⁸⁸

The general insanitary condition of the country that resulted from the devastating nature of the war, together with severe epidemics contributed to many deaths. Whether and to what extent plans to vaccinate all the blacks in the camps were put into practice, is not quite clear from archival records.⁸⁹ It was claimed by the NRD that epidemics of chicken pox, measles and dysentery were responsible for most deaths. Official death lists exist for some camps, in which the causes of death of the deceased are stated. Close scrutiny of those death rolls which are available seems to indicate that pneumonia (particularly in the cold winter months) and dysentery were the major causes

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84. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 151-2. See also F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p. 81.
 85. Report by Captain Fox, NRD superintendent in the ORC, cited in *Sunday Times*, 13 August 1995. See also J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, pp. 43:36-7.
 86. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 204; P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 145; See also the figures in T. PAKENHAM, *The Boer War* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1979), p. 573.
 87. Reported in *Beeld*, 30 January 1997. See also S.V. KESSLER, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, p. 14.
 88. *Sunday Times*, 13 August 1995. See P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 152.
 89. S.V. KESSLER, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, p. 8.

of death. Although it was high on NRD lists of causes of death measles did not cause as many deaths among blacks as among whites in the camps.⁹⁰

When the high mortality rate in the camps became known the Aborigines Protection Society of London suggested that a committee of South African ladies should be appointed to visit the camps and report on them. This suggestion was not accepted by the British government.⁹¹ However, because of the alarmingly high death rate, the NRD was forced to improve the conditions of the camps during the final months of the war. Superintending doctors were appointed to travel from camp to camp for sanitary inspection and to supervise the improvement of medical treatment.⁹² The largest black camps were split up and their population dispersed over a wider area in order to improve sanitary conditions and prevent the unmanageable spread of diseases. Attention was paid to improving the diet of blacks in the camps. Free rationing was extended in order to regularly supply fresh milk. More nutrients were introduced into the diet through the issue of tinned milk, bovril and cornflour. These measures helped to reduce the number of deaths and by April 1902 the death rate had been brought under control.⁹³

The war affected the natural increase of the population in that the number of deaths increased and the number of births declined. NRD reports reveal the

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90. FSAR, Chief Superintendent of Refugee Camps ORC (SRC), vol. 99. Weekly death rolls of NRD camps in the ORC. In an IASR interview (24 Feb. 1980, ref. 022) Phillip Mokgong Masike stated that people died in the camps from "headaches" and "stomach aches". According to Kessler, "The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)", address at Anglo-Boer War exposition, Kimberley, 10 October 1996, p. 8 pneumonia, typhoid and diarrhoea were the main causes of death. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 152; J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:37; B. FETTER and S. KESSLER, "Scars from a childhood disease", *Social Science History* 20(4) Winter 1996, p. 601.
 91. N. DEVITT, *The concentration camps in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902* (Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1941), p. 21.
 92. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902. See also FSAR, SRC, vol. 17, ref. RC6721 and RC6777.
 93. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 153; S.B. SPIES, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer republics January 1900-May 1902*, pp. 228-30; Saunders, p. 256. See J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, pp. 43:38-9 for statistics regarding the drop in the death rate.

discrepancy in the number of births and deaths. The NRD report for the ORC for January 1902 shows that compared to 1 542 deaths only 50 births occurred in black camps, thus more than 30 times more deaths than births.⁹⁴ When the death rate was brought under control this ratio improved. In May 1902 a total of 233 deaths and 82 births were recorded in the ORC camps. Up to the end of the war a total of 7 328 deaths and 534 births were recorded in camps for blacks in the ORC, about 14 times as many deaths as births.⁹⁵ In the Transvaal camps 6 345 deaths and 649 births were recorded between June 1901 and October 1902.⁹⁶

Education and training did not receive much attention in the camps. In wartime documents mention is made of teaching black camp inmates English and religion and of the establishment of workshops in the camps for different tasks such as carpentry and shoemaking.⁹⁷ However, De Lotbinière was opposed to opening schools in the camps when peace was concluded. In reply to a proposal in this regard by the wartime Director of Education in the Transvaal and the ORC he wrote to the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Sir Godfrey Lagden, that attempts to establish schools would be hardly worthwhile in the light of the temporary nature of the camps. In his view the introduction of a new element in the camps in the form of schoolmasters and clergymen would unsettle the NRD's system of control and weaken the hands of the camp superintendents.⁹⁸ Lagden agreed with De Lotbinière in this regard.⁹⁹

