

## **‘Enemy Aliens’ in Wartime: Civilian Internment in South Africa during World War I\***

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When the Union of South Africa decided to join the British war effort against the Central Powers in August 1914, Peters, Flamman & Co. were in trouble. The trade and services business had been operating in East London and Umtata since 1904. Both partners and most of the staff were German immigrants who were now considered a potential threat to the safety of the Union and classified ‘enemy subjects’. F. Flamman was immediately interned in the Fort Napier camp in Pietermaritzburg, and R. Peters joined him and a further 2,500 men in June 1915. The company ceased operations, was handed over to the state and faced compulsory liquidation in May 1917. The owners’ private assets were sequestered. Peters and Flamman were released in mid-1919 after more than four years in captivity.<sup>1</sup> Marie Salis, in contrast, did not survive internment. She had spent the pre-war years in the Belgian Congo with her husband Wilhelm who worked as a missionary for the Berlin Missionary Society. In October 1916 she was deported with her child to the women’s internment camp in Tempe near Bloemfontein. After giving birth to her second child in the camp she contracted tuberculosis. Her husband Wilhelm, meanwhile, was interned in Cairo. On her deathbed she was allowed to notify him of the birth of their child and her condition via telegram. In his telegraphic reply he assured her

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Archives, Berlin (hereafter BArch), R901/83133, Internee Schmalz to Edgar Herfurth, editor *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, uncensored letter forwarded to German Foreign Office 23 October 1917; Foreign Office Political Archive, Berlin (hereafter AA/PA), 56/Kapstadt, Fort Napier list of internees, March 1919; Dale Hutchison *et al.*, *The Law of Contract in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 382.

that ‘the children will always be my highest thought’ and hoped that ‘we shall meet in a better land.’<sup>2</sup>

The case histories of Peters, Flamman and Salis refer to a period of civilian minority confinement in South Africa which has received no comprehensive and little interpretive treatment. The existing scholarship is more concerned with general home-front Germanophobia leading to discrimination and physical violence. Bill Nasson, in his critical account of South African wartime society, provides an overview of anti-German hostilities and concludes that ‘the war went to the heads of those who made up the opportunistic crowds of 1915.’<sup>3</sup> In response to the torpedoing of the *Lusitania* ocean liner by a German submarine in May 1915, enraged mobs ransacked properties owned by Germans or by people with German-sounding names in several towns and cities. In Johannesburg alone, the cost of rioting and looting was estimated at £750,000. This included private homes as well as commercial premises such as merchants’ firms, butchers or public houses.<sup>4</sup> This literature, however, mentions the last and most drastic step of ‘enemy alien’ control, namely internment, only in passing.<sup>5</sup> Two article publications concentrating on Fort Napier either encapsulate a wider chronological and thematic framework or focus specifically on artefact production by internees.<sup>6</sup>

The scarce historiography stands in contrast to that on other parts of the British Empire and its Dominions. Civilian internment in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, as well as Britain

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<sup>2</sup> National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria (hereafter NASA), Governor General (hereafter GG) 631/9/64/513, Commissioner for Enemy Subjects to Governor-General, 10 October 1917; telegram Governor-General in Pretoria to High Commissioner in Cairo, 10 October 1917; telegram High Commissioner in Cairo to Governor-General in Pretoria, 13 October 1917.

<sup>3</sup> B. Nasson, *World War One and the People of South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014), 138.

<sup>4</sup> T. Dederling, ‘“Avenge the Lusitania”: The Anti-German Riots in South Africa in 1915’, in P. Panayi, ed., *Germans as Minorities during the First World War. A Global Comparative Perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 235-262.

<sup>5</sup> Also see, for example, P. S. Thompson, ‘The Natal Home Front in the Great War (1914-1918)’, *Historia*, 56, 1 (2011), 106, 127.

<sup>6</sup> G. Dominy, ‘Pietermaritzburg’s Imperial Postscript: Fort Napier from 1910 to 1925’, *Natalia*, 19 (1989), 30-42; G. Dominy and D. Reusch, ‘Handicrafts, Philanthropy and Self-help: The Fort Napier Kamp-Industrie during World War I’, *Natal Museum Journal of Humanities*, 5 (1993), 207-224.

itself has now been dealt with in a number of studies.<sup>7</sup> Recent work on Sub-Saharan Africa concentrates on Germans removed from pre-war German colonies (Cameroon, Togo, Southwest Africa, East Africa) and subsequently interned in British territories.<sup>8</sup> Pulling these studies together enables to identify a common denominator: during World War I, the policy of civilian internment was rolled out comprehensively throughout the British Empire, with Whitehall as the epicentre. This was a logical extension of established practices. In the prewar decades, Britain had developed a global ‘archipelago of camps’ (Aidan Forth) for the purposes of labour, punishment, social welfare, and political re-education.<sup>9</sup> As a component of colonial warfare, the idea of detention was transnationally diffused through a number of powers, including Spain on Cuba (1868-98), Britain in South Africa (1900-1902), the United States on the Philippines (1899-1902), and the German Empire in Southwest Africa (1904-08).<sup>10</sup> France was also part of this transnational learning process which gradually moved the practice from colonial ‘laboratories’<sup>11</sup> into metropolitan settings: during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) the Republic had only expelled its German population; during the First World War, in contrast,

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<sup>7</sup> B. Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada during the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); G. Fischer, *Enemy Aliens: Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia, 1914-1920* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1989); A. Francis, *‘To be truly British we must be anti-German’: New Zealand, Enemy Aliens and the Great War Experience, 1914-1919*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012); P. Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain. German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> M. Murphy, ‘*German Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees from the German Colonies in Captivity in the British Empire, 1914-1920*’ (D.Phil thesis, London School of Economics, 2015); D. Steinbach, ‘Challenging European Colonial Supremacy: The Internment of ‘Enemy Aliens’ in German East Africa during the First World War’, in J. E. Kitchen, A. Miller and L. Rowe, eds., *Other Combatants, Other Fronts: Competing Histories of the First World War* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 153-176.

<sup>9</sup> A. Forth, ‘Britain’s Archipelago of Camps. Labor and Detention in a Liberal Empire 1871-1903’, *Kritika*, 16, 3 (2015), 651-680.

<sup>10</sup> I.R. Smith and A. Stucki, ‘The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps (1868–1902)’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39, 3 (2011), 417-437; J. Hyslop, ‘The Invention of the Concentration Camp: Cuba, Southern Africa and the Philippines 1896-1907’, *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 2 (2011), 251-276; S. Scheipers, ‘The Use of Camps in Colonial Warfare’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43, 4 (2015), 678-698.

