

**“A QUESTION WHICH AFFECTS OUR PRESTIGE AS A NATION”: THE HISTORY  
OF BRITISH CIVILIAN INTERNMENT, 1899-1945**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis offers a comparative analysis of British wartime civilian internment policies, focusing on three key case studies: the South African War (1899-1902), the First World War and the Second World War. It seeks to determine the place of the 'concentration camps' of the South African War within the history of internment and the extent to which world war internment episodes were shaped by both historical and contemporary experiences. It suggests that reactions to internment, at both state and popular levels, are revealing about Britain's self-image in relation to civil rights, justice and the treatment of minorities.

In particular, the thesis argues that gender ideologies were highly significant in determining the development of internment policies, playing a central role in shaping popular images of the enemy and underpinning official assumptions about the treatment of women by the state. The debates and discussions which emerged around internment policy also provide insight into the ways in which the experience of war can accentuate the exclusion of minorities and the reinforcement of racial stereotypes. The thesis examines the ways in which racialized and gendered discourses converged during each conflict to create particular understandings of the enemy, which in turn had a discernible impact on the development of internment policies.

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## INTRODUCTION

In December 2004, nine individuals detained without trial at Belmarsh Prison as suspected terrorists brought their cases before the House of Lords, arguing that their detention was unlawful and undermined the guidelines set out in the European Convention on Human Rights.<sup>1</sup> The imprisonment of the men in question had taken place in the context of the counter-terrorism measures introduced by the British Government in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, allowing the detention of suspected international terrorists under Part 4 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001.<sup>2</sup> Their case had been rejected by the Court of Appeal, but the House of Lords upheld the claimants' challenge by a total of eight to one.<sup>3</sup> Coming at a time when fears about terrorism were shaping legislation across Europe and the United States, this ruling has been regarded as highly significant in reinforcing the case for civil liberties in Britain.<sup>4</sup> However, the statement of one of the eight peers, Lord Hoffman, has received particular attention for its strong rejection of the concept of detention without trial, and the terms in which this rejection was made. His argument, which hinged on the notion that detention without trial undermined a specifically British tradition of freedom and civil liberty, has been described as representing the "most enduring and important contribution of this case to the traditions of civil liberty in this country".<sup>5</sup> Hoffman asserted that "Freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention is a quintessentially British liberty, enjoyed by the inhabitants of this country when most of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Poole, 'Harnessing the Power of the Past? Lord Hoffman and the Belmarsh Detainees Case', *Journal of Law and Society*, 32, 4, 2005, pp.534-561; pp.535-6.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Mendelle, 'No detention please, we're British?', *New Law Journal*, 77, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Poole, 'Harnessing the Power', p536.

<sup>4</sup> Mendelle, 'No detention please'.

<sup>5</sup> Mendelle, 'No detention please'.

the population of Europe could be thrown into prison at the whim of their rulers.”<sup>6</sup> He urged that lessons should be learnt from British history, which was defined by the nation’s “constitutional freedoms”, and which had seen detention without trial only ever resorted to with “great misgiving” at times when the life of the nation was under grave threat.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the positive impact on British civil liberties attributed to the outcome of the ‘Belmarsh’ case, some observers have cautioned against the acceptance of Hoffman’s image of detention without trial as a policy somehow alien to British traditions.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, an examination of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British history demonstrates that internment and detention have been repeatedly used by the government against groups or individuals perceived as posing a threat, in a variety of ways, to the British nation.<sup>9</sup> A notable example of this has been the repeated utilisation of internment and detention policies by the British authorities in Ireland during the last two centuries, a region historically associated with nationalist and terrorist threats. During the nineteenth century, the British government introduced a number of pieces of legislation allowing the apprehension or detention

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<sup>6</sup> Judgments - A (FC) and others (FC) (Appellants) v. Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent), 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012, Para. 86.

<http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKHL/2004/56.html>, Accessed 16/08/2012.

<sup>7</sup> A (FC) and others (FC) (Appellants) v. Secretary of State, Paras 95; 89.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Moeckli, ‘Human Rights Strategies in an Age of Counter-Terrorism’, in Reza Banakar (ed.), *Rights in Context: Law and Justice in Late Modern Society*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.215-230; pp.220-221; A. W. Brian Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention Without Trial in Wartime Britain*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

<sup>9</sup> Internment and detention are frequently very similar in nature. However, *The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law* states that “the difference between internment and detention is that decisions relating to internment are taken by administrative or military authorities, while those relating to detention generally come under the responsibility of judicial authorities”: Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, *The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*, (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), p.226.

of individuals suspected of engaging in actions against British rule.<sup>10</sup> In 1918, an expansion of wartime security regulations allowed the detention without charge of individuals in Ireland suspected of planning insurrection, and the power of detention continued until the establishment of the Irish Free State in December 1921.<sup>11</sup> Fifty years later, when the British government assumed direct control in Northern Ireland, the detention without trial of terrorist suspects was given legislative authority through the Detention of Terrorists (NI) Order of 1972.<sup>12</sup> Similar (although less well-publicised) policies have also played a significant part in Britain's imperial history. In 1954, for example, it has been estimated that the British detained around 1.5 million Kikuyu people suspected of being connected to the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in both internment camps and "enclosed villages".<sup>13</sup> In addition, as this thesis will explore in detail, the internment of 'enemy' civilians took place during most major conflicts of the twentieth century within both domestic and colonial settings. Within a modern context, detention continues to be a significant element of British domestic policy. While policies regarding the detention of terror suspects have been relaxed in recent years, the Immigration Service continues to detain large number of 'asylum-seekers' under Immigration Act powers: 27,000 migrants were detained in 2011 alone.<sup>14</sup> As Daniel Moeckle has observed, therefore, internment or detention without

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<sup>10</sup> Simpson, *Highest Degree Odious*, pp.4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Simpson, *Highest Degree Odious*, pp.26-29. This was an expansion of Regulation 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Cunningham, *British government policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-2000*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp.20-21. This was a 'modified form' of the internment policy introduced under the Stormont administration and required the suspects case to be referred to a commissioner within twenty-eight days of arrest.

<sup>13</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulags: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*, (London: Pimlico, 2005), p.xi.

<sup>14</sup> Stephanie J. Silverman and Ruchi Hajela, 'Briefing: Immigration Detention in the UK', The Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, 22/05/2012, p.3.



charge or trial is, in reality, well-established in British legal and political history, and therefore should not be regarded as something which is “new”, “exceptional” or inherently ‘un-British’.<sup>15</sup>

While internment has been experienced by a range of different populations in a variety of contexts, the implementation of the policy is almost always justified by perceptions of those populations as a threat to the national community, whether physically, socially, or ideologically. Consequently, the development of internment has been particularly significant within wartime contexts, when it has tended to have been designed to control and contain ‘enemy’ civilians and others regarded as constituting a direct or indirect danger to national security. The study of internment during wartime, generally a time when distrust of outsiders is greatly heightened, allows an analysis of the ways in which rhetoric relating to social inclusion and exclusion can develop under extreme circumstances. Within these parameters, the current thesis will investigate the development of British wartime internment policy during the twentieth century, examining the continuities and shifts in the discourses surrounding such practices. Through a comparative analysis of three key episodes of internment established during the South African War (1899-1901), the First World War, and the Second World War, it will offer insight into the evolution of both the practical principles of internment policies and the wider discourses which shaped them. In addition, by addressing wartime incidences of internment, the thesis aims to offer analysis of the wider trends relating to attitudes towards ‘outsiders’ during times

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[http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/migobs/Immigration%20Detention%20Briefing%20v2\\_0.pdf](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/migobs/Immigration%20Detention%20Briefing%20v2_0.pdf) (accessed 21/08/2012)

<sup>15</sup> Moeckli, ‘Human Rights’, pp.220-1.

of conflict, the experiences of civilian populations during war, and the relationship of these themes to the changing nature of warfare during the twentieth century.

Internment policy during the three wars examined here was introduced principally (although not always exclusively) against civilians of 'enemy' nationality.<sup>16</sup> The first of these internment episodes developed during 1900 within the context of the Boer guerrilla campaign of the South African War (1899-1902). In late 1899, Britain had become involved in a war against the two independent Boer nations of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic (also known as the Transvaal Republic). The following year, in response to the development of guerrilla tactics by the Boer forces, the British military authorities introduced a 'scorched earth' policy, designed to hinder their opponents from accessing shelter and supplies.<sup>17</sup> To address the issue of homelessness which resulted among the Boer and African civilian populations, and to tackle the potential threat posed by Boer non-combatants as spies and suppliers to the enemy, internment camps (which became widely known as

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<sup>16</sup> There were exceptions or complexities relating to this rule during each of the three conflicts examined here. During the South African War, internment was initiated against Boers as enemy civilians. After the British claimed the annexation of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State in 1900, however, the internees could technically be regarded as British subjects. African civilians, many of whom expressed allegiance to the British cause, also found themselves in internment camps. During the First World War, attempts were made to intern almost all male 'enemy' civilians; however, protests were made in a number of cases where internees possessed 'enemy' nationality merely on a technicality, perhaps having been born within the borders of an 'enemy' state but raised in Britain or another neutral or Allied state. During the Second World War, attempts were made to base internment on an individual's sympathy with the enemy, rather than enemy nationality. As will be seen, this was frequently unsuccessful, but it did result in the internment of a significant number of British subjects suspected of having Fascist sympathies.

<sup>17</sup> For an in-depth discussion of these developments see S. B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism: Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics January 1900 – May 1902*, (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1977)

'concentration camps') were introduced.<sup>18</sup> The population of these camps included a significant proportion of women and children, and the incarceration of large numbers of people, in often unsanitary conditions, led to high levels of disease and mortality among the inmates. It has been estimated that over 26,000 people, including more than 22,000 children, died in the camps, and these figures caused huge controversy in Britain over the ethics of the internment of categories of non-combatants regarded as particularly vulnerable due to their age or sex.<sup>19</sup>

Both Caroline Elkins and David Anderson have noted the similarities between British tactics towards civilians during the South African War and those towards civilians in Kenya during the Mau Mau uprising, when the British authorities responded to guerrilla fighting with the enforced movement and confinement of civilian populations assumed to be associated with the 'enemy'.<sup>20</sup> A future comparative study of these two events would be highly useful in determining the role of colonial experiences and mindsets in shaping such policies. However, the present study is interested in the formative role of the South African War in shaping internment practices, and the discourses relating to them, during the early twentieth century. Although the South African internment policy has often been referred to as one of the earliest examples of modern wartime civilian internment policy, it has rarely been closely analysed in terms of its relationship with the episodes that followed it.<sup>21</sup> This thesis aims to draw

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.59.

<sup>19</sup> Liz Stanley, *Mourning becomes...Post/memory, commemoration and the concentration camps of the South African War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.3.

<sup>20</sup> Elkins, *Britain's Gulags*, p.235; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), p.294.

<sup>21</sup> While this has been regarded as the first modern British example of internment, it was preceded by the enforced internment, or 'Reconcentración', of civilian populations in Cuba by

out the administrative and ideological connections (and discontinuities) between internment practices in South Africa at the turn of the century and those implemented during the two world wars that followed.

Internment policies during the First and Second World Wars have traditionally been more closely associated with each other, due to their development on British soil in what have been regarded as 'total war' contexts.<sup>22</sup> During both these conflicts, internment policies were principally directed against 'enemy aliens', foreign nationals with origins in states against which Britain was engaged in hostilities. During the First World War, this category included Germans (who, prior to the outbreak of hostilities had constituted a significant and generally well-assimilated community in Britain), Austrians, Hungarians, and, later, Turkish nationals. Limited internment measures were introduced from the outbreak of the war, but in May 1915, against a background of increasingly virulent popular Germanophobia, the British government established a general internment policy against male enemy aliens of military age. Around 32,000 enemy aliens became subject to this policy, often for the duration of the conflict, and at the cessation of hostilities the majority internees were deported.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the male German population in Britain in 1919 stood at only 8,476, less than a quarter of

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the Spanish General Weyler in 1898, which gave rise to the phrase 'concentration camps'. See Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War 1914-1918*, (London: New York University Press, 2010), p.204; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002 [first edition 2000] Translated from the French by Catherine Temerson), pp.70-71.