Prior to April 1902 black men and women in many camps could not legally marry, as there was no marriage officer to solemnise such marriages. After William Nathaniel Somngesi, an ordained minister of the Methodist Church and resident in the black camp at Eensgevonden (near Brandfort), had applied for permission to do so, the matter started to receive attention. Somngesi was

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94. FSAR, CO, vol. 57, ref. 586/02. Native Refugee Department ORC, Return for month of January 1902.
 95. FSAR, CO, vol. 78, ref. 2150/02: Report by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC, May 1902, 3 Jul. 1902.
 96. Statistics cited in J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:40. Ploeger discusses the possibility that all births in the camps were not officially recorded.
 97. NAR, SNA, vol. 7, ref. NA 609/02. Rev. Gel's application for transfer from Middelburg to Belfast.
 98. NAR, SNA, vol. 8, ref. NA 1037/02. Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière/Sir Godfrey Lagden, 17 May 1902.
 99. J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:42.

not appointed (probably because he was a black person), but the superintendent of the NRD in the ORC, Captain F. Wilson Fox, recommended that the district inspectors of black camps in the colony be appointed as marriage officers.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately no further information on how marriages were handled in black camps is available.

5 Dismantling the Concentration camp system after the war

5.1 Repatriation of the Blacks

The main task facing the British administration in dismantling the camps for blacks after the declaration of peace, was the repatriation of the more than 115 000 people in the camps in the shortest possible space of time. After the conclusion of peace the Transvaal and ORC were transformed into British crown colonies and their government was transferred to a civil administration. The NRD continued to exist for some time and was responsible for the repatriation of blacks from its camps and the dismantling of the camps, but it ceased to be a military department and fell under the authority of the new civil administration. It was to be disbanded as soon as it had completed these functions, which were performed in consultation with the Native Affairs Departments of the Transvaal and ORC.

De Lotbinière wished to

get all natives with their families away from my camps as soon as possible.¹⁰¹

He set 1 September as target for the repatriation of as many blacks as possible, because that was the commencement of the season for sowing

100. FSAR, CO, vol. 62, ref. 935/02: Necessity of the appointment of marriage officers for Native Refugee Camps. Correspondence W.N. Somngesi/H.F. Wilson, Secretary ORC Administration, 2 Apr. 1902; Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC/Secretary ORC Administration, 15 April 1902; Assistant Secretary ORC Administration/W.N. Somngesi, 30 April 1902 with accompanying notes on file.

101. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:39 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 18 July 1902.

crops.¹⁰² He planned to close a number of NRD camps at the beginning of September and stop supplying mealies to blacks at a reduced rate.¹⁰³

In order to arrange the repatriation in an orderly fashion De Lotbinière issued circulars during June and July 1902 in which he explained the repatriation principles and procedures to his subordinates. Blacks were not to be allowed to leave the camps on their own initiative without official authorisation.¹⁰⁴ Repatriation forms with details about themselves, their proposed employment, their property and compensation claims would be given to each family leaving the camps.¹⁰⁵

Blacks who had formerly resided in towns were to be repatriated at once. Those who found employment in towns or the mines could leave with their families provided they had authority from the police or the resident magistrate of the district of their destination.¹⁰⁶ Blacks who had come from tribal areas could apply to return to their former reserves and chiefs.¹⁰⁷

The majority of black people in the concentration camps had before the war lived on white farms.¹⁰⁸ From the outset one of the NRD's objectives was to preserve former farm labourers as far as possible for the farming industry by encouraging them to return to the farms instead of going to any other employment and to town locations at the end of the war. Plans were prepared for the rapid repatriation of blacks to farms after the war, so that the agricultural recovery of the annexed republics could be achieved in the

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102. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:38 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 12 July 1902.
 103. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:39 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 18 July 1902.
 104. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:38 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 12 July 1902.
 105. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:39 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 18 July 1902.
 106. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:39 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 18 July 1902.
 107. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:38 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 12 July 1902.
 108. D. DENOON, "Participation in the 'Boer War': people's war, people's non-war, or non-people's war?", B.A. OGOT, (ed.) *War and Society in Africa*, pp. 115-6.