<sup>11</sup> S. Conrad, ‘Double Marginalization. A Plea for a Transnational Perspective on German History’, in H.-G. Haupt and J. Kocka, eds., *Comparative and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 58-61.

it pursued large-scale internment at home.<sup>12</sup> By 1914, civilian internment camps for ‘enemy populations’ were firmly established across the globe. The scene was set for their rapid proliferation during the subsequent years of international conflagration, adding to the multitude of military Prisoner of War camps.<sup>13</sup> The First World War was the first heyday of what Bettina Greiner and Alan Kramer have called, tongue in cheek, the ‘success story of an institution’.<sup>14</sup>

Within this geographical, chronological, and current scholarly context, the research vacuum on detention in South Africa during World War I appears all the more blatant. This is in spite of abundant primary sources in South African, British, and German archives that not only reflect the views and policies of government departments and administrators but also provide insights into the response from German residents. Thus the rich material allows for a critical, multi-perspectival enquiry to highlight the salience of the South African case and integrate it into wider theoretical questions and arguments which go beyond the existing literature. First, it touches on historiographical debates on the totalisation of war, and in particular the question whether this was a “soldiers’ war’ or a ‘civilians’ war’”. Scholars such as Heather Jones and Tammy Proctor argue for a stronger emphasis on the civilian element. Remembrance of civilian suffering and victimhood in all nations was overshadowed by soldiers’ narratives. It was now time for scholarship to re-dress this imbalance.<sup>15</sup> Our argument goes in the same direction, but expands it into the colonial sphere through the medium of the hitherto unexplored case-study of South Africa. The article is thus a central mosaic piece in the

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<sup>12</sup> D.L. Caglioti, ‘Waging War on Civilians. The Expulsion of Aliens in the Franco-Prussian War’, *Past & Present* 221, 1 (2013), 161-195; Jean-Claude Farcy, *Les camps de concentration français de la première guerre mondiale (1914-1920)* (Paris: Economica, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Good overviews are given by H. Jones (‘Prisoners of War’) and Matthew Stibbe (‘Enemy Aliens and Internment’) in *1914-1918 online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, section editor Roger Chickering, www.1914-1918-online.net, 2014, accessed 8 January 2016. For more detailed reading see H. Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War. Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> B. Greiner and A. Kramer, eds., *Die Welt der Lager. Zur ‘Erfolgsgeschichte’ einer Institution* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> H. Jones, ‘The Great War: How 1914-18 Changed the Relationship between War and Civilians’, *The Royal United Services Institute Journal*, 159, 4 (2014), 84-91; T. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

wider argument that no civilian ‘enemy alien’ throughout the British Empire was unaffected by wartime occurrences, whether through official government measures such as internment, deportation or expropriation; or through informal hostility, dismissal, rioting of premises, and suppression of ethnic life. Criteria for what constitutes a ‘total’ war are disputed, but if we apply that of geographical breadth of civilian internment operations, the notion of totality emerges more strongly.<sup>16</sup> It also emerges when questions of gender are included in the analysis. The fact that the majority of internees were men has led to a blind spot in scholarship with regard to direct or indirect consequences for women. Zooming in on female experiences of deportation, deprivation and internment in Sub-Saharan colonial zones will generate a more balanced picture. All this, in turn, integrates the case-study into the – recently invigorated – general theme of minority persecution during World War I.<sup>17</sup>

A caveat on suffering within a longer chronological continuum leads to a second argument. During the South African War, the British military had interned at least 150,000 civilians, both white and black, including the mass detention of women and children. Conditions in the camps contravened humane principles, and tens of thousands perished.<sup>18</sup> The operation was a global ‘PR-disaster’ for Britain. Not least in the German empire it was upheld as proof of English hypocrisy and hubris towards a white ‘brother race’.<sup>19</sup> We argue that the precedent of the South African War and its consequences had a profound effect on the way not just the Union of South Africa, but Britain and its dominions as a whole treated its ‘enemy

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<sup>16</sup> For example A. Marwick, C. Emsley and W. Simpson, eds., *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914-1955* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001); R. Chickering and S. Förster, eds., *Great War, Total War. Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> T. Grady and H. Ewence, eds., *Minorities and the Great War* (London: Palgrave, forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> A somewhat revisionist study which emphasises the non-punitive aspects of the South African concentration camps is E. van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2013). For an overview of the ongoing controversies surrounding the conditions in the camps see F. Pretorius, ‘The White Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War. A Debate without End’, *Historia*, 55, 2 (2010), 34-49. The classic study on African prison camps is P. Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> S. Bender, *Der Burenkrieg und die deutschsprachige Presse. Wahrnehmung und Deutung zwischen Bureneuphorie und Anglophobie 1899-1902* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009).

aliens' fifteen years later. Conditions during World War I differed in camps across the Empire, but on the whole they were comparatively better than during the South African War: where possible, prisoners were housed in barracks and not in tents; there was no malnutrition and no maltreatment; medical conditions were attended to, and there was a certain degree of freedom to pursue educational, professional and recreational activities in the camps. Established reasons for these relatively good conditions were the framework of international conventions on prisoner of war treatment which had developed in the pre-war years;<sup>20</sup> the fear of retaliation against British prisoners in German captivity;<sup>21</sup> and the claim of moral hegemony over the Central Powers, not least to support the case for conscription.<sup>22</sup>

We argue that lessons learnt from the South African War can be legitimately added to this list. The linkage is summed up exemplarily in a letter by the mayor of Stellenbosch, Paul Cluver, to the Minister of Defence (and later Prime Minister) Jan Christiaan Smuts in September 1914. Cluver wrote that Afrikaner internees and their children 'have been bitter enemies of everything British ever since', and if Germans died now, 1914, in captivity 'the Government would be blamed for many years to come.'<sup>23</sup> Such recriminations, Cluver might have added, could be expected to gain currency against the background of the simmering tensions between the Afrikaners and British South Africans. The founding of the Union in 1910 as a dominion in the British Empire had not silenced those Dutch speaking whites who still hankered after the lost independence of the two Afrikaner republics. They now viewed South Africa's entry into the war on the side of the erstwhile enemy as a bitter blow to their unabated nationalist aspirations.

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<sup>20</sup> R.B. Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> M. Stibbe, 'A Question of Retaliation? The Internment of British Civilians in Germany in November 1914', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 23, 1 (2005), 1-29.

<sup>22</sup> Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*.

<sup>23</sup> NASA, Secretary of Home Affairs (hereafter BNS), 1006/D170/9199, Paul Cluver to General Smuts, 28 September 1914.

Although historically dubious in view of Wilhelminian Germany's oscillating policies towards the Afrikaners, fond reminiscences of the close ties with their Germanic brethren began to gild nationalist demands to shun the alliance with the British.

Reference to the South African War also serves to put the plight of, mostly German, enemy aliens in perspective, leading to a third argument. Suffering and death were related to isolation, deportation and disruption of individual life trajectories. It was not related to deliberate neglect, mistreatment, or indeed extermination. This is in contrast to the camps set up by the German colonisers just ten years earlier to intern Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa, or those by the National Socialists during World War II. It is also in contrast to atrocities committed by German soldiers against civilians during World War I, particularly in Belgium.<sup>24</sup> The term 'concentration camp' appears throughout the sources, but has to be seen historically in its literal sense as 'bringing together' rather than leading to extermination. A convincing case can be made for a transnational perspective on suffering during World War I, which encapsulates Germans as victims and not exclusively as perpetrators. This case, however, needs to pick the right arguments. More persuasive pointers would include the British continental blockade which caused widespread famine and disease throughout Central Europe, Russian atrocities against civilians on the Eastern Front, or the mass deportations and harsh internment conditions in the Russian Empire.<sup>25</sup> This relativisation is crucial for a balanced argumentation to determine where internment in South Africa fits into the wider paradigms of totalisation, suffering, and chronological continuity.

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<sup>24</sup> J. Horne and A. Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914. A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); C. Jahr and J. Thiel, eds., *Lager vor Auschwitz. Gewalt und Integration im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> A. Watson, *Ring of Steel. Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London: Basic Books, 2014); Watson, 'Unheard-of Brutality'. Russian Atrocities against Civilians in East Prussia, 1914-1915', *Journal of Modern History*, 86, 4 (2014), 780-825; E. Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2003).