<sup>22</sup> Two volumes have been published in the last twenty years which have grouped these two internment episodes together: David Cesarani and Tony Kushner, *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Frank Cass, 1993), and Richard Dove (ed.), *'Totally Un-English'?: Britain's Internment of 'enemy Aliens' in Two World Wars*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005)

<sup>23</sup> David Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Alienism in British Society before 1940', in Cesarani and Kushner (eds.), *The Internment of Aliens*, pp.25-52; p.35.

that of 1914.<sup>24</sup> While the general internment policy was targeted exclusively at men, women of ‘enemy’ nationality were liable for repatriation to their country of origin, and, as this thesis will argue, the impact of internment was felt by all members of the German, Austrian and Hungarian communities in Britain.<sup>25</sup>

While the internment of ‘enemy aliens’ received widespread popular support during the First World War, by 1939, in the context of the irrationally discriminatory policies of Nazi Germany, the earlier episode was often remembered critically.<sup>26</sup> A 1939 article in the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, described the introduction of First World War internment as a result of “ignorant suspicion” prevalent amongst the British population.<sup>27</sup> At the outbreak of the Second World War, British officials pledged to introduce internment only where reasonable suspicion of an individual could be determined.<sup>28</sup> This appeared to be a particularly sensible stance given that a large number of the ‘enemy aliens’ in Britain were actually refugees from Hitler’s regime. However, as Nazi Germany’s military position appeared to strengthen during 1940, and the invasion of Western Europe left Britain increasingly isolated and vulnerable, opinion towards ‘enemy aliens’ hardened. Between May and July 1940, the government initiated internment measures against individuals of enemy origin who had not convinced a tribunal of their commitment to the British cause, and then

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<sup>24</sup> Panikos Panayi, ‘An Intolerant Act by an Intolerant Society: The Internment of Germans in Britain During the First World War’, in Cesarani and Kushner (eds.), *The Internment of Aliens*, pp.53-78; p.62.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed examination of the experiences of Germans in Britain during the First World War see Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain During the First World War*, (Oxford: Berg, 1991)

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, ‘The Treatment of Aliens’, *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1939, p.9.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Enemy Aliens’, *Manchester Guardian*, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1939, p.6.

<sup>28</sup> See Hansard, House of Commons Debates (hereafter HC Deb), 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939, vol. 351, cols 366-370.

expanded this measure to include a significant number of male enemy aliens who had originally been cleared of posing any threat to national security. On Italy's entrance into the war, internment was expanded to include Italian men of military age who had lived in Britain for less than twenty years. The late development of Italy's involvement in the conflict meant that none of these individuals were given the opportunity of appearing before a tribunal prior to their internment.<sup>29</sup> While there was little initial popular opposition to internment policy, by July 1940 criticism was growing. Increasing discomfort at the imprisonment of significant numbers of people considered to be genuine refugees was exacerbated by the deaths of several hundred internees on the torpedoed *Arandora Star* who were among the thousands of individuals shipped to Canada and Australia for internment.<sup>30</sup> In response to the outcry this provoked, the government gradually implemented a programme of release, and by the following spring many of those interned during the 1940 invasion panic had been freed.<sup>31</sup>

Since the controversy of 1940, and the subsequent release of internees, wartime internment during the Second World War, and indeed all the conflicts examined here, has largely disappeared from British popular memory, subsumed by the myth of a uniquely British history of liberalism, justice and fair play. As Lord Hoffman's words have indicated, the belief in a specifically British tradition of reverence for civil liberties continues to shape the national self-image, and as a result, civilian

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<sup>29</sup> 'Treatment of Italians in event of war with Italy', June 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1719; War Cabinet 161 (40): National Archives, Kew, CAB 65/7/56; Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing War as the 'Enemy Other': Italian Scottish Experience in World War II*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.97.

<sup>30</sup> Miriam Kochan, *Britain's Internees in the Second World War*, (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.84.

<sup>31</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1941, vol. 368, cols 179-181.

internment, with its potential to undermine this glorious self perception, has been difficult to address.<sup>32</sup> In recent decades, however, the subject of internment has begun to reappear on academic agendas; comparative, edited works on world war internment policies have been produced, and historians have shown increasing interest in the general experiences of civilians during war.<sup>33</sup> The 'concentration camps' of the South African War, in particular, have received increasing attention from academics, with studies on a range of elements of camp experiences, from both British and South African perspectives, appearing during the past decade.<sup>34</sup> This thesis aims to contribute to the growing body of work on the subject by providing a broader understanding of internment and its long-term development, within the context of a number of key themes. It will consider the place of internment policies within changing processes and perceptions of warfare and understandings of the status of the civilian within the twentieth century, and will investigate the significance of dominant British ideologies of national identity, race and gender in shaping the development of these policies.

### **Total war and the concept of the 'civilian'**

The introduction of civilian internment by belligerent states has been regarded as a significant feature of the 'total wars' of the twentieth century, particularly in terms of

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<sup>32</sup> Gavin Schaffer, 'Re-Thinking the History of Blame: Britain and Minorities during the Second World War', *National Identities*, 8, 4, 2006, pp.401-419; pp.401-402.

<sup>33</sup> Cesarani and Kushner, *Internment of Aliens*, Dove, 'Totally Un-English?', Proctor, *Civilians*, Matthew Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment and Civilian Internees in Europe, 1914-20', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 26, 1, 2008, pp.49-81; Hugo Slim, *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War*, (London: Hurst, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Leading scholars on this subject include Elizabeth van Heyningen, Liz Stanley, Helen Dampier and Paul Krebs. Please see the Bibliography for full details of their work.

its militarization of the civilian experience.<sup>35</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker have seen the development of internment policies for both civilians and military personnel during the First World War as being closely related to the 'total' nature of the conflict, and therefore different in kind to earlier colonial internment episodes.<sup>36</sup> The association of internment with 'total war' alone is not straightforward, however, particularly because historians and theorists remain divided on the definition of the term and have approached the concept from very different angles.<sup>37</sup> For Ian Beckett, for example, the essence of 'total war' lies in its global nature.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, John Horne, in his discussion of the First World War, has regarded the conflict's essential 'totality' as lying, not in its destructiveness or geographical scale, but in its "totalizing logic, or potential", particularly in terms of "the readiness to represent the war in absolute terms, as a crusade against a total (and often dehumanized) enemy".<sup>39</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have suggested that the First World War was characterised by excessive violence towards civilians in the form of massacres, atrocities, imprisonments, deportations and forced labour, which

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<sup>35</sup> Kay Saunders, ' "The stranger in our gates": Internment policies in the United Kingdom and Australia during the two world wars, 1914-39', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 22, 1, 2010, pp.22-23. Matthew Stibbe has also associated internment with features commonly associated with 'total war' such as the "enormous growth in the scale and destructiveness of war" and "the industrialisation of warfare [which] led modern nation-states to place increasing emphasis on the link between citizenship and military service": Matthew Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment and Civilian Internees in Europe, 1914-1920', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 26, 2008, pp.49-81; p.51.

<sup>36</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 14-18, pp.70-71.

<sup>37</sup> Jeremy Black, *The Age of Total War, 1860-1945*, (London: Praeger Security International, 2006), pp.1-2; pp.9-10.

<sup>38</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, 'Total War', in Arthur Marwick, Clive Emsley and Wendy Simpson (eds.), *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914-1955*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), pp.24-41; p.29.

<sup>39</sup> John Horne, 'Introduction: mobilizing for 'total war', 1914-1918', in John Horne (ed.), *State, society and mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.1-18; pp.3-4.



contributed to “the process whereby war became total in the twentieth century”.<sup>40</sup> This association between the idea of ‘totality’ and extensive civilian involvement, as agents, victims, or both, has been significant to a number of analyses of the world wars of the twentieth century.<sup>41</sup> Central to the concept of ‘total war’ for most historians, however, has been the mobilization of large proportions of national populations in its support, both ideologically and economically.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the ‘totality’ of both the First and Second World Wars was strongly defined by the commitment of civilian populations to driving the war industries and economies necessary to maintain hostilities. These developments meant that the distinction between civilians and soldiers become more difficult to define.

The problematic nature of the ‘civilian’ has been central to the discussions of wartime morality since the term came into use during the late nineteenth century. Adam Roberts has argued that the concept continues to be an ambiguous one, particularly in terms of the extent to which a civilian should be considered to be “an enemy or a subject of protection; and whether, to merit protection, the civilian needs to be ‘inoffensive’, perhaps entirely innocent of all entanglement in the ongoing conflict.”<sup>43</sup> As Hugo Slim has noted, while on the surface the idea of the ‘civilian’ may appear straightforward, in practice civilian populations have frequently been associated with

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<sup>40</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p.89.

<sup>41</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.3; Stibbe, ‘Civilian Internment’, p.51.

<sup>42</sup> Hew Strachan, ‘Total War in the Twentieth Century’, in Arthur Marwick, Clive Emsley and Wendy Simpson (eds.), *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914-1955*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), pp.255-283; pp.271-2; Horne, ‘Introduction’, pp.3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Adam Roberts, ‘The Civilian in Modern War’, in Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers (eds), *The Changing Character of War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.357-380; pp.362-363.

economic, political and social support for military conflicts.<sup>44</sup> This ambiguity was particularly notable in the context of the idea of the 'total' wars of the twentieth century. At this time, no international treaty had exclusively addressed the role of civilians in war (the 1949 Geneva Convention would be the first to do so), although the Hague Convention of 1901 declared that punishments should not be inflicted on local populations "on account of the acts of individuals for which it cannot be regarded as collectively responsible".<sup>45</sup> The scales of the First and Second World Wars, and the increasing reliance on civilians to provide manpower for war industries, meant that civilians became as significant as soldiers in driving the war efforts. In consequence, the identification of civilians as military targets became easier to justify; if a civilian factory was producing armaments for war, for example, the bombing of that factory, and the resulting loss of civilian life, could be regarded as a legitimate military step (such thinking would be replicated on the most extensive scale with the use of atomic weapons against Japan in 1945).<sup>46</sup> The development of internment policy in Britain, an essentially military step against civilian populations, provides an important point of focus for the dilemma regarding the status of the non-combatant in twentieth-century warfare. Central to Matthew Stibbe's analysis of First World War internment, for example, has been the contention that the conflict saw the "distinction between combatants and enemy civilians [become] increasingly

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<sup>44</sup> Slim, *Killing Civilians*, pp. 183-204.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, 'The Civilian in Modern War', pp.363-365; Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, p.111. Spies has argued that the British Government broke the Hague Convention in their treatment of civilians during the South African War.

<sup>46</sup> Hew Strachen and Sibylle Scheipers, 'Introduction: The Changing Character of War', in Hew Strachen and Sibylle Scheipers (eds), *The Changing Character of War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.1-26; pp.8-9. See also Proctor, *Civilians*, p.11; Slim, *Killing Civilians*, p.190.

blurred”.<sup>47</sup> Other historians have argued that, in fact, this ‘blurring’ affected not merely individuals of ‘enemy’ origin but the civilian sphere as a whole.<sup>48</sup>

Civilian internment can be associated with the practice which Hew Strachan has identified as one of the key determinants of ‘total war’: the breaching of the “principles of non-combatant immunity”.<sup>49</sup> During the First and Second World Wars, this also involved the more specific and violent targeting of civilian populations in bombing campaigns, naval blockades, forced migration, massacre and individual violence.<sup>50</sup> However, it is also important to note that the targeting of civilians, and the blurring of military and non-military spheres, was not unique to the world wars. The roots of this element of ‘total war’ has been seen as stemming from the American Civil War, and was frequently evident in smaller-scale, colonial conflicts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>51</sup> During the South African War, as will be seen, the British authorities frequently associated the successes of Boer guerrillas with their economic and ideological support from civilian communities. This assumption provided justification for the introduction of the ‘scorched earth’ policy, which devastated areas of civilian settlement, and the enforced internment of tens of thousands of civilians. The association of internment with ‘total war’ alone can therefore be problematic since it overlooks the possible long-term significance of colonial conflicts and the complexity of colonial-metropolitan relationships.