shortest possible time.¹⁰⁹ It was, however, stated by De Lotbinière that repatriation to particular farms should not be forced upon either the workers or the farmers.¹¹⁰

There were mixed feelings among black workers on the question of returning to farms.¹¹¹ Some were readily willing to go back to their former employers.¹¹² Others were frightened because of their assistance to the British forces during the war. However, those who had taken an active part in the war were provided for in government employment.¹¹³ Those whose former employers had treated them badly also did not want to go back. De Lotbinière emphasised that good relations between farmers and their employees should be fostered. He impressed upon his subordinates that those blacks, who hoped that the British government would restore to them their old black reserves, should be made to clearly understand that the British government did not intend to give them land of their own.¹¹⁴

De Lotbinière considered various options regarding blacks who could not return to their former employers on farms. They could be settled either on government farms or on crown land placed at the disposal of the NRD or on farms owned by mining companies. Otherwise arrangements would have to

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109. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 7; NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.
 110. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:38 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 12 July 1902.
 111. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 7.
 112. FSAR, CO, vol. 114, ref. 5079/02. Report on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC for the month of September 1902 by Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 7 Nov. 1902.
 113. FSAR, CO, vol. 105, ref. 4316/02. Report to the Lieutenant Governor, ORC on the Native Refugee Camps in the ORC for the month of August 1902 by Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 7 Oct. 1902.
 114. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:38 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 12 July 1902. See J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:45-6 for more details on the relationship between blacks and Boers after the war.

be made with the owners of the farms on which the remaining camps were located to maintain the camps for some time.¹¹⁵

Only limited options were open to blacks when the concentration camps were dismantled. They either had to go back to their former employers, find other employers or allow the Native Refugee Department to make arrangements for them to get new employers.¹¹⁶

In the programme of rural reconstruction after the war blacks were once again on the wrong side of discriminatory treatment. Rehabilitation of white agriculture was given first priority. In the Transvaal £1 183 594 was spent by the Repatriation Department to supply seeds, implements, livestock and transport to Boer farmers, while only £16 194 was spent on black rural resettlement.¹¹⁷

Among the tasks which faced the British administrators when repatriation started were the rebuilding of kraals, the preparation of land for cultivation, and the supply of transport and food. Repatriation was such a large operation that the danger existed that the Imperial Fund might be exhausted by the helpless blacks.¹¹⁸

Initially farmers were obliged to apply to the black camps for labour, but this process was speeded up by allowing blacks to make their own arrangements with employers. Transport was very limited, although many farmers assisted by sending wagons for the transportation of their employees. Blacks had insufficient food to last until the next season's crops could be harvested. Grain depots were established and in addition to the grain grown by blacks in the camps, they were permitted to buy up to three months supply of grain at

115. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Letter, Major G.F. De Lotbinière/W. Windham, Secretary for Native Affairs, Johannesburg, 23 July 1902.

116. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:39 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 18 July 1902. See also NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 7.

117. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 206.

118. D. DENOON, "Participation in the 'Boer War': people's war, people's non-war, or non-people's war?", B.A. ODOT, (ed.) *War and Society in Africa*, pp.115-6.

7s. 6d. per bag. The price was later increased to £1 per bag due to the high demand for grain.¹¹⁹

After the end of the war it took some time for repatriation to get under way. The demobilization of blacks who were employed by the army when hostilities were ceased resulted in a temporary increase in the number of blacks in the camps.¹²⁰ However, in spite of the initial unwillingness of many blacks to leave the camps, repatriation soon gained momentum and was completed fairly rapidly.

In the ORC only 640 blacks were repatriated in June 1902 and 164 in July. The number of blacks remaining in the camps was still 57 800 at the end of July. From August repatriation was speeded up. This is reflected by the following statistics: August 1902 - 9 866 repatriated and 47 934 remaining in the camps; September 1902 - 11 385 repatriated and 36 549 remaining; October 1902 - 12 966 repatriated and 23 583 remaining; November 1902 - 8 936 repatriated and 14 647 remaining; December 1902 - 9 679 repatriated and 4 968 remaining. Repatriation of blacks in the Orange River Colony was completed in January 1903.¹²¹

In the Transvaal the following number of blacks were repatriated month by month: July 1902 - 6 598; August - 23 647; September - 9 562; October - 4 137; November - 2 952. Over half of the blacks in the camps had been repatriated by the end of August 1902 and by November only 3 000 remained to be resettled.¹²²

119. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, pp. 7-8. See P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 159.

120. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p.159.

121. FSAR, CO, vol. 149, ref. 1652/03. Statement shewing number of natives repatriated during the eight months - 1st June, 1902, to 31st January, 1903. See also FSAR, CO, vol. 105, ref. 4316/02. Report to the Lieutenant Governor, ORC on the Native Refugee Camps in the ORC for the month of August 1902 by Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 7 Oct. 1902; FSAR, CO, vol. 114, ref. 5079/02. Report to the Lieutenant Governor, ORC on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC for September 1902 by Capt. F.Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC/Lieutenant Governor, ORC, 7 November 1902. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 159.

122. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 8. See P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 159.

Difficulties were experienced with the repatriation of refugees in Natal. During the war blacks who had come from the ORC and Transvaal were allowed to occupy land along the foot of the Drakensberg mountains. The Native Affairs Department of Natal formed a Native Refugee Department with a superintendent and black mounted policemen to control and protect these refugees. Many of these refugees had cattle and they were allowed to cultivate land on their own initiative. After the war the NRD issued written instructions for their repatriation.¹²³ To avoid an unmanageable movement of blacks from Natal into the ORC the administration insisted that applications for repatriation passes had to be made directly to the civil administration. Because these blacks were denied the opportunity to make their own arrangements with employers, their repatriation proceeded more slowly than in the ORC and Transvaal. Many of them refused to return until all their crops had been harvested and they were permitted to stay to the end of the season. At the end of 1902 a total of 1 149 refugees in Natal still remained to be resettled and their repatriation was only completed almost a year later. A number of them appear to have settled permanently in Natal.¹²⁴

During November 1902 the NRD was notified that the British government had decided that its camps would cease to be financed by the War Office on 31 December 1902 and that all the camps should be dismantled by that date. NRD staff were to be given notice that their employment by the NRD would cease from the end of the year.¹²⁵

Blacks without refuge, for whom no other provision could be made, would be temporarily settled in one or two small camps. Early in the repatriation process De Lotbinière had referred to difficulties to resettle a considerable number of families left destitute owing to their male relatives having died or disappeared.¹²⁶ These people had no employment and no refuge. It is not clear what became of them after the termination of the NRD.

Due to a lack of transport and rations the NRD could not quite meet the government's deadline.¹²⁷ The Native Affairs Departments of Transvaal and

123. FSAR, CO, vol. 90, ref 3177/02: letter, De Lotbinière/Lieutenant Governor, ORC, 5 September 1902.

124. Natal Archive Repository, Secretary for Native Affairs, vol. I/1/297, ref. 2978/1902. Instructions by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière to the Superintendent NRD, Natal, in connection with repatriation of refugees. See P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 159-60.

125. NAR, LTG, vol. 142, ref. 115/28. Letter, H.F. Wilson, Colonial Secretary ORC/Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 18 Nov. 1902.

126. NAR. Letter Major G.F. De Lotbinière/W. Windham, Secretary for Native Affairs, Johannesburg, 23 July 1902.

127. See NAR, LTG, vol. 142, ref. 115/28. Letter, Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC/Colonial Secretary ORC, 20 Nov. 1902.

the ORC took over the responsibilities of the NRD on 15 January 1903.¹²⁸ Under their supervision the process of dismantling the camps was extended for a few months into 1903. They took over and maintained the NRD grain depots, which had to supply food to those blacks who had not yet been repatriated, during this period.¹²⁹