## Criteria and Mechanics of Detention

In the aftermath of the South African War, the consolidation of a shared white South African identity remained a contentious political challenge. The unfolding crisis in Europe brought the animosities between English-speaking whites and Afrikaners to the surface. South Africa's dominion status obliged the Union to act in accordance with Britain and join the war unquestioningly, but prudently Prime Minister Louis Botha and Defence Minister Smuts obtained the approval of the House of Assembly before gearing their military forces towards the conquest of German Southwest Africa. Many Afrikaners were incensed at this key strategic demand raised by London. In Ian van der Waag's words 'there was an almost natural gravitation' of nationalist Afrikaners towards the Germans in southern Africa.<sup>26</sup> While Botha and Smuts were busy organising the campaign, they simultaneously had to respond to an armed rebellion that was led by anti-British Afrikaner army officers under General de la Rey who refused to fight on behalf of their erstwhile enemy.

Similar disagreement existed over the question of how to deal with the German migrant community in South Africa. A comparatively small group of 12,798 residents had been born in Germany, and for many British South Africans this was enough to throw a dubious light on their political loyalty.<sup>27</sup> Germans had been migrating to South Africa ever since the seventeenth century as farmers, craftsmen, scientists, artists, missionaries, industrialists and merchants.<sup>28</sup> A large section of these settlers had been absorbed by the Afrikaner segment, drawing little attention to themselves by aspiring to a hyphenated identity in the fashion of other German expatriate communities, such as in the United States or Brazil. In the immediate pre-war years, however, newer arrivals had openly displayed pro-German nationalism at the expense of inter-

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<sup>26</sup> I. van der Waag, 'South African Defence in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940', *Historia*, 60, 1 (2015), 132.

<sup>27</sup> According to the 1911 Empire census, the 1,116,806 white inhabitants were faced by a majority of 4,697,152 Africans and members of other 'non-white' groups.

<sup>28</sup> *Lantern*. Special Edition: *The German Contribution to the Development of South Africa*, February 1992.



ethnic frictions with British South Africans.<sup>29</sup> It was the latter group which, after the outbreak of war, was united by a groundswell of anti-German sentiment, which became increasingly vociferous after the German invasion of Belgium, and even more so after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the close cultural and social affiliation of Afrikaners and German residents was to add a calming element to the high tides of Germanophobia. Many Afrikaners distanced themselves from the outbursts of jingoism that intermittently convulsed wartime South Africa.

Those Germans who had completed their compulsory military service before migrating to South Africa were classified as reservists, thus representing a case in point for the increasingly blurred legal and societal distinction between ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ before 1914. This was an important contributory factor to the totalisation of war after August 1914: more individuals than ever before were affected by the state of war, even those in civilian occupations living far away from the battlefields. On 6 August, the British Governor-General in the Union, Earl Buxton, was alerted by newspaper advertisements which requested German and Austrian reservists to report for military duty in Europe. The next day a government directive ordered all German officers and reservists between the ages of 18 and 56 to be arrested. Austrian reservists were initially exempted from these regulations, but on 13 August the same principles were applied to them as well, including the request to register the names of all enemy aliens at sea ports and to confiscate their firearms and ammunition. The Government Gazette of 26 September 1914 codified the existing practice, as well as set out broad criteria for internment:

- (i) Alien enemies who are reasonably suspected of being in any way dangerous to the safety of the realm will be arrested by the police and handed over to the military authorities. Such persons will be

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<sup>29</sup> S. Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora. The ‘Greater German Empire’* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 252-4.

<sup>30</sup> B. Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme. South Africa in the Great War, 1914 – 1918* (Johannesburg and New York: Penguin, 2007), 28-9.

interned as prisoners of war, and every consideration compatible with safety should be shown to them as to other prisoners of war.

(ii) Alien enemies whose known character precludes suspicion or who are personally vouched for by British residents of standing should not be arrested or interned.<sup>31</sup>

Arrests took place all over the Union. On 20 August 1914, Caledon Square in Cape Town buzzed with German and some Austrian naval and army reservists who had been instructed to register for their transfer to Johannesburg. Only those who could provide documentary proof that they were naturalised British citizens or had been discharged from reserve duty were exempted. From 18 August the first non-reservists were also detained.<sup>32</sup> Complaints from prisoners that were collected later indicate that arrest and detention, particularly when it happened in full view of an unsympathetic public, were frequently experienced as a traumatising disruption of orderly civilian lives.<sup>33</sup> The Union government set up the office of Commissioner for Enemy Subjects in Pretoria to centralise the administration of the process. Those caught up in the early internment wave to mid-September 1914 were concentrated in the Agricultural Show Grounds in Johannesburg. The first 100 prisoners arrived on 21 August. According to the local English-language press, the mood was sombre but composed, and some Germans even thanked the government for the civil treatment they were awarded.<sup>34</sup> Some internee accounts, in contrast, were less complimentary. They agreed that accommodation in horse stables and the quality of food was dismal compared to other camps.<sup>35</sup> By the time the temporary camp was closed on 11 September 1914 it had accommodated 1055 enemy aliens.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> NASA, BNS 1006/D170/9199, The Union of South Africa Government Gazette Extraordinary, 26 September 1914, No. 1607.

<sup>32</sup> *The Star*, 20 August 1914.

<sup>33</sup> BArch, R67/823, Inspection report G. H. Murphy, American Consul-General, Cape Town, visit 3 to 7 August 1916, enclosure.

<sup>34</sup> NASA, Commissioner for Enemy Subjects (hereafter CES) 179/ES70/4231/14, Prisoner of War Internment Camps, Office of the Commandant to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 7 March 1917.

<sup>35</sup> BArch, R901/83133, H. Ette, POW No. 1016, to friend 'Oscar', 9 January 1916.

<sup>36</sup> NASA, CES 179/ES70/4231/14, Camp Commandant Fort Napier to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 7 March 1917.

The prisoners were now taken to the military base Roberts Heights in Pretoria. Amongst the new intake was farmer Hans Ette from Natal who found conditions to be ‘good, water better than Johbg, plenty of space, only the food was awful and wholly insufficient.’<sup>37</sup> As internment operations continued across the Union and numbers rose, new accommodation had to be sought, and on 25 October around 2,000 men were transported en masse to their final detention place, Fort Napier in Pietermaritzburg.

### A ‘Camp System’?

Panikos Panayi, in his ground-breaking study on camps in Britain, convincingly argues that these are best understood as a closely integrated ‘camp system’ rather than isolated entities. The system was held together by a relatively efficient bureaucracy which included the establishment of bespoke government departments and extensive correspondence. Twenty-eight central camps were complemented with a multitude of smaller satellite camps. All together, these held 30,000 civilians and 90,000 military Prisoners of War.<sup>38</sup> Although dimensions were considerably smaller in overseas territories, similar structural patterns applied there. Camp networks were set up in the colonies and dominions, and these were, in turn, integrated through global directives from Whitehall. The instructions in above quoted Government Gazette for the Union, for example, were ‘relative to the internment and treatment of enemy subjects in and throughout the British Dominions, adapted so far as is necessary to meet the conditions and circumstances obtaining in the Union of South Africa.’<sup>39</sup> A further aspect justifying the term ‘camp system’ at an *imperial* level was the ongoing prisoner transportation between camps within and across territories, as well as with the metropole. The Union was integrated into global deportation and internment structures. At *dominion* level,

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<sup>37</sup> BArch, R901/83133, Ette, POW No. 1016, to friend ‘Oscar’, 9 January 1916.

