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The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History
(Auckland Park, Jacana, 2013. xvii + 391 pp. ISBN 978-1-4314-0542-8)

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Elizabeth van Heyningen's *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* is the first extensive scholarly study focusing on the history of/ and everyday-life of the concentration camps in the South African War. Van Heyningen also highlights the fact that the concentration camps in South Africa were not unique occurrences, since a vast range of camps were seen in other parts of the world, especially due to colonial warfare.

Although Van Heyningen started doing research specifically on the medical history of the camps, she realized that the medical history could not be separated from the broader history against the backdrop of the social. As such the book developed into an important contribution to South African social history. It attempts to fill a gap within the South African historiography where the history of the general society, affected by the camps, was significantly neglected. A vast range of historical texts were written discussing the political history of the war, but the idea of the camps tended to be generalized and compartmentalized thus disregarding the social effects and history thereof.

Through Van Heyningen's intense research of the previously neglected primary sources such as administrative correspondences, camp registers, testimonies and so forth, she had made a notable contribution to the historiography of the South African War.

The book consists of four parts that give a semi-chronological, but also informative analysis of the camps. Van Heyningen's account of the mythology of the concentration camps provides the study with an important foundation and also serves as key motivation for undertaking the study. She discusses ideas regarding the history of the camps which has been accepted as an ultimate truth, while certain facts has either been ignored or forgotten. These mythologies have not only influenced historiography, but also the general understanding of the camps. Consequently the book is an attempt and method to either prove or disprove the mythologies through means of historical analysis and scrutiny of information accepted as "facts" relating to the camps.

An important discussion is the diversity of the people in the camps, with accounts to the different races and classes who have been influenced. Generalization of the history of the war disregarded the vast range of people and thus also the vast influence of the war on the broader South African community.

The social and economic state of South Africa before the war are important aspects to consider, because the country was not in the same stage of development as Europe and still rested on a pre-industrial type of hierarchy. British women had a significantly different role in the family and society, where the Boer women's roles were idealised and they possessed a status unequalled in contemporary Britain. The Boer women participated in the war to a large extent and Van Heyningen stresses the agency of the Boer women, especially because it is an indication of one of the motivations for Britain to establish the camps.

Van Heyningen explains how Britain had a lack of decent policies regarding the camps and how these reluctant policies led to the crises for which the camps are known. Kitchener was the main propagator of the ruthless measures of the camps with aims to force the war to an end. Van Heyningen shows that these policies did not take the realities of an almost "total war" into account when it came to civilians. Therefore the administration was also not sufficient, leading to practical mismanagement which contributed to the poor food and

medical sources. Health care was non-existent as well as the lack of proper infrastructure. Her thorough focus on the nature of these policies goes further than previous studies of the camps.

A large portion of the book focuses on the physical and emotional challenges experienced by both white and black women and children in the camps and an idea is sketched of what “being in a camp” involved. Van Heyningen’s discussion regarding the black concentration camps is a much needed discourse in the current South African historical field. Historians tended to neglect this part of the war for a significant amount of time. The extent to which black women and children also suffered and died due to the camps, had not been previously realized. These tragic experiences are not euphemized in the book and the horrifying circumstances are explained. By explaining these experiences, one gains a better understanding of why the South African War is still such a source of regret and tragedy.

Since the book started as a medical history of the camps, a portion in the third part of focuses solely on medical history – a topic on which Van Heyningen has published in the past. Many controversies and ideas regarding the British and Boer medical care were under debate at the time of the war, but even though the Boers were made out to be unhygienic, little was done to improve their circumstances in the camps. Nurses had little or no medical supplies and the fatality rate in the camps skyrocketed. In the recent historiography of the South African War, this part of the book contributes to what has been called “a debate without end” when the causes of all the deaths in the camps came under the scrutiny of historians.

Although the book focuses on the camps and the women and children, Van Heyningen does not neglect to discuss the men in the camps. The general idea was that there were not a lot of men in the camps except for *hensoppers* and old men. However, her study proves that more men were included than originally believed and their circumstances equaled those of women. Furthermore, they experienced difficulties regarding their identity in the camps and the *hensoppers* were despised for giving up and betraying the Boers. Probably the most ironic part of the camps, was that the British tried to educate the “refugees” in the camps to become more “civilized”.

The final part discusses the aftermath of the war and the end of the camps. Even at the end of the war Britain had false ideas and misguided interpretations about the camps and the inhumane way in which they were

managed. Additionally, the end of the war did not represent happiness for the Boers or the Black population of the two former republics, since their homes and farms were destroyed. Trust between each other was demolished and families were scattered and devastated. Black people had a lot of difficulties, since they were called traitors by the Boers, but they also did not get what they were promised by the British and consequently their suffering cannot be ignored in favor of ideas that have been propagated by historiography in the past, namely that only the *Boers* carried the brunt of the war.

The trauma experienced in the aftermath as well as the remembrance thereof was a post-war depression that hung over the country, with both psychological and physical impacts on the inhabitants. The South African demography was altered to a massive extent, but the war had paved a way for the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism. Van Heyningen states that the black people suffered the most, but they were also a form of collateral damage, since their political situation did not improve much after the war. The concentration camps had an immense impact and Van Heyningen succeeds in explaining why this was the case.

Taking into account the length of the book, it is undeniable that there are still noteworthy areas that could also be discussed concerning the concentration camps. The lack of sources about the black camps also contributes to the lesser account thereof in the book, as Van Heyningen points out as well. The term “Anglo-Boer War” is a debatable label in the title, hence it could have been wiser to use the politically correct term of “South African War”, especially since it is more commonly used in current South African historiography.

Nevertheless, the book presents a comprehensive overview that is an asset to the corpus of South African historical studies. In addition, it is comprehensible for non-academic readers and will certainly appeal to the general public. Van Heyningen illustrates a paradigm shift in the historical approach of the South African War through sufficient knowledge and information, as well as a non-normative approach through which the agency of women and children were especially emphasized. *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* is without a doubt valuable reading and research material for students and historians of South African history.