Although the bulk of the repatriation of blacks in the Transvaal and ORC had been completed by the end of 1902 it seems as if some blacks remained in the vicinity of the NRD camps. This was in spite of De Lotbinière's insistence that the camps should not be transformed into permanent locations.¹³⁰ De Lotbinière endorsed a settlement scheme proposed by one of his camp superintendents, which suggested the establishment of permanent locations or reserves under government control, combined with a system of labour bureaux.¹³¹ A possible clue regarding the continued existence of black settlements in the vicinity of former NRD camps can be found in a resolution passed by the ORC Central Farmers' Union at its congress in May 1904, some 15 months after repatriation had been officially completed. The resolution requested that "the various refugee camps along the railway lines" be broken up to enable farmers to get back their former servants.¹³² In reply a government official stated that the camps had been closed down. But why was such a resolution passed if no such camps existed any longer? The only explanation seems to be that informal black settlements remained at the sites of the former NRD camps. Kessler agrees with this view. He regards the concentration camps as the embryos of townships at various towns, because all the inmates did not return to the farms where they had previously been employed.¹³³

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128. NAR, SNA, vol. 17, ref. NA 2500/02. Various documents concerning the transfer including Maj. De Lotbinière/Secretary of Native Affairs, 12 January 1903 (transfer statements) and Secretary of Native Affairs/Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, 17 January 1903 (notification of take-over).
 129. NAR, TKP, Transvaal Administration Reports, 1902, part 1, p. 8 cited in E.J. More, List: Archives of the Native Refugee Department, 1901-1903, p.
 130. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. 1473/02. Native Refugee Department, Johannesburg, Circular L:39 to District Inspectors and Camp Superintendents: Repatriation of Native Refugees, 18 July 1902.
 131. NAR, SNA, vol. 45, ref. NA 1458/1902. Letter, G.J. De Lotbinière/Secretary of Native Affairs, Johannesburg, 21 July 1902 with Inspector Allenberg's "Scheme for the settlement of natives in the Transvaal and ORC" enclosed.
 132. FSAR, CO, vol. 296, ref. 4252/04. ORC Central Farmers' Union: resolutions re various matters passed at congress of May 1904.
 133. Cited in *Beeld*, 30 January 1997.

5.2 Compensation for losses

The question of compensation for losses during the war was fraught with difficulties and caused disillusionment with the British among blacks.¹³⁴ Even government officials had to admit that blacks had “genuine cause of complaint” in this regard.¹³⁵ When sweeping operations had taken place during the scorched earth phase of the war grain belonging to blacks brought into NRD camps had largely been destroyed.¹³⁶ Stock owned by blacks had either been transported with them to the camps, destroyed or confiscated for military use. Whether they would receive any compensation seemed to have been a major anxiety of blacks in the concentration camps although they were assured by government officials that they would be treated “in a reasonable and just manner”.¹³⁷ Some blacks refused to leave the camps until they had been compensated in full for the grain and livestock commandeered by the army.¹³⁸

De Lotbinière’s view was that the British government had to accept the responsibility to compensate blacks for their losses on account of the war. Employment provided to blacks and the scheme under which they cultivated their own crops could be regarded as partial compensation for the destruction of their grain and food by the British columns. However, nothing could

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134. Ample evidence to this effect can be found in IASR interviews. See e.g. the interviews with Simon Matlaba, 29 Nov. 1979 (ref. 276); Israel Mathuloe, 13 May 1981 (ref. 318); Abram Mogotsi Ramothibe, 28 Nov. 1979 (ref. 246); Esther Sibanyoni, 4 Sep. 1979 (ref. 002); Sophie Skhosana, 21 Oct. 1979 (ref. 010); Phillip Mokgong Masike, 24 Feb. 1980 (ref. 022); Tolo Manoto, 26 Feb. 1980 (ref. 023); Jim Madiga Nkadameng, 22 Oct. 1979 (ref. 011); Kodisang Petrus Phadime, 18 Nov. 1980 (ref. 042).
 135. FSAR, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01. Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 November 1901, 26 Nov. 1901.
 136. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 1.
 137. FSAR, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01. Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 November 1901, 26 Nov. 1901. See also FSAR, CO, vol. 54, ref. 326/02. Report to Major De Lotbinière on tour of inspection through native refugee camps in January 1902 by Captain F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 3 Feb. 1902.
 138. FSAR, CO, vol. 114, ref. 5079/02. Report on Native Refugee Camps in the ORC for the month of September 1902 by Capt. F. Wilson Fox, Superintendent NRD, ORC, 7 Nov. 1902.

compensate them for their cattle "except stock in kind after the war".¹³⁹ This conclusion seemed reasonable, but turned out to be idealistic. Mainly owing to rinderpest too few cattle were left in the country after the war to compensate blacks in kind for their losses.¹⁴⁰