<sup>38</sup> Panayi, *Prisoners*, 78-122.

<sup>39</sup> NASA, BNS 1006/D170/9199, The Union of South Africa Government Gazette Extraordinary, 26 September 1914, No. 1607.

however, we have to differentiate. Both Canada and Australia developed elaborate camp networks at around twenty each. Many camps were smaller, holding only several hundred internees or less.<sup>40</sup> South Africa, in contrast, pursued a policy of concentrating male civilians into one single camp, Fort Napier. The other camps listed in Table 1 were set up for specific purposes and only existed for shorter periods of time. In comparison with other dominions, therefore, the term ‘camp system’ is only partially applicable to South Africa.

Table 1

Camps in South Africa, 1914-1919<sup>41</sup>

Name and location	Available key data
Fort Napier, Pietermaritzburg	main camp August 1914 to June 1919 average 2500 prisoners
Agricultural Show Ground, Johannesburg	transit camp 19 August to 11 September 1914 1055 prisoners
Roberts Heights, Pretoria	military base female and mixed September 1914 to May 1915
Lords Ground Durban	barb-wired cricket ground

<sup>40</sup> Kordan, *Enemy Aliens*; Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*; National Archives, London (NA), FO 383/297, camp lists in Prisoners of War Information Bureau, London, to Colonial Office, 13 June 1917.

<sup>41</sup> Sources: *passim*, unless noted otherwise.

	officers
	November 1914 to March 1915 <sup>42</sup>
Kimberley, Du Toit Pan Mine Compound, De Beer	provisional 963 in July 1915 <sup>43</sup>
Tempe, near Bloemfontein	military base women's camp 1914/15 and 1917
Princess Park Pretoria	women and children from German East Africa February to May 1917 <sup>44</sup>
Baviaanspoort near Pretoria	men no specific information <sup>45</sup>
Standerton Government Farm	agricultural work for good conduct in Fort Napier <sup>46</sup>

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Further camps existed in former German Southwest Africa for combatant troops at Kanus, Aus, Albrechts Camp, Okanjande, and Grootfontein.<sup>47</sup> The development of internment operations can be broadly divided into two phases. The first phase between August and mid-October 1914 was one of 'trial and error'. It was as yet unclear what categories of persons would be affected

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<sup>42</sup> NASA, CES 53/ES70/938/14, Commandant Manning, Fort Napier, to Commissioner for Enemy Subject, 3 March 1915; NA, FO 383/247, various files December 1914 and January 1915.

<sup>43</sup> NASA, CES 185/ES70/4447, Commandant Kimberley to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 17 July 1915.

<sup>44</sup> NASA, CES 126/ES70/2592/14, various files April 1917

<sup>45</sup> Compilation 'Fort Napier' by Eckart von Fintel, Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, South Africa, electronic source, p. 285.

<sup>46</sup> NASA CES GG633/9/64/590, Report Swiss Consul, 17 May 1918.

<sup>47</sup> Murphy, *Prisoners*, 55, 87.

by internment, in which form they should be detained, and what numbers were to be expected. Official categories of what constituted ‘dangerous’ enemy aliens had to be applied and interpreted by local police and magistrates. In addition, the military campaign against German Southwest Africa was in full swing from mid-September 1914, and deportees from Lüderitzbucht included not just men, but also women and children. This also applied to deportees from Belgian Congo. Despite forced removal, the official term used by the authorities for this cohort was ‘refugees’. The camp system during this first phase should thus be best understood as fluid and adaptable depending on circumstances. The second, main phase from mid-October 1914 until August 1919 was one of concentration and consolidation, although the Lusitania incident triggered a spike in May 1915 which led to additional temporary capacity being set up in Kimberley. Male detainees were brought together from 24 October 1914 in Fort Napier, which functioned as the central camp. Its size was strikingly constant throughout the war at around 2,500 internees.

### **Women and Children**

In contrast to the South African War, women and children living *within* the Union were exempt from internment. Those deported from other Sub-Saharan territories, however, were not. As German colonial rule began to crumble, women and children from all across the region were taken to South Africa and experienced some form of internment. One of them was Hertha Brodersen Manns. She had arrived in Lüderitzbucht, German Southwest Africa, in February 1914 to take up a position as legal secretary with a solicitor. South African forces took the town on 18 September without any resistance, and in the following days deported most of its German population to South Africa. Brodersen was part of the last cohort of 300 who were deported on the 3 October on the cattle ship *Armada Castle*. She provides an intelligent account of her captivity which is well balanced between praise and criticism towards her captors. On the

*Armadale Castle*, the ‘bug-ridden mattresses were dirty beyond description, [...] instead of water a thick, disgusting liquid came from the taps, [and] the food was consumed at greasy tables. [...] There were breast-feeding women and crying children, and a deafening noise filled the room which was heavy with all kinds of stench.’<sup>48</sup> After two days the *Armadale Castle* arrived in Cape Town. The deportees were escorted to train compartments which carried the sign ‘Prisoners of War from Lüderitz’ and attracted crowds of local bystanders who were kept away by armed soldiers. Families were separated with men and women put into different compartments. Men were locked up in compartments with barred windows, whilst women travelled in relatively normal fashion. Brodersen found ‘the food on the train definitely better than on the ship. For the main meals clean tables were laid in the dining hall, and there were a variety of good things to eat.’ After one and a half days the men’s compartments were uncoupled and directed towards Roberts Heights camp in Pretoria. The authorities were noticeably concerned to prevent the transport of large groups of prisoners from turning into demonstrations of anti-German sentiment. In Cape Town thousands of curious onlookers were disappointed to find out that the enemy aliens had been secretly shipped off to the Transvaal from an alternative train station.<sup>49</sup> Women carried on for another one and a half days to Pietermaritzburg and re-joined those from Lüderitzbucht who had been deported in earlier waves. Later on they were joined by deportees from the Belgian Congo.<sup>50</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg, the women and children were accommodated in two separate compounds dubbed, for no obvious reasons, the ‘Red Camp’ and the ‘Green Camp’. These lay adjacent to the main Fort Napier camp for male prisoners. Up to five women lived in one room in accommodation which had formerly been occupied by the families of those British troops which had just left the garrison. Guard and supervision was provided by ‘nurses’ and a head

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<sup>48</sup> H. Brodersen-Manns, *Wie alles anders kam in Afrika* (Windhoek: Kuiseb Verlag, 1991), 17.

<sup>49</sup> *The Star*, 22 September 1914.

<sup>50</sup> Brodersen, *Wie alles anders kam*, 20 (quote), 24.

‘matron’, but relative freedom of movement was granted. Women were allowed to go into Pietermaritzburg every two weeks, accompanied by their female guards. They also had the choice to find accommodation in families throughout South Africa. Some took up employment as housemaids or governesses, others were taken in by relatives or other families. They kept being attached to the Fort Napier camp through registration and regular reporting. This information allows us to read the following breakdown of numbers.

Table 2

Female deportees and children from Lüderitzbucht, German Southwest Africa, interned in Pietermaritzburg October 1914 to 5 March 1915<sup>51</sup>

Women	Girls	Boys	Babies and Toddlers
Green Camp			
135	12	26	17
Red Camp			
133	64	59	27
Private			
42	5	5	4

<sup>51</sup> Source: extracted from name list in Brodersen, *Wie alles anders kam*, 69-76.