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<sup>47</sup> Stibbe, ‘Civilian Internment’, p.51.

<sup>48</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.11; Peter Gatrell, ‘Refugees and Forced Migrants during the First World War’, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 26, 1/2, 2008, pp.82-110; p.82; p.87

<sup>49</sup> Strachan, ‘Total War’, p.265.

<sup>50</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.11.

<sup>51</sup> Strachan, ‘Total War’, pp.255-6; pp.265-6; Beckett, ‘Total War’, p.28.

As both Hew Strachan and Jeremy Black have noted, a war that is regarded as 'total' for one state can be 'limited' for another, as in the experience of the USA during the Second World War.<sup>52</sup> While it would be difficult to label the South African War as a 'total war' in the same way as the twentieth century world wars, due to its limited geographical range, it seems pertinent to argue that it involved elements of totality, or developments which anticipated those of the later conflicts. Strachan has argued that, although colonial wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have traditionally been regarded by European or American commentators as "small wars", they were often experienced by the colonial populations (and particularly non-white, tribal communities) as 'total' conflicts, since they involved totality of war aims and frequently militarised the vast majority of the civilian community.<sup>53</sup> Although the South African War was clearly not a total war experience for the British people, the conflict was devastating from the perspective of the South African population, and mobilised or impacted on enormous sections of the national community. The profound effect of the war on the civilian population was epitomized by the wartime internment experience, which involved the imprisonment – and ultimately the deaths - of large numbers of the South African population.

As Tammy Proctor has argued, however, while civilians became more closely involved in the experience of war during the twentieth century a sharper distinction between the civilian and military spheres was simultaneously cultivated in official and popular rhetoric. Thus, both the First and Second World Wars saw the strict ideological demarcation of the military fronts and the 'home fronts', the latter of

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<sup>52</sup> Strachan, 'Total War', p.263; Black, *Age of Total War*, p.8.

<sup>53</sup> Strachan, 'Total War', pp.265-6.

which, while in reality essential to the maintenance of the war effort and with their own mythologies developing around them, remained strictly separate and secondary to the former.<sup>54</sup> Proctor has suggested that the “civilian/soldier dichotomy” of the First World War, however problematic in reality, was central to the way that all belligerent governments encouraged popular support for the conflict. While the ‘home fronts’ were essential to maintaining the war effort on a practical level, their definition as ‘civilian’ zones which needed protection could be used by governments as a tool to encourage ongoing commitment to the military cause from the soldiers being asked to put their lives on the line.<sup>55</sup> This thesis will demonstrate that the pattern of a practical blurring of civilian and military spheres, accompanied by a rhetorical separation of the two, was not unique to the First World War but was also strongly evident during the South African War, with echoes continuing to be seen during the Second World War. The fact that this coincided with the development of British wartime internment policies was not coincidental: in each of the three conflicts analysed here, the introduction of internment - a military measure taken against non-combatants - reinforced the increasing ambiguity of civilian status.

### **War, gender and internment**

The civilian/military divide which was key to twentieth-century warfare was also, to a very large extent, a male/female divide. During the two world wars, this was particularly evident in the development of the ‘feminine’ ‘home front’ in relation to the ‘masculine’ military front. To some historians, the very existence of divisions between these two spheres were significant in creating the potential for traditional gender

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<sup>54</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.3; Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp.48-50.

<sup>55</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.7; Noakes, *War and the British*, p.52.

imbalances to be addressed, particularly as the removal of men from the 'home front' allowed large numbers of women to undertake occupations which had previously been regarded as male preserves. At the conclusion of the First World War, in 1918, some British women were awarded suffrage rights, and Arthur Marwick has been prominent in arguing that political emancipation, and what he has regarded as positive post-war social and economic developments for women, were closely connected with their involvement in the 'war effort' between 1914-1918.<sup>56</sup> In the last few decades, however, historians have increasingly challenged such interpretations and have pointed to both the conservative force of war on gender relations and the complexities and nuances frequently found in wartime representations of both masculinities and femininities. While the employment of women in traditionally 'male' roles may have given the temporary impression of a shift in gender roles, it seems likely that the gendered rhetoric of military and civilian spheres limited the long-term impact of these experiences. As Margaret and Patrice Higonnet have argued, a 'double helix' effect can be seen in operation during both conflicts, whereby the advances achieved by women never allowed them to reach a status perceived to be equal to that of men.<sup>57</sup> Lucy Noakes has argued in relation to the Second World War that, while many British women encountered new employment opportunities, the image of these roles, and, indeed, that of the 'home front' as a whole, was one of support for the more 'important' combative roles undertaken by men on the military front. The expansion of women's experiences was therefore able to take place within traditional gender structures as men became defenders of the 'home front' and

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<sup>56</sup> Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), pp.110-111.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.R. Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', in Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp.31-47; p.34.

women's "supportive role in the home was extended to the public sphere".<sup>58</sup> David Morgan and Mary Evans have suggested that one of the main ways in which women were expected to contribute to the 'war effort' was by "putting up with" the restrictions, shortages and hardships of war without complaint: "Women's traditional, passive compliance was thus reinterpreted as their patriotic duty to the home front."<sup>59</sup> In relation to the First World War, Susan Kingsley Kent has argued that the devastating experiences, particularly of men, led to post-war efforts to reinstate gender roles which were seen as being disrupted by the conflict. In contrast, Susan Grayzel has suggested that the devastating loss of life experienced during the war reinforced the significance of pronatalist thought and ensured that, despite the expansion of experiences for some women, motherhood became increasingly central to understandings of women's roles during the war itself.<sup>60</sup>

While the practical experience of wartime life therefore reinforced traditional gender assumptions during the First and Second World Wars, a more general pattern has been identified in the experience of conflict, whereby gender assumes a deep significance in the discussions of the morality of war, particularly in terms of the treatment of enemy civilians. As Hugo Slim has noted, women have frequently been associated with the "innocence" of civilian status and regarded as the victims of war, despite numerous examples of women engaging with warfare as supporters, actors

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<sup>58</sup> Noakes, *War and the British*, p.19.

<sup>59</sup> David Morgan and Mary Evans, *The Battle for Britain: Citizenship and Ideology in the Second World War*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p.83.

<sup>60</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*, (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp.3-4.

or opponents, and playing significant “ideological” roles within conflicts.<sup>61</sup> Proctor has argued that, in the context of modern war, the term ‘civilian’ has developed “a particularly strong feminine connotation as it becomes a sort of shorthand for the phrase ‘innocent women and children’.”<sup>62</sup> A significant link between the South African War and the First World War was the development of internment policy during both conflicts against backgrounds of extensive public debate about the treatment of civilians (but more specifically women and children) by their enemies. During the South African War, this debate centred on internment itself, and whether the imprisonment of women and children could be considered to be ethically acceptable. In contrast, during the First World War, the internment of enemy alien men was justified by (and arguably provoked by) a widespread propaganda campaign which highlighted German brutality towards civilians. In each case, the focus on women and children as the innocent victims of military aggression reinforced the significance placed on maintaining divisions between the military and civilian spheres. The relationship between war and a tightening of gender roles was reflected in the gendered nature of twentieth century wartime internment. During the First World War, no women were interned under the general regulations, while during the Second World War women constituted just under 17.5 per cent of internees.<sup>63</sup> The gendered nature of British internment policy during the twentieth century must be considered in the context of these clearly demarcated gender roles that were reinforced within wartime contexts.

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<sup>61</sup> Slim, *Killing Civilians*, pp.201-2.

<sup>62</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, pp.4-5.

<sup>63</sup> This figure is based on the approximate numbers given in: Herbert Morrison, ‘War Cabinet. Internment of aliens of enemy nationality’, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/8/109.



In contrast to the dominant pattern of male internment during the two world wars, the majority of internees during the South African War were women and children, and despite the presence of male internees, the camps were frequently referred to as 'women and children's camps'.<sup>64</sup> While these facts may appear to underline the differences between colonial internment and the development of policies against 'enemy aliens' during the world wars, this thesis will argue that the later resistance to female internment was influenced, not only by the contemporary sharpening of British gender roles, but also by memories of the negative reactions that developed in 1900-1902 to the gendered image of the South African concentration camps. Wartime internment policies were significant because, as military steps taken against civilians, they provided points of discussion where ideas about the military-civilian relationship could be tried out, explored, and consolidated. This is particularly evident in the internment and other anti-civilian policies developed the British during the South African War. As this thesis will explore, these policies were significant in consolidating the gendering of the civilian sphere within twentieth century British discourses on warfare and determining the parameters of what was considered to be acceptable behaviour towards non-combatants.

### **National Identity**

A belief in acceptable codes of behaviour towards women and civilians can be found in many cultures, but in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain such ideas were frequently articulated as part of a national self-image that placed great significance on positive 'British' values. As Catherine Hall has shown, a masculine-orientated form

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<sup>64</sup> On the gendering of the camps see Krebs, *Gender*, pp.70-1.

of national identity was expressed strongly and influentially by the increasingly powerful British middle classes from the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>65</sup> The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the development of a dominant notion of national identity which was strongly associated with masculinity. Within male-orientated educational institutions and within wider popular culture, an image of specifically British manhood developed which was associated with “adventure, virility, courage and chivalry”.<sup>66</sup> Such ideas were closely linked with idealized conceptions of the home as a feminine sphere, to be supported and protected by the male, who belonged in the public, political arena. Paul Ward has suggested that, in popular discourses, women’s significance to the nation lay in their roles as mothers and objects of protection.<sup>67</sup> While there is wide evidence that women, as well as men, embraced national identities and engaged in patriotic activities, their relationship with the ‘nation’ was complicated in a practical sense by the fact that a woman could lose her legal national identity through marriage to a foreign national.<sup>68</sup> Evidence of the widespread acceptance of strict wartime divides between male and female roles can therefore be said to have represented an intensification of discourses of gender and national identity which were already well established in British culture. The deep cultural investment in separate gender roles and a dominantly masculine national identity was brought to the forefront of public debate during the South African War when contemporaries clashed over the morality of interning Boer women and children. The frequent attempts by both opponents and supporters of the policy to

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<sup>65</sup> Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.207.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.39.

<sup>67</sup> Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, pp.39-40.

<sup>68</sup> For a survey of twentieth-century responses to this issue see: M. Page Baldwin, ‘Subject to Empire: Married Women and the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act’, *Journal of British Studies*, 40, 4, 2001, pp. 522-556.

shape their arguments to fit within a national identity based on male duties of chivalry and protection indicated the strength of this gendered notion of 'Britishness'. The question of whether the policy was 'un-British' in its treatment of women and children again marked this internment episode as an important site on which dominant discourses could be thrashed out.

While gendered notions of national identity were central to the ways in which internment was perceived in Britain, equally significant were broader, parallel themes relating to specifically 'British' traditions of justice and fairness. Colin Holmes has stressed the significance of the belief in a culture of "tolerance" in shaping British national identities, while Tony Kushner has argued that the idea of a "liberal and humanitarian" British tradition significantly influenced responses to immigrants and refugees during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>69</sup> The endurance of such themes in contemporary rhetoric has been indicated in Lord Hoffman's statement on the Belmarsh case, deeply rooted in ideas about British liberal traditions. The internment of enemy civilians by successive British wartime governments, and indeed many examples of the peacetime treatment of immigrants and minorities, have been regarded as having the potential to undermine such positive interpretations of 'Britishness', perhaps explaining why internment remained on the fringes of British historical research for much of the twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> However, certain key events

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<sup>69</sup> Colin Holmes, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p.14; Tony Kushner, *The persistence of prejudice: Antisemitism in British society during the Second World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.115.