Pakenham notes that the British government compensated Africans at a lower rate than the Boers.¹⁴¹ Because of the haphazard way in which receipts for confiscated property had been issued and the fact that receipts had been lost by blacks, many of them could not claim full compensation for their losses. Camp superintendents compiled lists of blacks who had not received receipts for property confiscated or destroyed, in which their claims were specified.¹⁴² It was decided that such claims had to be dealt with by civil magistrates after the war.¹⁴³ Another problem was that unscrupulous legal agents took the largest share of the money owed to blacks.¹⁴⁴ As a result the NRD organised a system which enabled blacks who held receipts to be paid directly. Military officers were appointed to forward all military receipts to the district payment offices at Pretoria and Bloemfontein. In each district one day during the month was fixed when blacks could claim their compensation and bring in additional receipts.¹⁴⁵

In November 1902 £2 million was granted by the British government to supplement compensation. Of this £300 000 was especially apportioned for

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139. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902. See J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:42-3 for more details on De Lotbinière's views regarding compensation.
 140. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 8.
 141. T. PAKENHAM, *The Boer War*, p. 573. A. ODENDAAL, *Vukani bantu! The beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1984), p. 39.
 142. See e.g. FSAR, CO, vol. 52, ref. 15/02. Lists compiled by W.C. Pitcairn, Superintendent Native Refugee Camps, Albertina.
 143. FSAR, CO, vol. 90, ref. 3177/02. Letter: Major G.F. De Lotbinière/Lieutenant Governor ORC, 5 Sep. 1902.
 144. NAR, SNA, vol. 16, ref. NA 2269/02. District Inspector's complaint about law agents soliciting natives in refugee camps concerning claims for compensation.
 145. NAR, TKP, vol. 135, Transvaal Administration reports for 1902: Final report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department of the Transvaal from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 10. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 160-1.

the compensation of blacks. This amount was hardly sufficient. In the Transvaal alone compensation of blacks was officially assessed at £661 106, while in the ORC it was estimated at £171 000. Because of the inflation of cattle prices owing to the scarcity of livestock after the war, the money awarded as compensation was insufficient to replace all the cattle which had been destroyed or commandeered. Some blacks claimed that they had not been issued receipts for all their confiscated stock and that the value placed on the stock was too low.¹⁴⁶

When the NRD was closed some staff members were transferred to the Transvaal and ORC Native Affairs Departments to complete the payment of receipts handed in by blacks.¹⁴⁷

At the end of January 1903 a sum of £163 109 in compensation to blacks had been distributed in the Transvaal and £100 000 in the ORC.¹⁴⁸ In some regions the payment of compensation to blacks proceeded so slowly that as late as June 1905 a number of blacks had not received payment as yet.¹⁴⁹ At that stage, more than three years after the conclusion of the war, 5 692 claims by blacks had not been settled.¹⁵⁰

5.3 Aftermath of the war: black hope turns to disillusionment

The South African War disrupted the economic activities of many black workers and peasants and had a negative impact on their and their families' daily lives. Those who were interned in the concentration camps had to adapt to a new mode of economic life, where they were dependent upon the NRD for sustenance.

De Lotbinière's aim was to make as many as possible of the camp population economically self-sufficient. He wrote:

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146. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 161. See also FSAR, CO, vol. 48, ref. 4353/01. Report of visit to native refugee camps by the Resident Magistrate of Harrismith on 22 and 23 November 1901, 26 Nov. 1901.
147. NAR, TKP, Transvaal Administration Reports no.1, 1902, p. 12 cited in More, p. 1.
148. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 160-1.
149. D. DENOON, "Participation in the 'Boer War': people's war, people's non-war, or non-people's war?", B.A. OGOT, (ed.) *War and Society in Africa*, p.116.
150. A. ODENDAAL, *Vukani bantu! The beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912*, p. 39.