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Total			
310	81	90	48

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Grand Total: 529

Contact between compounds was tightly controlled. Women whose husbands were interned in the male camp were allowed visits during set times, and unmarried women could visit male patients in the hospital ward. When music ensembles were occasionally allowed to perform in the women's camp, the musicians were served coffee and cake after the performance. 'At least that is what the matron thought. Most of the coffee cups, however, contained beer, which we had smuggled in.'<sup>52</sup> An engaged couple became married. After the church ceremony conducted by an interned clergyman, Pater Hetzenecker, the couple got separated, and each continued to celebrate with their own sex in respective compounds.<sup>53</sup>

Women and children in the Green and Red Camps were removed on 5 March 1915 to Roberts Heights, together with their husbands from the main camp. The camp commandant, Cowley, was 'a really nice and humane Englishman', and conditions were generally satisfactory. One compound was reserved for families, and the other one for single women. The former was dubbed 'Camp of Good Hope' by inmates and, indeed, in December that year, after release and re-deportation, an unusually high number of children were born in Lüderitzbucht. Other children were born in the camp itself. Two inmates in the compound for single women were former sex workers in Lüderitzbucht's brothel, *Km I*. One of them did not want to go back as she found employment as governess with a butcher in Transvaal and never returned to Southwest Africa.<sup>54</sup> For reasons that do not clearly emerge from the sources ~~From~~

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, 63 (quote), 68.

~~July 1915 onwards~~, Germans from Lüderitzbucht were re-deported from July 1915 onwards. These included 408 from Roberts Heights (53 men, 181 women, 174 children), 181 from Fort Napier (43 officers, 138 civilians), and 171 scattered over the Union (82 women, 6 men, 83 children).<sup>55</sup> Back in Southwest Africa, they could move into their former homes, but remained under curfew for the remainder of the war.

Brodersen's is a unique account which allows us to explore issues of gender, everyday life, and interpersonal relations from an inmate's perspective. To what extent it is representative, however, is debatable. Deportees from British and in particular Belgium-owned territories generally suffered more hardship. Brodersen herself mentions that those arriving from Belgian Congo in Pietermaritzburg had been 'treated very badly during capture and transport.'<sup>56</sup> On 2 September 1914, the Vice Governor-General of the Katanga territory (Congo) asked the British High Commissioner in Pretoria for permission to deport its German subjects to the Union at the cost of the Belgian government: 'Their present incarceration at Elizabethville causes the greatest difficulties, and does not guarantee their safety on account of the great excitement of the Belgian population. [...] Their presence here is a constant and serious danger.' 53 Germans were despatched from Elizabethville on guarded trains, amongst them five women and four children, for internment in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>57</sup> Those who were married were finally reunited in the Roberts Height camp in March 1915.<sup>58</sup>

After closure of the Roberts Heights camp in May 1915, new facilities for families had to be set up in 1917. This was as a consequence of British military advances in German East Africa and subsequent deportation. Those from occupied New Langenburg – mostly residents

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<sup>55</sup> NASA, CES 126/ES70/2592/14, Commissioner for Enemy Subjects to Quartermaster General, Union Defence Force, 22 July 1915.

<sup>56</sup> Brodersen, *Wie alles anders kam*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> NASA, CES 55/ES70/965/14, Vice Governor-General in Katanga to British High Commissioner in Pretoria, 2 September 1914; BNS 1006/D170/9199 (quote; includes list of names), 19 September 1914.

<sup>58</sup> NA, Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 383/33, American Consulate General Cape Town to Governor-General, 17 April 1915.

of farms, as well as the Berlin and Moravian Missions – were first interned in Blantyre (Nyasaland). In October 1916 the c.150 men were separated, first taken to Mombasa, and then dispersed to camps throughout the Empire. The 54 women and 80 children were deported four months later to South Africa and were first housed in makeshift accommodation in the Princess Park exhibition ground in Pretoria. One inmate wrote that ‘after all our troubles and experiences etc. the state of our nerves is fairly upset.’<sup>59</sup> They feared for their husbands’ health in disease-ridden Mombasa and were unsure about their own future. In May 1917 they were taken to more suitable accommodation in a military station in Tempe near Bloemfontein. Commandant Cowley, who had previously run the operation in Roberts Heights, was put in charge of the new refugee camp. He reassured the Commissioner for Enemy Subjects that the health of the inmates was ‘excellent [...], there are no complaints, and all are satisfied.’<sup>60</sup> This is not necessarily backed up by other sources. The women had no information about their husbands and were exhausted from deportation. Two examples were the wives of missionaries from the Berlin Missionary Society, Martha Heese and Marie Salis. Mrs Heese had three children to look after, was ‘in very poor health’, and asked whether one of her children could be looked after by a sister in law in Riversdale, Cape Colony.<sup>61</sup> Marie Salis, whose fate was mentioned in the introduction to this article, had her second child in the camp and died soon thereafter of consumption/tuberculosis.

If at all, internment in South Africa has only been described as a male experience by existing scholarship. The fact that enemy alien women from within the Union were exempt from internment has led to this. This section has shown that this is an undue omission. In

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<sup>59</sup> NASA, CES 126/ES70/2592/14, Governor in Zomba to Governor-General in Pretoria, 20 January 1917; note Provost Marshal, 5 February 1917; Deutscher Hilfsverein Pretoria to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 7 February 1917; Maria Tauer to Elisabeth Wagner, 11 March 1917 (quote); Internees Princess Park to PM Louis Botha, 25 April 1917.

<sup>60</sup> NASA, CES 126/ES70/2592/14, Commandant Cowley to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 24 July 1917.

<sup>61</sup> NASA, CES 126/ES70/2592/14, Deutscher Hilfsverein Pretoria to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 18 April 1917.

addition to just over 3,000 men, the Union interned, or tightly controlled the movements of, a minimum of 663 'refugee' women and children from other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa: 520 from Lüderitzbucht, 9 from Belgian Congo, 134 from German East Africa, and also a sprinkling from other territories such as Rhodesia, Bechuanaland or Lesotho whose exact numbers do not appear in the sources. But even those women who were not interned from within the Union suffered hardship through loss of income of the main breadwinner, as well as discrimination in daily life. As the American consul in Durban noted after an inspection visit to Fort Napier: 'It is not prisoners who are in need of attention and relief as are the unfortunate women and children, the wives and children of those who are interned, they are the ones that most particularly need attention and relief.' The government allowance of one shilling a day for women and six-pence for children only covered food and lodging, but no clothing, medicines, and other necessary expenses.<sup>62</sup> Graham Dominy notes for Pietermaritzburg that 'a pathetic group of near-destitute wives and children crept into the city seeking lodgings and charity so that they could be near their husbands and fathers confined in the Fort. These unfortunate victims of a conflict not of their making were snubbed, ignored or patronized by the whites of the city according to temperament or affiliation.'<sup>63</sup> Overlooking the impact of internment policies by belligerent states generally, Matthew Stibbe rightly comes to the conclusion that women have been 'forgotten victims of internment. [...] In general, internment was a gendered and gendering experience, emasculating men and disempowering women.' In the same vein, Zoe Denness uncovers the 'forgotten experiences of German women in Britain, 1914-1919.'<sup>64</sup> It is important to look beyond the gender divide, as well as the barbed wire, in order to understand the full impact of internment operations on enemy minorities.