<sup>70</sup> Tony Kushner and David Cesarani, 'Alien Internment in Britain During the Twentieth Century: An Introduction', in Cesarani and Kushner (eds), *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*, pp.1-24; p.8; Richard Dove, 'A matter which touches the good name of this country', in Dove (ed.), *Totally Un-English?*, pp.11-16; p.11.

and experiences in British history have been used as evidence of British “fairness”.<sup>71</sup> Memories of admission of Huguenot refugees in the eighteenth century, for example, and the acceptance of Jewish refugees during both the nineteenth century and the Nazi period, have allowed an image to be maintained of a tradition of British defence of the rights of asylum for the oppressed. In reality, at the time of all these refugee crises, negativity and restrictionist attitudes towards these groups were widely expressed.<sup>72</sup> The memory of these episodes, however, has served to reinforce British beliefs in a national tradition of tolerance and acceptance of outsiders, and has been used to play down the significance of events which might raise questions about the significance of these experiences to national narratives.

John A. Garrard has highlighted a long tradition in British culture, observable since the nineteenth century, of a reluctance to be seen as exhibiting prejudice towards minorities, even where prejudice clearly does exist. Thus politicians and social commentators may express anti-immigrant sentiment using language carefully phrased to appear non-discriminatory.<sup>73</sup> Tony Kushner has noted, for example, that in the years prior to the Second World War, the “disreputable nature of being labelled an antisemite is well illustrated by the refusal of any of the leading anti-Jewish campaigners to accept the tag”.<sup>74</sup> To Garrard, British attitudes towards immigrants have been characterised by an “underlying ambiguity” which can sometimes be observed in “the juxtaposition of sentiments of tolerance and intolerance in the same

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<sup>71</sup> Tony Kushner, *Remembering refugees: Then and now*, (Manchester University Press, 2006), p.21.

<sup>72</sup> Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*, pp.6-7; Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p.398.

<sup>73</sup> John A. Garrard, *The English and Immigration 1880-1910*, (London: Open University Press, 1971), pp.5-6.

<sup>74</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, p.2.

statements".<sup>75</sup> Therefore, while ongoing beliefs in British traditions of tolerance have allowed evidence of ambiguity and even hostility towards outsiders to be glossed over, they have also frequently acted as a check against the expression of intolerant attitudes or acts.<sup>76</sup> The significance attached by many contemporaries to 'British' traditions of justice, fairness and tolerance became particularly evident in debates on internment during the South African War and the Second World War. In both cases (and retrospectively in the case of the First World War), internment was regarded by its opponents as an intolerant act which was not in keeping with the British character. Although this positive interpretation of British identity had its limitations (for example, in the context of the South African War it was wielded in criticism of the treatment of white internees, but rarely in relation to their non-white counterparts) it became a central part of anti-internment discourses.

While articulations of a specific version of 'Britishness' were vital in limiting the scope of internment, it can also be argued that the exclusive nature of British national identity played a role in creating the atmospheres in which internment initially became acceptable. Internment policies not only drew attention to groups considered to be dangerous, but played a role in defining who and what should be defined as 'British'. By clearly targeting individuals who were not considered loyal to the nation, and physically excluding them from the national community, internment policies provided a tangible reinforcement of distinct categories of loyalty and disloyalty,

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<sup>75</sup> Garrard, *The English and Immigration*, pp.5-6.

<sup>76</sup> Kushner and Knox, *Refugees*, p.398.

'Britishness' and 'un-Britishness'.<sup>77</sup> This shaping of national identity in relation to outsiders was not exclusive to wartime, but has been recognized as part of a long history of identity formation. A number of British historians have argued that 'Britishness' itself has always been constructed in relation to perceptions of groups regarded as outsiders. Catherine Hall's statement that "the English can only recognise themselves in relation to others"<sup>78</sup> has been frequently reasserted in relation to the wider British experience. As Robin Cohen has suggested, 'Britishness' can be understood as "a complex national and social identity which is continuously constructed and reshaped in its often antipathetic interaction with outsiders, strangers, foreigners and aliens".<sup>79</sup> A notable nineteenth-century example of national self-definition in relation to the 'Other' can be found in the British reaction to the immigration of Eastern European Jews from the 1880s onwards. While negative reaction to such immigrants was by no means universal, their presence fuelled intense debates on the problems of immigration, culminating in the passing of the Aliens Act of 1905 which introduced restrictions on aliens entering the country. Although criticism of this wave of immigration was frequently couched in the language of economic or social concern, Cesarani has argued that the expression of such anxieties were closely related to the construction and consolidation of late-nineteenth century British identity. The identification of negative 'alien' characteristics

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<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of the wartime 'exclusion' of minority groups see Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 3, particularly pp.71-73 and pp.93-94.

<sup>78</sup> Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class*, p.208.

<sup>79</sup> Robin Cohen, *Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others*, (London: Longman, 1994), p.1.

– crime, vice, dirt, squalor – reinforced what the British felt that they themselves were not.<sup>80</sup>

It is in this context that the development of policies, including internment, against enemy aliens in wartime Britain must be understood. The study of internment policy during wartime is particularly revealing because it can be regarded as one of the most tangible examples of the way that war can heighten suspicion of outsiders and a sense of otherness. Sonya Rose has highlighted the strong tendency, during times of national crisis, for antipathy to develop towards groups of people regarded as marginal to the dominant national image.<sup>81</sup> The common experience of a threat towards the nation's survival can tighten a sense of national belonging; simultaneously, however, such a powerful image of national unity can encourage an erosion of tolerance towards groups which are perceived as failing to conform to the dominant rhetoric. Rose has argued that the heightened significance placed on a specific form of national identity during war forces groups with conflicting identities to either conform to the dominant narrative or to be excluded, and such groups can “become a potent contrast against which the nation defines itself”.<sup>82</sup> Thus during the First World War, conscientious objectors, ‘slackers’ and Jews became the focus of prejudice since they were perceived as failing, in various ways, to commit themselves to the patriotic principles on which the war was being fought.<sup>83</sup> The development of

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<sup>80</sup> Cesarani, ‘An Alien Concept?’ pp.26-28.

<sup>81</sup> Rose, *Which People's War?*, pp.71-72.

<sup>82</sup> Rose, *Which People's War?*, p.72.

<sup>83</sup> Nicoletta F. Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.44; p.182-3; Susanne Terwey, ‘Stereotypical Bedfellows: The Combination of Anti-Semitism with Germanophobia in Great Britain, 1914-1918’, in Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (eds),

the image of the Jewish population in Britain as lacking in national loyalty and sitting outside the national community had long historical roots.<sup>84</sup> However the power of wartime pressures to intensify this image is evident in the fact that it re-emerged in similar ways during the Second World War, when Rose has argued that perception of Jews as “foreign group” was fundamental to fuelling anti-semitism.<sup>85</sup> Long-established stereotypes of Jews as selfish and materialistic were given new life through popular wartime associations of Jewish people with the black market and exhibitions of ostentation in the face of wartime shortages.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Schaffer and Ugolini have argued that stereotypes of Italians presented them as cowardly, “servile” and treacherous” and therefore “natural fifth columnists”.<sup>87</sup> Rose has suggested that such trends were mirrored in the expression of concerns about women’s sexual laxity during the war, which took on particular significance because such behaviour could not be reconciled with a wartime rhetoric rooted in principles of self-sacrifice and service to the nation.<sup>88</sup> These examples demonstrate how even groups which were usually considered as part of the national community could come to be perceived as ‘enemies within’ the nation. Such a process was even more explicit when it came to individuals within Britain who quite literally possessed ‘enemy’ nationality. This thesis

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*Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp.125-141; pp.127-130.

<sup>84</sup> Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, (London: Frank Cass, 1992), p.52; Kenneth Lunn, ‘Political Antisemitism before 1914: Fascism’s Heritage’, in Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow, *British fascism: essays on the radical right in inter-war Britain*, (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp.20-40.

<sup>85</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p.93.

<sup>86</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, pp.94-7; Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, pp.119-120.

<sup>87</sup> Wendy Ugolini and Gavin Schaffer, ‘Victims or Enemies? Italians, Refugee Jews and the Reworking of Internment Narratives in Post-War Britain’, in Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer (eds.), *The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.207-225; pp.210-211.

<sup>88</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p.79.



will explore the ways in which such discourses strongly influenced the development of internment policies aimed at 'enemy aliens'.

Due to the 'total' nature of the First and Second World Wars, and the significance attached to ideas of the home fronts, anxieties about the 'enemy within' took on a potency which was not relevant during the South African War due to its geographical distance. However, while internment policy in South Africa did not develop within the context of domestic security fears, the development of images of 'the enemy' were crucial in influencing the way that internment was understood. Stibbe has argued that First World War internment can be differentiated from colonial internment by its association with powerful 'enemy' imagery, which influenced the way in which opponents were perceived.<sup>89</sup> This thesis will explore whether, in fact, the justification of internment through the production of racialized images of the 'enemy' should be regarded as theme which connected discourses on the South African concentration camps with the internment policies implemented in Britain during the First and Second World Wars. The changing nature of these images during each of the conflicts examined here is evidence not only of the differing natures of the wars themselves, but of the wider development of British racial thinking from the late nineteenth century to the mid-1940s.

## **Race**

During each of the three conflicts examined in this study, responses to the 'enemy', as well as those perceived more generally as 'outsiders', were driven by notions of

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<sup>89</sup> Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment', p.54.

racial difference as well as national difference. As with other forms of identity and identification, the significance of 'race' in relation to perceptions of difference became intensified under the pressure of the war. During the South African War, the language of race came to shape the image of the Boer as backward, ignorant, degenerate and, ultimately, racially suspect. Such ideas were given wide publicity in Britain through the debates on the concentration camps, and so became intrinsically tied to the internment experience. The image of the German that developed during the First World War is perhaps one of the most infamous examples of the way in which the enemy can become demonised and racialized. Widespread wartime propaganda depicted the Germans as inherently brutal, uncivilized and violent, and this thesis will explore the relationship between this racialized image and the introduction of internment. By 1939, however, a significant shift was evident in the tendency towards racializing the enemy. While race (and particularly perceptions of 'Jewishness' and 'Italianness') played a part in the way that enemy aliens were imagined, and some commentators still referred back to older images of the 'Hun', no specifically racialized image of the enemy ever developed. As Malik has noted, the horrors of Nazi racial ideologies during the 1930s and 1940s undermined the legitimacy of 'race' as a concept during this period, and this may explain why a racialized image of the enemy was less significant during the Second World War.<sup>90</sup> However, as will be seen, racialized discourses continued to exist during the period, but tended to be expressed in more subtle or muted terms. This was particularly true of antisemitic

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<sup>90</sup> Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), pp.14-15.

attitudes, which have been regarded as playing a role in driving decisions on internment.<sup>91</sup>

The racialized images of the enemy which developed during the South African War and the First World War evolved from ideas which were rooted in the pre-war period. The 'backward' Boer and the 'militaristic' German were already established in British imagery before being magnified and further distorted by the experience of war. The significance of race in shaping attitudes towards the enemy is unsurprising given the increasing preoccupation of British contemporaries with the idea of 'race' from the late nineteenth century, in relation to both domestic and imperial politics and experiences.<sup>92</sup> A number of historians have highlighted an increased sense of anxiety in Britain during the late nineteenth century about the nation's economic and political prestige on the international stage, and about social changes and class conflict within Britain itself.<sup>93</sup> Such concerns coincided with emerging scientific theories of evolution and developments in the natural world, which were seized on by some contemporaries to give meaning and purpose to social phenomena. In such a context, international competition could be perceived in terms of national survival, a concept which was often addressed in racial terms as contemporaries sought to find ways of ensuring the 'fitness' of the British 'race' in order to maintain their nation's superiority. At the same time, concerns about poverty, crime and disorder among sections of the working class were made sense of through reference to ideas about the internal degeneration of the race. Malik has described such trends as "the use of

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<sup>91</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, pp.146-7; Gavin Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society, 1930-62*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.82-83.