The system built up for dealing with the native refugee question has been the result of labour and thought, and an honest endeavour to get at the bottom of things, and to place the natives in a fair position to start life afresh. Promises have been made to these natives, and, unless they are faithfully adhered to, we shall place ourselves in a false light with all the farm natives of both colonies.¹⁵¹

Unfortunately, the cessation of military operations did not alleviate the plight of many of these blacks. Although the dismantling of the camps and repatriation took place with great haste, a large number of blacks missed the opportunity to cultivate land for their needs during the season ahead. The shortage of seeds, draught animals and even the most basic implements such as picks and hoes, added to the difficulties of those leaving the camps. Blacks whose livestock and grain had been confiscated by the army in many cases received only minimal and in many cases long delayed compensation.¹⁵²

In the Transvaal and ORC evidence of black hardship after the war was overwhelming. De Lotbinière reported that the Piet Retief, Wakkerstroom, Standerton, Ermelo, Bethal, Carolina and Heidelberg districts were suffering from famine six months after the end of the war. Because of the droughts of 1902 and 1903 conditions did not rapidly improve. Consequently, large numbers of blacks who had been interned in the concentration camps failed to become self-supporting and had little alternative but to continue to sell their labour in order to raise money to buy food.¹⁵³

For the black people, a new era had indeed begun with the end of the war and the beginning of resettlement and reconstruction. But it was an era whose character was rather different from that anticipated by the black elite at the onset of the war. They had hoped that Britain's ultimate victory would usher in a new period of liberty and enlightenment in South African affairs in which racial discrimination would end and they would receive equal rights.¹⁵⁴ These aspirations were incompatible with both British and Boer interests after the

151. NAR, SNA, vol. 6, ref. NA 519/02, Report on the NRD in the ORC, 1 August - 31 December 1901, by Maj. G.F. De Lotbinière, Chief Superintendent NRD, to the Deputy Administrator ORC, Bloemfontein, 18 January 1902.

152. F. PRETORIUS, *1899-1902: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, pp. 80-1.

153. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, pp. 206-7.

154. See A. ODENDAAL, *Vukani bantu! The beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912*, pp. 30, 37. See IASR interviews with Esther Sibanyoni, 4 Sep. 1979, ref. 002 and Phillip Mokgong Masike, 24 Feb. 1980, ref. 022.

war. It was in the interest of the mining capitalists and the farmers to force blacks into wage labour.¹⁵⁵

Soon it became clear that the approach of the British and the Boers towards racial relations was basically the same. The position of blacks remained fundamentally the same under British rule. The political colour-bar was retained. Clause eight of the Treaty of Vereeniging stated that the question of granting the franchise to natives would not be decided until after the introduction of self-government.¹⁵⁶ Hopes that Afrikaner lands would be transferred to blacks were dashed. Boer families were assisted by the British government to reoccupy their land and black families who had settled there during the war were evicted. The economic independence of black peasants was further undermined after the war.¹⁵⁷ Chiefs who had given assistance to the British war effort in the hope of gaining land or political autonomy were disappointed.¹⁵⁸ In terms of Ordinance 13 of 1902 black communities were disarmed after the war.¹⁵⁹ For black workers in the industrial region of the Transvaal labour conditions worsened rather than improved. Wages in the gold mining industry were reduced and a more sophisticated network of control over the black work force was devised. Measures such as the republican pass laws continued to be applied.¹⁶⁰

Black writers expressed the disillusionment of the black population. Sol Plaatje lamented that after the war blacks had no claim to the country for which they had bled¹⁶¹ and Silas Molema concluded that "the position of the

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155. J.A. HOBSON, *The war in South Africa: its causes and effects* (James Nabet, London, 1969), pp. 285, 289, 290; J. PLOEGER, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, deel V, p. 43:47.
 156. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 208; A. ODENDAAL, *Vukani bantu! The beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912*, p. 37.
 157. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 207; P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 165, 168.
 158. P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 208.
 159. P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 165.
 160. S. M. MOLEMA, *Bantu past and present: An ethnographical and historical study of the native races of South Africa* (Edinburgh Publishers, London, 1920) pp. 283-5; P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p. 207; P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, pp. 169-74; A. ODENDAAL, *Vukani bantu! The beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912*, p. 38.
 161. S. PLAATJE, *Native life*, p. 252 as quoted in P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 184.

Bantu after the South African War was worse than before it".¹⁶² This disillusionment gave rise to the establishment of a network of political organisations and newspapers throughout the country in order to mobilise and unite the black people against the injustices of the white government. These organisations and newspapers were used as platforms by blacks to express their anger and dissatisfaction with the results of the South African War.¹⁶³ The war had served as a stimulus towards the rise of black nationalism as black criticism of the British policy intensified. It marked the first signs of a long struggle of black resistance to white domination in South Africa.