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<sup>62</sup> BArch, R901/83133, W.W. Masterson, American Consul Durban, Report on Civil Camps, 28/29 May 1915.

<sup>63</sup> Dominy, 'Pietermaritzburg', 36.

<sup>64</sup> Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment'; Z. Denness, 'Gender and Germanophobia: The Forgotten Experiences of German Women in Britain, 1914-1919', in Panayi, *Germans as Minorities*, 71-98.

### **Fort Napier internment camp**

During the first phase of ‘trial and error’, the question of where male enemy aliens from within the Union were to be finally detained was overshadowed by the ongoing Afrikaner rebellion. Smuts and Botha condemned the revolt in the harshest terms but distanced themselves from emotional calls for the internment of all Germans regardless of their citizen status. The rebellion was finally crushed in January 1915, but there were disconcerting rumours about the Afrikaner rebels planning to free the German prisoners in Pretoria. Uncensored evidence from above mentioned farmer Hans Ette shows that there was some substance to these rumours: ‘Boer-boys smuggled a message to us that the rebels were approaching in order to liberate us.’ Ette and his fellow inmates tried passive resistance to delay their removal from the camp and wait for the Afrikaner-attack, which never materialised.<sup>65</sup> It seemed to be the safest option for the government to move the prisoners from the Transvaal out of the reach of the rebels. Natal was the only one of the four South African provinces without any insurgent activities. Here, pro-British in combination with anti-German sentiments were most stridently displayed as the hallmark of settler identity. According to Prime Minister Louis Botha, Natal was the ‘most British portion’ of the country.<sup>66</sup>

Fort Napier had recently been abandoned as a British garrison fort for colonial troops and presented itself as an ideal facility with sufficient capacity and security. Regular inspections were carried out by American consular officials as representatives of a neutral power. After the US-entry into the war in 1917, Swiss officials continued their work. Further visits were undertaken by the Judge President of the Natal Native High Court, Henri G. Boshoff, who argued for improvements in conditions.<sup>67</sup> Their reports give detailed information about the topography and workings of the camp. The factual information is corroborated by

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<sup>65</sup> BArch, R901/83133, Ette, POW No. 1016, to friend ‘Oscar’, 9 January 1916.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Dominy, ‘Pietermaritzburg’, 35.

<sup>67</sup> NASA, CES 97/ES70/1843/14, Reports Judge Boshoff, 1915-1917.

other kinds of sources such as (former) inmates' accounts and letters.<sup>68</sup> The site was surrounded by solid corrugated iron fence with barbed wire entanglements. Armed guards were stationed in elevated tower platforms around the whole. The site was divided into four main camps, and these were in turn separated by the same corrugated iron and barbed wire structure. Each camp had an elected captain, and each barrack an elected representative to assist in maintaining discipline and represent prisoners' interests towards the commandant. Camp 1 consisted of 18 barrack rooms constructed from wood and iron with brick foundations. It was furnished with 26 WCs, 12 showers and two bath rooms. There was a kitchen with cooking utensils and a recreation ground. Camps 2 and 3 were described in very similar terms. Resembling military barracks, the rooms were equipped with basic furniture. Each prisoner was given a mattress, blankets, and simple tableware and cutlery. Each of the four camps had a kitchen staff comprising one white cook as well as several Indian and African assistants. African workers cleaned the latrines on a daily basis.<sup>69</sup> South African racial hierarchies remained untouched.

The quality of accommodation was based on a three-tier class system. Camps 1 and 2 were the biggest and contained around 70 percent of the total inmate population. One barrack slept 50 prisoners on average. Camp 3, in contrast, had the 'poorest accommodation'<sup>70</sup> in store rooms with concrete floor and little light and ventilation. Cold and moisture caused rheumatism and, according to inmates, 'no animal could live there for any length of time.'<sup>71</sup> The American consul noted that it contained 'some men of a rougher and less reasonable class than are those in Camps 1, 2, and 4.'<sup>72</sup> One room slept 64 on average. Camp 4, then, held older and 'better

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<sup>68</sup> For example BArch, R 901/83828, Report by German Consular Secretary to German Foreign Office, interned 3 January to 20 March 1915.

<sup>69</sup> NA, FO 383/469, Internees to Louis Botha, 20 July 1917, in Swiss Consul Cape Town, portfolio on Fort Napier, 22 January 1918.

<sup>70</sup> NA, FO 383/469, Swiss Consul Cape Town, portfolio on Fort Napier, 22 January, 1918.

<sup>71</sup> NA, FO 383/469, Internees to Louis Botha, 20 July 1917, in Swiss Consul Cape Town, portfolio on Fort Napier, 22 January 1918.

<sup>72</sup> BArch, R67/823, Inspection report George H. Murphy, American Consul-General, Cape Town, visit 3 to 7 August 1916, 9.

class men' and was 'considered the most desirable one at Fort Napier'. The American Consul summed up its advantages:

Unlike the other camps, where each barrack contains a single large room occupied by many men, in Camp 4 the buildings are divided into 136 rooms, 3 or 4 men being quartered in each apartment. Another advantage which this camp has is that it is supplied with bedsteads. Furthermore it is enclosed only with a barbed-wire fence, while the others are surrounded with high corrugated-iron ones.<sup>73</sup>

There was also a small Camp 5 consisting of a single barrack with just nine occupants in August 1916. This was for 'outcasts from the other camps, where their presence was not desired or tolerated. They were disliked there on account of objectionable habits or for other reasons.' Some were thrown over the fence in their original camps, 'and thus summarily disposed of by their fellow prisoners.'<sup>74</sup> One such instance was that of a prisoner who notified the guards of escape plans by his inmates. He was thrown out of his hut and beaten up in such a serious manner that the guards feared for his life and intervened.<sup>75</sup> Detention and isolation cells existed for those prisoners who disobeyed orders or were re-captured after attempted escapes. Overall, however, inspectors and camp authorities praised the discipline and orderliness amongst the prisoners. One medical officer and twelve orderlies staffed the basic camp hospital with support from a prisoner who was in charge of the dispensary.

Total numbers in the camp rose from 514 in August 1914 to 1174 in September and 2554 in December 1914. The latter number constituted the rough average until 1919, with fluctuations between 2332 (March 1915) and 2782 (July 1915),<sup>76</sup> depending on government policies of detention and parole. In comparison with other dominions and Britain, parole on

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Brodersen, *Wie alles anders kam*, 34-5.

<sup>76</sup> BArch, R 67/823, Report Camp Commandant Manning, 6 August 1915.

humanitarian grounds such as illness or dying relatives was granted liberally. In August 1916 a composition sample read as follows:

Table 3

Prisoner numbers in Fort Napier, August 1916<sup>77</sup>

BY COMPOUND	
Camp 1	931
Camp 2	717
Camp 3	387
Camp 4	334
Camp 5	9
Camp Hospital	33
Detention Camp	3
Total in enclosures:	2414
Mental Hospital	10
Sanatorium	3
Grand Total:	2426

BY NATIONALITY	
German	2212
Austro-Hungarian	192

<sup>77</sup> Source: BArch, R67/823, Inspection report George H. Murphy, American Consul-General, Cape Town, visit 3 to 7 August 1916, 2.