<sup>92</sup> Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (CUP, 1990 [first edition 1986]), p.12.

<sup>93</sup> Rich, *Race and Empire*, p.12.

natural explanations for social phenomena”.<sup>94</sup> In this way, the idea of ‘race’ could be used to both explain and justify social differences, and, as Greta Jones has argued, underline the idea that “social inequality was the product of natural selection”.<sup>95</sup> The close association of such discussions with national interests often resulted in the conflation of the terms ‘race’ and ‘nation’<sup>96</sup>, and this was a trend which was intensified during the First World War in particular, when a highly racialized discourse regarding enemy difference combined with acute anxieties about national survival.

The concept of ‘race’ was therefore a significant tool in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain for shaping a sense of self and for making sense of contemporary social and political developments. These ideas were reinforced through the enthusiastic categorisation of other nations and peoples by racial type, and through the development of new theories of anthropology and anthropometry. Increasingly, social groups came to be categorised in racial terms, with biological heredity being associated with not only intellectual and physical but also moral characteristics.<sup>97</sup> Such trends became particularly apparent in British responses to their imperial encounters. Stephen Howe has argued that the ideological foundations of empire rested on “ideas about difference, and usually on a belief in superiority”; this was therefore the ideal area for European ideas of racial categorisation and

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<sup>94</sup> Malik, *The Meaning of Race*, pp.99-100.

<sup>95</sup> Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism in English Thought*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p.142.

<sup>96</sup> G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), pp.60-61; G. R. Searle, *Eugenics and Politics in Britain, 1900-1914*, (Leyden: Noordhoff International Publishing, 1976), pp.22-23.

<sup>97</sup> Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), p.14.

different levels of racial development to flourish.<sup>98</sup> In a similar way that discourses on immigrants in Britain centred on concepts of 'difference', so were colonial encounters frequently constructed to stress the contrast between colonisers and colonised. Edward Said has famously argued that British understandings of its Eastern colonies were largely based on imagined constructs; British observers created their own exotic interpretation of the 'Orient' rooted strongly in beliefs in what the British were not. As Said noted, the construction of identities always involves the establishment of "opposites" and "others", and he has illustrated the way in which the "Oriental" has been imagined as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different""", reinforcing an implicit image of the European as "rational, virtuous, mature, "normal.""<sup>99</sup> Perceptions of the colonial 'Other' were given particular resonance through their association with racial thinking.<sup>100</sup> Drawing on Said's theories, Steve Attridge has suggested that similar cultural forces were at work during the nineteenth century in relation to Africa, which was "primitivised" in British discourses.<sup>101</sup> In contrast, David Cannadine has argued that British perceptions of colonial societies were shaped more by perceptions of similarity, and the "construction of affinities", than by concepts of difference.<sup>102</sup> This thesis will use the case study of the South African War, in particular, to explore these different approaches to understanding British imperial identity.

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<sup>98</sup> Stephen Howe, 'Empire and Ideology', in Sarah Stockwell (ed.), *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp.157-176; p.66.

<sup>99</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 2003 [first edition 1978]), p.40.

<sup>100</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p.206.

<sup>101</sup> Steve Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.10.

<sup>102</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire*, (London: Penguin, 2002 [first edition 2001]), pp.xix-xx.

As will be seen, such modes of thinking would be highly significant in shaping understandings of the Boers at the turn of the twentieth century. British perceptions of colonial subjects were widely underpinned by a series of opposites based not only on skin colour, but on cultural imaginings regarding ideas such as cleanliness and dirt, rationality and irrationality, modernity and backwardness. Philippa Levine has argued that the colonial experience reinforced the significance of 'whiteness' as a fundamental element of British identity, underpinned by belief in the implicit connection between 'whiteness' and dominant, 'civilized' societies, as opposed to the 'backwardness' and powerlessness of non-white populations.<sup>103</sup> Such forms of racial thinking, closely associated with colonial encounters, were significant in shaping discourses on internment during the South African War, when negative stereotypes of the Boer became strongly infused with racialized language usually reserved for non-white colonial subjects. However, the centrality of 'race' to imperial attitudes was highly significant in defining broader British identities, and helped to entrench an association between 'Britishness', 'whiteness' and 'civilization' which was to re-emerge frequently during the twentieth centuries, and particularly during the First and Second World Wars, when national identity took on renewed importance.

Internment experiences during the First and Second World War have often been considered separately to those of the South African War due to the colonial nature of the earlier conflict.<sup>104</sup> However, this approach is at odds with an increasing amount of historical scholarship which recognizes the two-way process of the dissemination of

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<sup>103</sup> Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.4.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment', p.54. As noted above, the two principal edited works offering a comparative discussion of internment, by Cesarani and Kushner, and Dove, focus only on the First and Second World Wars.

ideas, attitudes and practices between Britain and its colonies.<sup>105</sup> The tendency for British national identity to be reinforced by ideas of 'otherness' rooted in both domestic and imperial relationships is one way in which this occurred. British observers frequently utilised similar language in responses to the colonial subjects they encountered as they did in reference to the slum-dwellers of Britain's industrialized cities.<sup>106</sup> Equally, however, this was a two-way discourse, and the "language of class itself in Europe drew on a range of images and metaphors that were racialized to the core".<sup>107</sup> There is much evidence that British colonial administrators attempted to address the 'backwardness' of colonial societies through the implementation of 'civilized' British practices (as would be particularly evident in their administration of the South African concentration camps). However, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler have argued that "Europe was made by its imperial projects, as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts within Europe itself"<sup>108</sup>, and this thesis will examine the extent to which, in the case of internment, experiences from the imperial periphery, and wider British perceptions and reactions to these experiences, filtered back and exerted an influence on developments in later domestic policy. The experience of South African internment set a pattern for later development of internment within a domestic context, not, perhaps, in the most obvious, administrative terms, but by shaping perceptions of the meaning of

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<sup>105</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial races: The military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp.3-4; Ann Laura Stoler and Fredrick Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (London: University of California Press, 1997), pp.1-56; p.27.

<sup>106</sup> Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp.5-6.

<sup>107</sup> Cooper and Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony', p.27; p.9; Jones, *Social Darwinism*, p.144.

<sup>108</sup> Cooper and Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony', p.1.

internment, the relationships between military and civilian spheres, and the types of people it was acceptable to intern.



## CHAPTER ONE: THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR (1899-1902)<sup>109</sup>

### Introduction

As the first large-scale British conflict to take place since the development of mass literacy and mass communications, the conduct of the South African War was able to become the subject of debate and scrutiny to an extent which would not have formerly been possible. Indeed, in terms of its handling by the British media, the conflict has been regarded as a forerunner of the modern wars of the twentieth century.<sup>110</sup> From 1901, this extensive media attention came to focus increasingly on a specific, controversial issue: the internment, by the British military, of large numbers of Boer civilians in hastily improvised camps, and the appalling mortality rates that resulted. The targeting of non-combatants through internment, as well as the destruction of crops and homes, meant that this war became one in which the spotlight often shifted from the military to the civilian population, with international public attention frequently fixing on the experiences of women and children rather than primarily on the Boer soldier. These factors meant that understandings of the 'enemy' were to develop which were dependent to a large extent on gender ideologies as well as on British understandings of the way in which white, 'civilized' society should be defined. The racial discourses which emerged on the Boer community have been regarded as significant precursors of the "practice of demonizing the enemy", which was to become a common theme of twentieth-century

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<sup>109</sup> Some of the material in this chapter has been published in: Zoë Denness, 'Women and warfare at the start of the twentieth century: the racialization of the 'enemy' during the South African War (1899–1902)', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46, 3-4, 2012, pp.255-276.

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, 'The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13, 1, pp.1-16; p.2.

warfare, most strikingly so during the First World War.<sup>111</sup> This chapter will argue that the debates on internment were particularly significant in shaping a popular image of the 'enemy', and will explore the ways in which the controversy surrounding the camps highlighted the significance of gender, race and nation to British identities, consolidating a particular understanding of the ethics of internment which would later influence the development of policies during the First and Second World Wars.

Prior to the summer of 1900, the South African War was pursued on both sides by means of a generally conventional forms of warfare, and has been described as a confrontation of "assembled armies"<sup>112</sup> Siege warfare was particularly significant to the Boer strategy during the first months of the war and the towns of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking were each held under siege for several months. In December 1899, during a period that came to be known in Britain as 'Black Week', British forces attempted advances at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso, but were defeated or held back by the Boers in each case. In December 1899, the Commander in Chief, Major-General Buller, was replaced by Lord Roberts with Lord Kitchener as Chief of Staff. Extensive troop reinforcements were organised which ensured the success of major new British offensives during 1900, and by the middle of 1900, a British victory appeared assured.<sup>113</sup> Rather than submitting, however, the Boer forces initiated a change in strategy and continued their campaign with guerrilla tactics. Boer commandos launched attacks on British military installations and sought

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<sup>111</sup> Mark Hampton, 'Press, Patriotism, and Public Discussion: C. P. Scott, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the Boer War, 1899-1902', *The Historical Journal*, 44, 1, 2001, pp.177-197; p.180.

<sup>112</sup> Bill Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902*, (London: Arnold, 1999), p.11.

<sup>113</sup> Nasson, *South African War*, pp.91-99; pp.126-134; p.149; p.173.

to cripple British communications by targeting railway lines and telegraph wires.<sup>114</sup> In response, the British military authorities commenced a policy which involved clearing the South African countryside in order to cut off the Boers from supplies and civilian assistance, and to counteract potential espionage. During May 1900, the Commander in Chief of the British Forces in South Africa, Field-Marshal Roberts, issued proclamations warning that the perpetrators of damage to British property would be punished, and that the consequences would be shared by local residents, who would be assumed to have knowledge of guerrilla activities in their vicinity.<sup>115</sup> On 16<sup>th</sup> June 1900, Roberts further clarified his orders in a proclamation which stated that homes in the vicinity of attacks would be liable to be burnt, and that the “principal civil residents” in these areas would be made prisoners of war.<sup>116</sup> These proclamations have been regarded as marking the beginning of the British military’s ‘scorched earth’ policy in South Africa.<sup>117</sup>

Inevitably, as S. B. Spies has highlighted, the result of Roberts’ proclamations was that reprisals were enacted for guerrilla attacks against significant numbers of local civilians who did not necessarily have any connection with, or knowledge of, the events in question.<sup>118</sup> As general practice, the house nearest to the incident would be burnt, but in September Roberts authorised that “the country within a radius of ten

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<sup>114</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, pp.101-103.

<sup>115</sup> Lord Roberts’ proclamations, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1900, and XIV, May 1900, ‘Proclamations issued by Field-Marshal Lord Roberts in South Africa’, *19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1900 session (Cmd. 426), Vol. LVI (p.7).

<sup>116</sup> Lord Roberts’ proclamation, No. 5 of 1900, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1900, ‘Proclamations issued by Field-Marshal Lord Roberts in South Africa’, *19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1900 session (Cmd. 426), Vol. LVI (p. 10).

<sup>117</sup> Fransjohann Pretorius, ‘Boer civilians and the scorched earth policy of Lords Roberts and Kitchener in the South African War of 1899-1902’, p.1, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ptb/www/War2/Pretorius%20paper.pdf>

<sup>118</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, p.108-11.

miles should be completely cleared or stocks and supplies”<sup>119</sup>. The increasing numbers of Boer families left homeless by the scorched earth policy became a problem which was difficult for the British authorities to ignore, although, as Spies has noted, no standard, official policy was ever introduced to tackle the issue during Roberts’ time in office.<sup>120</sup> Although the widespread homelessness of Boer families appears to have been a key factor in the establishment of internment policy, the precise beginning of the ‘concentration camps’ is difficult to identify. Spies has found evidence of the existence of camps from July 1900, but official references to them were not made until September, when it was announced that camps for surrendered burghers were being established. While the internment of families was not officially discussed, this too appears to have been put into practice.<sup>121</sup> Over the following months the internment system was gradually extended and became a more formal part of British policy, with eventually forty camps spread across the four South African states.<sup>122</sup> Although the camp inmates consisted mainly of women and children, a significant number of men also entered the camps, since the British offered accommodation to neutral or pro-British Boers.<sup>123</sup> In addition, separate areas for black African families were also introduced, who, in exchange for their camp accommodation, were expected to provide labour for the British Army.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, p.108; p.110.