6. Conclusion

The main thrust of this article has been to show that blacks (also those in the concentration camps) played a significant role in British military strategy during the war and that they also suffered greatly in the war. In the end the black population, even more than the defeated Afrikaners, had to bear the brunt of the war. With more than 14 000 fatalities in the concentration camps, their political and economic aspirations unfulfilled, unsatisfactory compensation payments and massive impoverishment, blacks paid a heavy price in a "white man's war".¹⁶⁴ A British missionary, Canon Farmer, remarked during the war:

Of all who have suffered by the war, those who have endured most and will receive least sympathy, are the Natives....¹⁶⁵

Without any doubt the concentration camps remain a tragic component of the South African War. Although a memorial to the dead of the white concentration camps was erected at Bloemfontein in 1913, there is no such memorial to the blacks who perished in black concentration camps. Their plight has remained largely unknown to the nation and the world.¹⁶⁶ The

162. Molema, p. 292.

163. See A. ODENDAAL, *Vukani bantu! The beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912*, p. 40 *et seq.* and J. GROBLER, *A decisive clash? A short history of black protest politics in South Africa, 1875-1976* (Via Africa, Pretoria, 1988), pp. 19-24 for a discussion of African political organisation after the war. See also P. WARWICK, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p. 175; P. WARWICK and S.B. SPIES (Eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, pp.189-90.

164. T. PAKENHAM, *The Boer War*, pp. xiv, xvii, 573; A. ODENDAAL, *Vukani bantu! The beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912*, p. 39.

165. Cited in T. PAKENHAM, *The Boer War*, p. 573.

166. N. KANHEMA, "How Boer War historians tore out the page on blacks", *Saturday Star*, 14 September 1996, p.13.

example of the oblivion of the concentration camps for blacks poses a challenge to black historians in South Africa to start writing their own history.

Opsomming

Slagoffers van 'n witmansoorlog: Swartes in konsentrasiekampe gedurende die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog (1899-1902)

Historici het oor die afgelope twintig jaar die deelname van swartes aan die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog nagevors en bevind dat dit nie as uitsluitlik 'n 'blanke' oorlog beskou kan word nie. Hierdie artikel sluit by dié navorsingsfokus aan. Dit handel oor 'n aspek van die Oorlog waarvan historici bewus is, maar waaroor nie veel onder die algemene publiek bekend is nie, naamlik die Britse kampe waarin swartmense tydens die Oorlog gehuisves is, die sogenaamde 'native refugee camps'. Teen die einde van die Oorlog was daar volgens amptelike statistiek 70 sulke kampe in die Transvaal- en Oranjerivierkolonies, met 'n bevolking van 115 700. Die onderafdelings van die artikel skenk aandag aan die administrasie van die kampe deur die Native Refugee Department, die funksies van die kampe as beide vlugteling- en konsentrasiekampe (veral arbeids- en voedselvoorsiening was belangrik in die breër Britse militêre strategie), die toestande in die kampe, en die aftakeling van die kampstelsel na afloop van die Oorlog. Die gevolgtrekking is dat swartes, ook dié in die kampe, dikwels die spit moes afbyt in 'n sogenaamde witmansoorlog. Hulle is deur die verskroeiende aarbeide sonder heenkome gelaat, hulle is as 'n bron van goedkoop arbeid uitgebuit, hulle is dikwels in haglike omstandighede gehuisves wat tot 'n hoë sterftesyfer in die kampe gelei het, hulle is nie behoorlik gekompenseer vir hul verliese tydens die Oorlog nie, en na afloop van die Oorlog was hulle ontnugter omdat hulle onder Britse bestuur nie beter daaraan toe was as onder die Boererepublieke nie. Vir die 14 154 swartes (meestal kinders en oumense) wat volgens amptelike syfers in die kampe gesterf het, anders as vir die 27 927 blankes wat in die konsentrasiekampe omgekome het, is geen monument opgerig nie en hulle lot het grootliks onbekend gebly. 'n Oproep word aan swart historici gerig om te voorkom dat hierdie stilswyende lydendes in vergetelheid raak.