Turkish	6
Naturalized British	16
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Total:	2426
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In December 1916, prisoners themselves conducted a ‘mini-census’ to collect data for perusal by the Berlin-based Support Committee for Germans in British South Africa. Although some numbers do not add up exactly due to inaccurate answers on questionnaires, the compilation provides valuable insights into social structures: Out of a total of 2323, 38 inmates were under 20 years, 57 over 55 years, and the remainder between 20 and 55 years. 1375 were unmarried, and 863 were married with 1763 children. 733 had resided or travelled in South Africa only temporarily, 350 had resided more than five years, 677 more than ten years, and 443 more than 20 years. Roughly a third indicated that they wanted to stay in South Africa after the termination of war, another third wanted to return to Germany, and another third were undecided. The occupational structure looked as follows:

Table 4

Prisoners’ occupations in Fort Napier, December 1916<sup>78</sup>

Artisans	798	Farmers	146
Merchants	514	Miners	84
Hotel employees, chefs, hairdressers, etc.	274	Engineers, architects, etc.	75
Seamen	234	Teachers, missionaries, pastors	38

<sup>78</sup> Source: Camp Representatives to Hilfsausschuss für die Deutschen in Britisch-Süd-Afrika Berlin, 27 Dec. 1916, NASA, CES 170/ES70/3892/14.

A Swiss camp inspector and psychologist, Dr A. L. Vischer, who visited camps in Britain, coined the term ‘barbed-wire disease’ to describe the mental state of those who were interned over prolonged periods. He stated widespread depression and nervousness caused by a mixture of boredom, total lack of privacy, having nothing meaningful to do, disruption of professional existence, worries about families outside the camp, and physical confinement.<sup>79</sup> Another contemporary, Canadian sociologist Robert D. Ketchum who was one of 4000 British and Commonwealth internees in the Ruhleben Camp near Berlin, explained that ‘purposeful activity’ was crucial to escape mental breakdown. Activities pursued by inmates were therefore more than just pastimes, ‘for purpose is the great organizing agent of the personality, establishing priorities among its motives, giving direction and focus to behaviour, and so unifying and stabilizing the self. An aimless life is a disorganized life, and ultimately a demoralized one.’<sup>80</sup> Just like their counterparts in Britain and Germany, inmates in Fort Napier pursued a range of activities, including gardening, football, gymnastics, bowling, tennis, boxing and wrestling. Physical exercise was mostly conducted open air. The Swiss camp inspector in 1917 was ‘agreeably surprised at the general healthy and fit appearance.’<sup>81</sup> Classes for languages, art and technical education were organised, as well as concerts and theatre performances. Orchestral and choir music was prominent. A former inmate wrote that ‘musicians established genuine music schools. It is right to say that nowhere in the whole of South Africa were to be found better classical music performances than in the internment camp in Pietermaritzburg.’<sup>82</sup> Elaborate woodwork was produced and sold outside the camp,

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<sup>79</sup> A. L. Vischer, *Barbed Wire Disease: A Psychological Study of the Prisoner of War* (London: John Bales, Sons and Danielsson, 1919).

<sup>80</sup> R. D. Ketchum, *Ruhleben. A Prison Camp Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 208-9.

<sup>81</sup> NA, FO 383/469, Swiss Consul Cape Town, portfolio on Fort Napier, 22 January 1918.

<sup>82</sup> H. Weiland and L. Kern, eds., *In Feindeshand. Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellungen*, vol. 2 (Vienna: Aron Göch, 1931), 112.

generating a whole ‘Kamp-Industrie’ and some income for craftsmen.<sup>83</sup> Artists created vivid depictions of life in the camp.<sup>84</sup> ‘Others avoid destitution by performing services for their more fortunately placed fellow prisoners, such as acting as barbers, washing clothes, preparing baths, etc.’<sup>85</sup> Contact with the outside world was sustained by a lively written correspondence. This was encouraged by the camp administration, perhaps with the prospect of giving the prisoners an outlet for their emotional distress, although the camp censors found themselves exhausted by the sheer mass of letters that needed to be scrutinised.<sup>86</sup>

Despite what appears to be buzzing activity, the mental state of inmates deteriorated steadily as internment dragged on. This becomes clear when reading successive inspection reports. The American Consul in Durban, visiting in May 1915, found the prisoners ‘exceedingly well, and in good spirits, and on the whole I am inclined to think they are satisfied with their condition, and accept the inevitable good naturedly.’<sup>87</sup> Over a year later, his colleague from Cape Town comes to very different conclusions which point towards endemic ‘barbed wire-disease’. His report is full of descriptors like ‘depressingly monotonous’, ‘mental and physical degeneration resulting from idle brooding over anxieties and troubles’, ‘wearisome confinement’, ‘mental depression’, and ‘sullenness’. He found it natural that, after two years of confinement, ‘some natures become fretful and some minds abnormal.’<sup>88</sup> Professional existences slipped away. Farmer Hans Ette, for example, had his farm let out, but his lessee ran away, his cattle disappeared, and part of his wattle plantation was destroyed by fire. Repeated applications for temporary parole to look after his affairs were rejected.<sup>89</sup> The

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<sup>83</sup> Dominy, ‘Handicraft’.

<sup>84</sup> See n. 44 above, *passim*.

<sup>85</sup> BArch, R67/823, Inspection report George H. Murphy, American Consul-General, Cape Town, visit 3 to 7 August 1916, 6.

<sup>86</sup> NASA, CES 74/ES/70/1331/14, Commandant Fort Napier to Colonel Hamilton-Fowle, 12 January 1916.

<sup>87</sup> BArch, R901/83133, W.W. Masterson, American Consul Durban, Report on Civil Camps, 28/29 May 1915, 10.

<sup>88</sup> BArch, R67/823, *passim*, Inspection report George H. Murphy, American Consul-General, Cape Town, visit 3 to 7 August, 1916.

<sup>89</sup> NASA, CES 55/ES70/963/14, Commandant Fort Napier to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 12 January 1916.

mental state clearly came to the fore in internees' utterances. Dr. Carl August Cohn wrote to relatives in Hamburg:

This month I complete the third year of my sad captivity. It has to be endured, even when the corrugated iron disease starts to destroy the mental and physical organism. To be herded together within such a confined space [...] for such a long time without interruption, behind corrugated iron and idle – even the strongest nerves and body are not able to cope with this in the long run.<sup>90</sup>

Cohn was the offspring of a German-Jewish merchant family which had strong trading connections with South Africa in the form of Arndt & Cohn Ltd. Ironically, twenty years later he would be detained again, this time in Hamburg by the SS in the wake of the *Reichskristallnacht*. His assets in the company were confiscated and he re-migrated to Johannesburg in 1939, 'which town he has selected as his permanent domicile. He has not the intention to return to Germany.'<sup>91</sup>

In Fort Napier, by 1917 three cases of suicide and a dozen cases of insanity had occurred. The prisoners themselves found this rate relatively low considering the circumstances, and ascribed this 'to our method of keeping ourselves employed in true German fashion.'<sup>92</sup> The situation escalated in 1917. In April inmates in Camp 4 wrote a letter to Prime Minister Botha, complaining about remarks made by the Minister of the Interior, Sir Thomas Watt. This included a statement that Germans in South Africa had been induced by their Consuls to become naturalized to act as spies for the German government. The letter was discussed in parliament and triggered a visit to the camp by Louis Botha on 30 July. He met

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<sup>90</sup> BArch, R 901/83133, C. A. Cohn, written to cousin of MP D. F. Waldstein, 19 October 1917. Further accounts of this nature in the same file.