<sup>120</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, p.143.

<sup>121</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, p.144; p.150.

<sup>122</sup> For detailed information on each of these camps, including records of inhabitants, see the online database constructed by Elizabeth van Heyningen as part of a project funded by the Wellcome Trust: <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd>.

<sup>123</sup> Stanley, *Mourning becomes*, p.13.

<sup>124</sup> B. E. Mongalo and Kobus du Pisani, ‘Victims of a white man’s war: Blacks in concentration camps during the South African War (1899-1902)’, *Historia*, 44, 1, 1999, pp.148-182; pp.155-8; Krebs, *Gender*, p.32.

Over the following months, the concentration camps became infamous across the world due to their appalling death rates. In total, over 26,000 people, including more than 20,000 children, would die in the 'white' camps, mainly of epidemics of diseases such as measles.<sup>125</sup> Figures for the 'black' camps are incomplete, but it is estimated that a further 14-20,000 people died, about 80 per cent of whom were children.<sup>126</sup> The isolated lifestyle of many rural South Africans meant that little resistance had developed among the community to viral and contagious diseases, and the accommodation of several thousand people at close quarters enabled illnesses to spread quickly.<sup>127</sup> The tragedy unfolding in the camps was initially slow to receive attention in Britain, but in December 1901, Emily Hobhouse, a representative of the newly created South African Women and Children Distress Fund, arrived in South Africa to distribute goods collected by the organisation to victims of the war and was horrified by the conditions she found.<sup>128</sup> Poor shelter, lack of sanitation and inadequate rations were severely exacerbating the virulence of the epidemics which were sweeping the camps, and the death rates were rising at an alarming rate. Hobhouse spent five months investigating the camps and returned to Britain in May

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<sup>125</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, p.3. Although the camps designated for Boer civilians are referred to as 'white' camps in this study, it should be noted that they also accommodated a significant number of black people who worked as servants for Boer families or who were employed in various ways in the camps.

<sup>126</sup> Mongalo and du Pisani, 'Victims of a white man's war', p.166.

<sup>127</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'Women and Disease: The Clash of Medical Cultures in the Concentration Camps of the South African War', in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh and Mary-Lynn Suttie (eds.), *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*, (Ohio University press, 2002), pp.186-212; p.191.

<sup>128</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, p.201; Marouf Hasian, Jr., 'The "Hysterical" Emily Hobhouse and Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy', *Western Journal of Communication*, 67, 2, 2003, pp.138-163; p.138. Although Hobhouse expressed concern about the black camps, she didn't have time to visit one during her time in South Africa.

1901 to publicise her findings.<sup>129</sup> Her report, along with the revelation of the mortality rates from the camps, caused a “national scandal”.<sup>130</sup>

In response to the public outcry provoked by Hobhouse’s report, the British government made the decision to appoint a ‘Concentration Camps Commission’, consisting of six British women and headed by the well-known suffragist, Millicent Fawcett, to visit South Africa and investigate the conditions in the camps. The appointment of an all-female Commission has drawn mixed reactions from historians. Bridget Theron has described its initiation as “politically path-breaking as far as the progress of feminism in the early twentieth century is concerned” and, similarly, Paula Krebs has regarded it as an indication of the increasing centrality of both women and women’s issues to British public life.<sup>131</sup> In contrast, Elizabeth van Heyningen has argued that the female composition of the Commission meant that it tended to be regarded dismissively by the British military authorities.<sup>132</sup> The Commission’s role was not to comment on the camps policy but to make recommendations to improve living conditions with a view to alleviating the mortality rates. Although Fawcett and other members of the Commission were generally supportive of British policy in South Africa, and so approached the camps in a very different way to Hobhouse, ultimately their recommendations to improve camp conditions were very similar to hers.<sup>133</sup> When these recommendations, which included changes to camp

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<sup>129</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), p.508.

<sup>130</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.32.

<sup>131</sup> Bridget Theron, ‘Victorian women, gender and identity in the South African War: An overview’, *African Historical Review*, 38, 1, pp.3-24; p.14; Krebs, *Gender*, p.78.

<sup>132</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen, ‘“Fools rush in”: Writing a history of the concentration camps of the South African War’, *Historia*, 55, 2, 2010, pp.12-33; p.13.

<sup>133</sup> Of the six members of the commission, only one, Lucy Deane, privately expressed opposition to the Government’s policy in South Africa. Lucy Deane to Hyacinthe Mary Deane,

organisation, sanitation facilities and improvement of rations, were finally put into practice, the death rates began to decline.<sup>134</sup>

Boer women's testimonies of their experiences in the concentration camps began to be produced very soon after the end of the war. Hobhouse initially organised a compilation of women's accounts with the aim of publicising wartime civilian suffering and in 1902 she published a collection of testimonies from former camp inmates.<sup>135</sup> Hobhouse's pattern of edited, first-hand accounts was adopted by South African women's nationalist groups seeking to publish further testimonies on wartime experiences, and *The Brunt of the War* was quickly followed by another edited work by Elizabeth Murray Neethling in the same year.<sup>136</sup> Publication of testimonies intensified during the 1930s and 1940s, when a resurgence of interest in the camps coincided with active attempts to consolidate an Afrikaner national identity.<sup>137</sup> As the only records produced by camp survivors, the testimonies of nationalist women shaped the way in which the camps were remembered in South Africa. Few, if any, testimonies were produced by non-nationalists, despite the fact that the camps accommodated a significant number of families who opposed the Boer cause or considered themselves neutral.<sup>138</sup> However, as Liz Stanley has argued, the testimonies have often been accepted as providing the full "facts" about the camps,

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3<sup>rd</sup> December 1901, STREATFEILD 2/11 99, and 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1901, STREATFEILD 2/11 109: London School of Economics (LSE) Archive.

<sup>134</sup> Pakenham, *Boer War*, p.518.

<sup>135</sup> Liz Stanley, 'A Strange Thing is Memory': Emily Hobhouse, Memory Work, Moral Life and the 'Concentration System', *South African Historical Journal*, 52, 1, 2005, pp. 60-81; pp.78-79.

<sup>136</sup> Ethel Neethling, *Should We Forget*, (Cape Town : Holl.-Af. Publishing Co., 1902)

<sup>137</sup> Albert Grundlingh, 'The War in Twentieth-Century Afrikaner Consciousness', in David Omissi and Andrew S. Thompson (eds), *The Impact of the South African War*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp.24-37; pp.25-26.

<sup>138</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, p.101.

despite their highly subjective nature.<sup>139</sup> The testimonies tended to share an approach to the camps underlined by a sense of martyrdom and anti-British feeling which, Stowell V. Kessler has argued, became essential to the developing Afrikaner identity during the twentieth century.<sup>140</sup> During the years after the war, the camps experience became a highly significant part of Afrikaner collective memory, depicted as a test from God, and a time of shared suffering which the Afrikaner people, and specifically, Afrikaner women, endured bravely and stoically.<sup>141</sup>

The concentration camps testimonies have been regarded as particularly significant in shaping the idea of the Afrikaner woman as *volksmoeder* ('mother of the nation'), and allowing it to evolve into one of the central symbols of Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>142</sup>

Jenny de Reuk has argued that the suffering of women and children in the concentration camps was 'appropriated' by the nationalist cause in the years after the

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<sup>139</sup> Helen Dampier, 'Re-reading as a methodology: the case of Boer Women's testimonies', *Qualitative Research*, 8, 2008, pp.367-377; p.369.

<sup>140</sup> Stowell V. Kessler, 'The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902: Shifting the paradigm from *sole martyrdom* to *mutual suffering*', *Historia*, 44, 1, 1999, pp.110-147; p.117.

<sup>141</sup> Kessler, 'The black concentration camps', p.112.

<sup>142</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'The Concentration Camps of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, 1900-1902', *History Compass*, 7, 1, 2009, pp.22-43; p.27. The significance of the concept of the *volksmoeder* has been contested by historians. Elsabe Brink has argued that the development of the idea of the *volksmoeder* is a typical example of a male-dominated society attempting to give women a legitimate, but passive and subordinate, position within a national identity. The focus on her courage, piety, domesticity and loyalty to the nationalist cause gave the Afrikaner woman a certain status but also imposed on her a restrictive code of behaviour: Elsabe Brink, 'Man-made women: Gender, class and the ideology of the *volksmoeder*', in Cheryl Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (London: James Currey, 1990), pp.273-292. In contrast, Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier have argued that, far from having the idea of the *volksmoeder* thrust upon them, a number of elite women actively helped to shape it, in particular through their testimonies on the concentrations. Dampier and Stanley have described these women as 'cultural entrepreneurs' who played a significant role in shaping the legacy of the camps as sites of nationalist ideology: Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier, 'Cultural Entrepreneurs, Proto-Nationalism and Women's Testimony Writings: From the South African War to 1940', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 2, 2007, pp. 501-519; p.504.



war and used to represent wider Afrikaner suffering and victimisation; in turn, this could later be used to justify extreme politics expressed in terms of the necessity of 'protecting' a vulnerable nation.<sup>143</sup> In South Africa, the camps experience has therefore become a nationalist women's story: a huge historical silence has engulfed the experiences of black, male, pro-British, or neutral internees, reinforced by a system of commemoration across South Africa which focused exclusively on white women and children.<sup>144</sup> The ongoing significance of the war and the tragedy of the camps in Afrikaner consciousness is apparent in the way in which this history continued to be used as a political weapon even ninety years later, as certain white South African nationalists compared the prospect of black South Africans in government with the persecution of the Boers by the British at the turn of the twentieth century:

If you add to the fact that our forefathers paid dearly for a part of South Africa, that we fought the British because they wanted to rob us of our right to self-determination, that we lost 26 000 women and children ... do you think that we will simply surrender to a communist like Mandela? It is out of the question.<sup>145</sup>

For much of the twentieth century, one of the most significant silences relating to the camps, and indeed to the war generally, was a lack of acknowledgement of the involvement of black Africans.<sup>146</sup> Research by both Stowell V. Kessler and Peter Warwick into the black camps has suggested that conditions there may, in fact, have been far worse than those of the 'white' camps, in terms of sanitation, housing and

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<sup>143</sup> Jenny de Reuk, 'Social Suffering and the Politics of Pain: Observations on the Concentration Camps in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902', *English in Africa*, 26, 2, 1999, pp.69-88; pp.82-83.

<sup>144</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, pp.11-13; pp.56-59.

<sup>145</sup> Koos van der Merwe, 'Leadership', 9 March 1990, cited in Grundlingh, 'The War', p.31.

<sup>146</sup> Jacob Saul Mohlamme, 'Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902', Doctoral Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1985, p.3.

medical facilities.<sup>147</sup> Although the Native Refugee Department (NRD), which administered the black camps, produced positive reports on the camps, a missionary visiting the camp at Dryharts remarked on the “great poverty and misery” he found there.<sup>148</sup> The historical silence surrounding the black camps has been compounded by the lack of historical records relating to them.<sup>149</sup> Although partly due to contemporary administrative inefficiencies, much of the dearth of source material seems to be due to the lack of interest in the camps displayed by contemporaries and to their insignificance in terms of Afrikaner nation building. In contrast to the detailed documentation of the white camps by investigators such as Hobhouse and Fawcett, reports on the black camps were limited to those carried out by the NRD and a handful of missionaries who visited the camps.<sup>150</sup> The conditions in these camps were never made the subject of public debate, either in Britain or South Africa.<sup>151</sup>

Perhaps more significant to the remembrance of the black camps in South Africa was the development of nationalist politics during the twentieth century. In apartheid South Africa the history of the camps was a White Afrikaner history, and this was reinforced, as has been seen, by the testimonies of white women whose narratives were accepted as representing the ‘true’ history of the camps. In the post-war period,

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<sup>147</sup> Stowell V. Kessler, 'The black and coloured concentration camps', in Franjohan Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched Earth*, (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1999), pp.132-153; pp.147-9; Peter Warwick, 'Black People and the War', in Peter Warwick and S. B. Spies (eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, (Harlow: Longman, 1980), pp. 186-209; p.205.

<sup>148</sup> USPG, Reports, Africa 1901, 1 (27347) Rev Brown to Rev W H. Tucker, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1901, cited in Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War 1899-1902*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.156.

<sup>149</sup> Warwick, *Black People*, pp.151-152.

<sup>150</sup> Mongalo and du Pisani, 'Victims of a white man's war', p.162.

<sup>151</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.77.

only white women and children were commemorated on monuments to the victims of the camps, and the deaths of black inmates were ignored.<sup>152</sup> Despite increasing interest in the role of black people during the Boer War, studies of the black concentration camps continue to be relatively limited in number, and Kessler has suggested that many South Africans remain unaware of the existence of the black camps.<sup>153</sup> He has argued that the ‘forgetting’ of the black camps was necessary to reinforce the significance of the white camps as a key element of Afrikaner heritage and to emphasise what he has called “the paradigm of sole martyrdom”.<sup>154</sup> He has suggested that the repeated references in the Boer women’s testimonies to the collusion of black men with the British helped to reinforce the image of white Afrikaner women and children as the only victims of the camps.<sup>155</sup>

For much of the twentieth century, neither the black nor the white concentration camps received a great deal of attention from British historians, with those who did refer to them tending to act as apologists for British policy.<sup>156</sup> While a number of works referred briefly to the camps, there were few significant studies. Typically, Thomas Pakenham’s major work on the South African War in 1979 devoted only a single chapter to the history of the camps, the focus of which was their political implications for British society. His discussion of the camps focused on the splits in the Liberal Party caused by debates over the camps, and the British Government’s apparently successful solution to the problem in the appointment of the Concentration Camps Commission. To Pakenham, the “magical effect” of Millicent Fawcett and her

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<sup>152</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, pp.56-59.

<sup>153</sup> Kessler, ‘The black concentration camps’, pp.117-118.

<sup>154</sup> Kessler, ‘The black concentration camps’, p.118.

<sup>155</sup> Kessler, ‘The black concentration camps’, p.117.

<sup>156</sup> van Heyningen, ‘Concentration Camps’, p.23.

colleagues neatly closed his chapter on the camps.<sup>157</sup> However, Pakenham's lack of interest in the camps was balanced by the publication of S. B. Spies' *Methods of Barbarism* in 1977. This was the first in-depth investigation of the British policy towards civilians during the Boer War, with an analysis of the extent to which their actions were legally legitimate. Spies' text explored in depth the development and detail of British policy in South Africa and continues to be used as a starting point for most historians approaching the subject.<sup>158</sup> In recent years, a number of historians have moved away from political and policy-related approaches to the South African internment experience and have begun to examine discourses on the camps to gain insight into both British and South African attitudes and assumptions about issues such as race, imperialism, national identity, and, particularly, gender.

Since the 1990s, academic studies of the concentration camps, in both Britain and South Africa, have increased, and research into the subject now represents a vibrant and growing area. The centenary of the outbreak of the South African War in 1999 provoked renewed interest in the history of that period, and the production of a documentary and accompanying book on the experiences of civilians brought the subject to a popular audience in South Africa.<sup>159</sup> During the last decade, South African historian Elizabeth van Heyningen, and British historians Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier, have led research on the camps and all have attempted to utilise new methodologies to establish closer insights into the experiences of camp

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<sup>157</sup> Pakenham, *Boer War*, p.502; p.518.

<sup>158</sup> See, for example, Fransjohann Pretorius, 'The white concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A debate without end', *Historia*, 55,2, 2010, pp.34-49; p.37; Nasson, *South African War*, p.244.

<sup>159</sup> Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched Earth*.

inmates.<sup>160</sup> This has enabled fresh theories to be established regarding the social make-up of internees and on camp life and experiences, challenging what van Heyningen describes as a widespread sense that the “story” of the camps “has been told”<sup>161</sup>. Through a close examination of camp records, Stanley has offered insight into previously ‘forgotten’ groups of camps inmates, including male internees and the formerly “invisible” black civilians who lived and worked in the ‘white’ camps.<sup>162</sup> Similarly, Dampier has scrutinised existing records to uncover evidence of the “everyday life” which took place in the camps but which has been obscured by the tragedy of the mortality rates.<sup>163</sup> In contrast, van Heyningen has focused on the relationships between Boer inmates and the British administrators of the camps, and has highlighted British attempts to use the camps to anglicise the Boer internees.<sup>164</sup> The significance of attempts by camp personnel to promote ‘British’ ideologies and practices among the inmates will be a central theme of this chapter, which will argue

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<sup>160</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen’s recent publications have been based on an extensive, ongoing research project funded by the Wellcome Trust which is collecting information and statistics on individual camps into an online database: <http://www2.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/>. This has allowed van Heyningen to identify statistical patterns in camp populations and mortality rates which provide deeper insights into the camps experiences. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise have attempted to address the subject using the methodology of ‘feminist fractured foundationalism’, whereby at the centre of their research is the concept that understandings of ‘social life’ should involve a balance between a “material factual reality” and the significance of conflicting interpretations of this reality by participants: Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, ‘Putting It into Practice : Using Feminist Fractured Foundationalism in Researching Children in the Concentration Camps of the South African War’, *Sociological Research Online*, Volume 11, Issue 1, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/11/1/stanley.html>. Helen Dampier has attempted to ‘re-read’ well-known examples of Boer women’s camp testimonies, with reference to unpublished accounts, with a view to establishing an insight into the way specific narrative structures have developed: Dampier, ‘Re-reading as a methodology’. See also, Helen Dampier, ‘Everyday Life’ in Boer women’s testimonies of the concentration camps of the South African War’, in Barry Godfrey and Graeme Dunstall (eds.), *Crime and Empire 1840-1940: Criminal Justice in local and global context*, (Ufflollme: Willen, 2005), pp.202-223.

<sup>161</sup> van Heyningen, ‘ “Fools rush in”’, p.12.

<sup>162</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, Chapter 7.

<sup>163</sup> Dampier, ‘ ‘Everyday Life”’.

<sup>164</sup> van Heyningen, ‘Fools rush in’, p.17.

that an ideology of 'Britishness' permeated many of the discourses which developed on the camps.

While van Heyningen, Stanley and Dampier have provided significant new insights into the experiences of internees, Paula Krebs has examined perceptions of the concentration camps in Britain. Considering the camps in terms of their place within popular discourses (particularly those generated by the press), she has highlighted the social and cultural significance of the camps in British, rather than South African, society. Krebs has regarded the reaction to the concentration camps as an important turning point in British attitudes towards imperialism, arguing that the scandal and ensuing debate instigated by Hobhouse's report were events which initiated a very gradual and long-term re-evaluation of imperialist ideologies. Of particular significance to this study is Krebs' assertion that the camps controversy was highly gendered, in terms of perceptions of the victims, the expected role of the 'male' state as protector, and roles of women, such as Emily Hobhouse and the Concentration Camps Commission, in initiating improvements.<sup>165</sup> She has observed that while opposition to the British policy in South African was expressed strongly by many contemporaries, camp opponents never "challenged the underlying ideologies of race and gender that played key roles in sustaining the policy of imperialism".<sup>166</sup> This chapter will argue that, in fact, the concentration camps crisis was highly significant in reinforcing these ideologies.

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<sup>165</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, pp.70-6.

<sup>166</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.34.

While historiography on the camps is therefore developing in a number of directions, the subject remains a contentious element of South African history. The centenary of the South African War in 1999 saw the League of Boer Prisoners' of War, an organisation of descendents of internees, formally request that Queen Elizabeth II apologise for the concentration camps on her visit to South Africa.<sup>167</sup> In the same year, an article in *The Spectator* by Andrew Roberts provoked condemnation in both Britain and South Africa for suggesting that the Boers themselves were ultimately responsible for the death rates in the camps (in the words of his title, that they "brought it on themselves") due to their insistence on "obstinately pursuing ignorant and superstitious medicinal practices".<sup>168</sup> Fierce debate also continues in academic responses to the camps. Recently, Elizabeth van Heyningen has asserted that the camp populations consisted mainly of 'bywoners', (non-land owning, rather than middle-class Boers) who, prior to the establishment of the camps, had little knowledge of 'modern' sanitary practices and had "lived in comfortable association with human and animal excrement"; as a result, she has suggested that the camps were significant in modernising Boer understandings of hygiene and sanitation.<sup>169</sup> This assertion has been met with outrage from some members of the South African community, and van Heyningen has reported receiving angry letters from members of the public, objecting to what was seen as a dismissive racialization of the Boers.<sup>170</sup> South African historian Fransjohan Pretorius has criticized van Heyningen for

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<sup>167</sup> Rupert Cornwell, 'The Queen to express regret over loss of life on all sides during Boer War', *The Independent*, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1999.

<sup>168</sup> Andrew Roberts, 'They brought it on themselves', *The Spectator*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1999. For responses to this article see: Pretorius, 'Boer civilians'; Johan Hari, 'The dark side of Andrew Roberts', *The Independent*, 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009.

<sup>169</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'A Tool for Modernisation? The Boer concentration camps of the South African War, 1900-1902', *South African Journal of Science*, 5/6, 106, 2010, pp.1-10; p.6.

<sup>170</sup> Van Heyningen, 'Fools Rush In', pp.12-13.

accepting biased British sources without question and offering a skewed perception of the camp populations by ignoring middle-class internees.<sup>171</sup> In response, Van Heyningen has argued that attacks by Pretorius and others on her work are based more on the continuing hold on the Afrikaner nationalist imagination of traditional interpretations of the camps, and unwillingness on the part of contemporary South Africans to consider an image of their ancestors as less than 'respectable'.<sup>172</sup>

While a specific way of remembering the concentration camps has been significant in post-war South African historiography and politics, perceptions of the camps have also had a place in a wider, international setting, particularly in terms of their associations with the development of concentration camps under the Nazi regime. Stanley has noted that when such camps were established in Nazi Europe, Reich Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, deliberately labelled them 'concentration camps' in reminiscence of the South African War and as part of his anti-British propaganda.<sup>173</sup> As a result of the horrific associations of the term, it has become common for modern societies to make assumptions about the nature of the South African camps<sup>174</sup>, which have sometimes been reflected in academic literature. In her writing on the South African internment experience, for example, Jenny de Reuk has encouraged her audience to make sense of Afrikaner women's descriptions of their journeys to the camps by recalling "the grainy images of Jews being trucked to Auschwitz and the other concentration (extermination) camps of the Third Reich."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Fransjohan Pretorius, 'Toiletpraatjies stink', *Die Burger*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2010; Pretorius, 'The white concentration camps', pp.45-48.

<sup>172</sup> Van Heyningen, 'Fools Rush In', pp.12-13.

<sup>173</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes...*, p.7.

<sup>174</sup> Helen Dampier, 'Everyday Life', p.202.

<sup>175</sup> de Reuk, 'Social Suffering', p.74.