<sup>91</sup> F. Bajohr, *'Aryanisation' in Hamburg. The Economic Exclusion of the Jews and the Confiscation of their Property in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 226; NA, Office of the US Military Government (OMGUS) 260/M1922, Petition Dr. C. A. Cohn to Supreme Court of South Africa, 3 October 1939 (quote), and Arndt & Cohn to Chief Finance President Hamburg, 18 April 1940.

<sup>92</sup> NA, FO 383/469, Letter inmates Camp 4 to General Botha, 2 April 1917, in Swiss Consul Cape Town, portfolio on Fort Napier, 22 January 1918.

with eleven camp representatives who assured him that feeling amongst inmates had 'risen to fever heat', that many were 'on the verge of mental breakdown' due to cramped conditions, separation from families, destroyed professional existence and, most importantly, incomprehension why they were interned at all. Botha's visit did not generate any improvements, and the situation soon boiled over. Frustrated inmates in Camp 3 initiated a three day riot, starting on the evening of 16 August. Applying paraffin, they burnt down two wood and iron buildings. Another building was partially destroyed, and an attempt to set fire to the canteen was intercepted. 250 yards of barbed wire fence was broken down, but no prisoner managed to escape. Seven rioters were injured, and one of them, sailor Emil Gehr, later succumbed to his wounds. Three of the troops and police were injured. Additional troops were brought in from Pietermaritzburg and Durban to support the guards.<sup>93</sup> The cost of damage to buildings either totally or partially destroyed amounted to £1123.6.1.<sup>94</sup> As a punishment, 88 inmates were sent to the Kanus camp in Southwest Africa, where harsh conditions prevailed.<sup>95</sup>

Although prisoner complaints about hygiene, food, lack of exercise outside the camp, cramped conditions, etc., continued after the riots,<sup>96</sup> resignation into the inevitability of internment seems to have set in and the monotony of camp life carried on. Berlin occasionally hinted at the history of neglect in the British concentration camps in the South African War as a sinister precedent to the fate of the German prisoners,<sup>97</sup> but despite the undeniable hardships, camp life in Pietermaritzburg never deteriorated to a similar level of suffering as insinuated by Berlin. The prisoners protested vehemently when the regular visits of their wives were reduced to only one visit every ten days instead of once per week.<sup>98</sup> Objections were also raised when

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<sup>93</sup> NA, FO 383/277, Telegram Governor-General to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 August 1917.

<sup>94</sup> NASA, CES 178/ES70/4202/14, South African Police, Office of the Chief Paymaster and Accountant to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 10 October 1918.

<sup>95</sup> Various files February and March 1918 in NA, FO 383/437, and NASA, CES 184/ES70/4387/14.

<sup>96</sup> NASA, CES 199/ESC31, Internees to Camp Commandant, 3 February 1918.

<sup>97</sup> NA, FO 383/103, German Foreign Office to US Embassy, 24 March 1915.

<sup>98</sup> NASA, CES 97/ES/70/1843/14, Inspection Visit, 28 December 1915.

a promised swimming pool had not materialised.<sup>99</sup> Complaints about the reputedly excessive chicory content of the coffee were only refuted after an official investigation.<sup>100</sup>

Armistice Day did not lead to immediate release. Just as in other countries and parts of the Empire, prisoners were held back as a bargaining chip to put pressure on Germany during peace negotiations and to expedite release of own nationals held by the Central Powers. This period also saw more lengthy discussions about the fate of imprisoned women and children in East Africa who initially were destined to be shipped to occupied German Southwest Africa. The Union authorities were loath to accommodate even more German prisoners at a time when anti-German sentiment among British South Africans ran high. These plans folded, however, mainly because the outbreak of the Spanish Influenza heightened fears of importing infected prisoners to the Union's new territorial acquisition.<sup>101</sup> In April 1919 there were still 2116 inmates in South Africa. Half of these were repatriated to Germany during May 1919 on German and British steamers, also taking in 210 women and 240 children. Most of the 1096 remaining inmates were gradually released into South African society, although beginning of August there were still 291 whose release may have been delayed due to difficulties in arranging for their repatriation. On 16 August 1919, finally, Camp Commander Manning reported that he had transferred five inmates to the Natal Mental Hospital and released the remainder, making the camp population 'Nil'.<sup>102</sup> Ironically, Fort Napier was turned into a mental hospital in 1927 and is used in this function up until the present day.

## Conclusion

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<sup>99</sup> NASA, CES 97/ES/70/1843/14, Inspection Visit, 9 November 1917.

<sup>100</sup> NASA, CES ES70/938/14, part IV, Commandant Fort Napier to Commissioner for Enemy Subjects, 5 June 1916.

<sup>101</sup> NA, FO 383/5436, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Administrator German East Africa, 19 Oct. 1918.

<sup>102</sup> AA/PA, Kapstadt, Name list March/April 1919 compiled by internees, including report July 1919, 56; NASA, CES 137/ES70/2860/14, tables May 1916 to August 1919 in camp commandant's reports.

When pro-Empire loyalists started a campaign after the war to have all German residents irrespective of their naturalisation repatriated from the Union, this stirred vehement resistance among Afrikaners, leading to the withdrawal of the Enemies Repatriation and Denaturalisation Bill which had proposed the deportation of all German prisoners and possibly of other Germans residents deemed to be hostile to the Empire.<sup>103</sup> This episode harks back to our initial argument about the squeezed position of South Africa's German minority between the two dominant white groups – not necessarily to its detriment. The history of internment in South Africa indicates a global trend towards a sharper definition of ethnic identity and citizenship during the First World War, culminating in more restrictive migration regimes during the 1920s.<sup>104</sup> Many Germans had not conceptualised their identity within such clearly demarcated categories until being made aware of them during their years in confinement. Conversely, the political struggles between Afrikaners and British South Africans contributed to the relatively benign treatment of the German prisoners because Afrikaner sympathies provided an antidote to excessive Germanophobia. Both Botha and Smuts continuously emphasised throughout the war that they fought the German government but did not have any quarrels with the German people. When Prime Minister Louis Botha visited the camp in 1917, he was almost apologetic towards internees, stressing that he had to follow the British lead, and that “relations between the German people, and the Boer nation have always been friendly.”<sup>105</sup> Although it was important throughout the present article to widen the lens on other world regions and periods, the specificities of the South African case must not be left out of sight.

Suffering was not confined to the male sphere but also included wives and families outside the camps, as well as deportee women from other Sub-Saharan territories. This article

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<sup>103</sup> Debates of the House of Assembly of the Union of South Africa as reported in the Cape Times, Vol.4, part 1, 17 Jan. 1919 to 20 June 1919, State Library Pretoria, 15 and 29 March 1919, 4 April 1919.

<sup>104</sup> A. Fahrmeir, O. Faron and P. Weil, eds., *Migration Control in the North Atlantic World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

<sup>105</sup> NA, FO 383/469, Swiss Consul Cape Town, portfolio on Fort Napier, 22 January 1918.

has contributed to filling~~filled~~ the blank gender spot which pervades much of the literature on civilian internment and proposes pertinent methodological (re-)consideration for future scholarship. More generally, individual suffering occurred but has to be seen within the relativising framework outlined in the introduction to this article. Other national groups, or indeed Germans elsewhere, suffered incomparably more through wartime restrictions and atrocities against civilians. It is, however, not *in spite*, but *because* of these relativisations that the significance of the South African case comes to the fore. It constitutes a hitherto unexplored chapter in the evolution of civilian mass internment which, as a policy, would become a constitutive element of warfare throughout the twentieth century.