Such association of the South African camps with Nazi death camps, however, does not allow for consideration of the vastly different contexts in which the camps developed or the stark differences relating to purpose and use. Stanley and Dampier have stressed strongly that the South African camps were highly different in nature to later European extermination camps. Stanley has asserted that the high death rates in the civilian camps in South Africa were horrific and deplorable, but that, essentially, they were not deliberate, and that many British administrators worked hard to alleviate the suffering of the inmates. She stresses that the “different deaths, the deliberate evil and the stupidly accidental, are different in kind, not just degree.”<sup>176</sup> Dampier has described the essential difference between the two as the fact that “central to the concentration system in South Africa was the organisation and regulation rather than the destruction of ‘everyday life.’”<sup>177</sup>

This thesis will argue that a far more useful way of placing the South African concentration camps in context, is to examine them in relation to later British wartime internment policies. References to the formative role of the South African camps in terms of the development of wartime internment processes are not uncommon in literature on the subject. For example, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, have made a close association between the development of colonial internment by both the British in South Africa and the Spanish in Cuba and later wartime internment episodes, arguing that the “[internment] camps of the Great War took up where the two colonial episodes left off.”<sup>178</sup> However, this theory has been difficult to test, since research into internment has tended to focus on distinct case

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<sup>176</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes...*, pp.32-33.

<sup>177</sup> Dampier, ‘Everyday Life’, p.202.

<sup>178</sup> Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p.71.

studies. Matthew Stibbe has rejected such connections, arguing that South African War internment differed considerably to that of the First World War, particularly because of the significance of negative 'enemy' stereotyping in driving the latter.<sup>179</sup> This chapter will suggest, however, that racial stereotyping of civilians was an essential aspect of the propaganda battle which raged over the South African concentration camps and that the racialization of the enemy was in fact a theme which strongly connects the internment camps in South Africa with those of later conflicts. However, the perception of the camps as predominantly 'women and children's camps' meant that 'enemy' imagery was particularly influenced by gender assumptions. The chapter will argue that the gendered nature of the South African 'concentration camp' experience was also highly significant in driving long term patterns of wartime internment. The internment of women and children, and the ways in which this decision was perceived and depicted by British observers, had a profound impact on the way that later British governments approached internment policies. The chapter will also demonstrate the impossibility of disentangling gender ideologies from notions of national identity and race. By examining the development of debates on the concentration camps policy, and reflections on the 'characters' of the imprisoned Boer women, it aims to provide insight not only into British attitudes towards Boers, but into what such debates can reveal about British ideologies and self-perceptions at the turn of the twentieth century. Central to this discussion will be the significance of British understandings of 'civilization' and 'barbarism', and how these ideas impacted on perceptions of racial, cultural and gender difference within the Empire.

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<sup>179</sup> Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment', pp.54-55.

## The nineteenth century image of the Boer

British wartime perceptions of the Boers can only be understood with reference to longer-term British discourses on South Africa and the Boers as a community or 'race'. Racial stereotyping of the Boers had developed throughout the nineteenth century, with British observers typically labelling the community as "ignorant", "uncultivated", and "backward."<sup>180</sup> Even prior to the war this negative imagery was marked enough to attract criticism from some liberal commentators. The British historian, James Froude, for example, had argued as early as 1886 the Boers "had been so systematically abused and misrepresented that the English scarcely regarded them as human beings to whom they owed any moral consideration."<sup>181</sup> Critics of the Boers accused them of forming a backward society which failed to conform to civilized standards. In the early 1890s, for example, Randolph Churchill argued that the backwardness of Boer society was demonstrated in their failure to effectively harness South Africa's natural resources. Churchill argued that the apparent technological inertia of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony was reflective of wider Boer social and character traits, predicting: "Having had given to them great possessions and great opportunities...[the Boers] will be written of only for their cruelty towards and tyranny over the native races, their fanaticism, their ignorance, and their selfishness."<sup>182</sup> Churchill's criticism of the Boer relationship with black Africans was not unusual: tensions over this issue had existed since the arrival of the British in South Africa and their drive for the abolition of slavery in the region. It

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<sup>180</sup> Randolph S. Churchill, *Men. Mines and Animals in South Africa*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1897), p.94; James Bryce, *Impressions of South Africa*, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1900 [first edition 1897]), p.279.

<sup>181</sup> James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, or England and her Colonies*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912 [first edition 1886]), p.56.

<sup>182</sup> Churchill, *Men. Mines and Animals*, p.82.

was widely believed by British observers that the Boers were particularly cruel and oppressive towards non-Whites, and, as Churchill's statement makes clear, such attitudes were associated with cultural backwardness by British commentators who considered that the relationships between white Europeans and black Africans should be based on more "enlightened" principles.<sup>183</sup> This point reinforces the argument of South African historian Hermann Giliomee, who has stressed that the British viewed the Boers in contrast to their own national self-image. The apparent backwardness, superstition and ignorance of the Boers were seen as particularly significant because these traits were felt by British observers to represent "everything they themselves were not."<sup>184</sup>

This point is underlined by the tendency of contemporaries to express their criticism of the Boers with reference to British social norms, often with a focus on the failure of the Boer community to conform to British gender ideals. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin have argued that gender ideologies formed a highly significant element of British culture during the late nineteenth-century. Male and female roles were firmly delineated, and masculine ideals involved the association of 'manliness' with "physical courage", "chivalric ideals", and "virtuous fortitude with additional connotations of military and patriotic virtue".<sup>185</sup> In contrast, femininity was often associated with far more passive qualities, and women's roles tended to be rooted in

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<sup>183</sup> Todd Lee, 'The Fiction of Difference: The Afrikaner in British Adventure Fiction', *UCLA Historical Journal*, 18, 1999, pp.1-26; p.14.

<sup>184</sup> Hermann Giliomee, *Afrikaners: Biography of a people*, (London: Hurst and Co., 2003), p.202.

<sup>185</sup> J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, 'Introduction', in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds.), *Manliness and morality: Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp.1-6; p.1.

the home rather than the public sphere, centring on domesticity and motherhood.<sup>186</sup> Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff have demonstrated that, even by the middle of the nineteenth century, dominant middle-class ideologies placed great significance on the place of women in the home.<sup>187</sup> The belief in such highly gendered social spheres, in which men owed a duty of protection to women and children, has been regarded as an essential element of British national ideologies during the late nineteenth century.<sup>188</sup> Hall has noted that such assumptions were particularly significant in underpinning a British belief in its status as a “civilized” nation.<sup>189</sup> British observations on South African society during this period often focused on the failure of the Boers to observe these idealized gender roles that were regarded as such essential elements of ‘civilized’ society. MP James Bryce, for example, argued that the isolated and inward-looking Boer lifestyle ensured that the “children grew up ignorant; the women, as was natural where slaves were employed, lost the neat and cleanly ways of their Dutch ancestors; the men were rude, bigoted, indifferent to the comforts and graces of life.”<sup>190</sup> This was a typical example of British contemporary thought that labelled Boer men as lazy and ignorant and Boer women as slovenly, “ill-educated and unattractive”.<sup>191</sup> Todd Lee has argued that nineteenth-century British fiction authors consciously constructed images of the Boers which were based on their failure to conform to British gender ‘norms’ of domestic and refined femininity

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<sup>186</sup> Mangan and Walvin, ‘Introduction’, p.4.

<sup>187</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850*, (London: Routledge, 1987), pp.183-4.

<sup>188</sup> George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p.17.

<sup>189</sup> Catherine Hall, ‘Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century’ in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.46-76; p.47.

<sup>190</sup> Bryce, *Impressions*, p.107.

<sup>191</sup> Bryce, *Impressions*, pp.379-380; ‘The Transvaal Boer III’, *The Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1896, p.13.

and industrious and chivalrous masculinity. Lee's conclusion is relevant not only to literature on the Boers, but to wider British discourses on the subject: "By emphasizing the failings of Afrikaner gender roles and identities, British authors gave readers the sense of a misshapen culture which lacked the proper order and sense of restraint necessary in all facets of culture if a people aspired to colonial rule".<sup>192</sup>

The "fiction of difference"<sup>193</sup> identified by Lee was firmly underpinned by contemporary racial-imperialist thought. The need to 'civilize' 'black Africa' was well-established in British discourse by the late nineteenth century, and discussions of Boer 'backwardness' often took on similarly racial tones. By the outbreak of the South African War the Boers had become a target of advocates of racial degeneration theories: it was argued that their deliberate remoteness from 'civilized' European influences and their interaction with black Africans meant they had "backslid as a European race."<sup>194</sup> Randolph Churchill argued that "year after year, generation after generation, the Boer farmer drags out the most degraded and ignoble existence ever experienced by a race with any pretensions to civilization."<sup>195</sup> Such cultural degeneration was often connected with the South African environment. It was suggested by a correspondent of *The Times*, for example, that the outdoor life of the Boer had resulted in a coarseness of character. The correspondent explained that life "in a rough country, and in the open air, undoubtedly blunts very quickly the finer feelings, or sloughs, that thin, delicate skin which we call civilization."<sup>196</sup> The extent to which such ideas had gained currency by the time of the South African War

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<sup>192</sup> Lee, 'Fiction of Difference', p.24.

<sup>193</sup> Lee, 'Fiction of Difference'.

<sup>194</sup> Paula Krebs, *Gender*, p.117.

<sup>195</sup> Bryce, *Impressions*, p.107.

<sup>196</sup> 'The Transvaal Boer II', *The Times*, 31 December 1895, p.6.

can be gleaned from a comment by Lord Kitchener in which he stated that the Boers should be regarded as “uncivilized Africander [*sic*] savages with only a thin white veneer...”<sup>197</sup> While it is rare to find contemporary examples of open discussion of the possibility of ‘miscegenation’ between Boers and Africans, such comments strongly imply that this was an idea which may have reinforced British prejudice. M. Van Wyk Smith has suggested that such “suspicions about Boer cultural integrity” – or doubts about whether the Boers should be considered a genuinely ‘white’ race - meant that the South African War “had much more of a racial edge to it than we may now care to remember.”<sup>198</sup> Lee has argued persuasively that such a racialized approach was an essential justification for British policy in South Africa. He has observed that British representations of the Boers were frequently couched in a language of ‘otherness’ that was based on a sense of “black / white racial dichotomy”, despite their shared ‘white’, European roots.<sup>199</sup> This had striking parallels with the ‘blackening’ of white social groups within Britain regarded as ‘racially’ inferior, such as Jewish and Irish immigrants.<sup>200</sup>

It is essential to note, however, that while such negative, racialized stereotypes of the Boers were widespread in British discourses prior to the war, they were sometimes tempered by more favourable depictions. In contrast to the dismissive criticism of Boer culture by contemporaries such as Churchill and Bryce, more sympathetic

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<sup>197</sup> Kitchener to Brodrick, cited in S. B. Spies, ‘Women and the War’, in Peter Warwick and S. B. Spies (eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, (Harlow: Longman, 1980), pp. 161-185; p.174.

<sup>198</sup> M. van Wyk Smith, ‘The Boers and the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) in the Twentieth-Century Moral Imaginary’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 2003, pp.429-446; p.430.

<sup>199</sup> Lee, ‘Fiction of Difference’, p.5.

<sup>200</sup> See Philip Cohen, ‘The Perversions of Inheritance: Studies in the Making of Multi-Racist Britain’, in Philip Cohen and Harwant S. Bains (eds.), *Multi-Racist Britain*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp.9-118; pp.72-75.

observers applauded the isolated lifestyles enjoyed by South Africans. During the pre-war years a number of favourable interpretations of the Boer way of life appeared that, while tending to perpetuate the image of the rough, slow, and backward Boer, presented these characteristics in a more positive way. The *Times* correspondent who had lamented the decline of civilized values in Boer society in 1895-6, for example, also expressed considerable admiration for the Boer way of life. Although he argued that “life in a wild country quickly blunts many of the finer feelings of civilization”, he also suggested that living close to nature had considerable benefits, and that the simple existence of the Boers might actually encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle. Such conflicting interpretations often rested on an alternative understanding of the concept of ‘civilization’. The simplicity of Boer life was contrasted with the dangers of “crowded” urban life, characterized by “chicanery, cheating, vice, and...crime.”<sup>201</sup> The association of the term ‘civilization’ with the more negative elements of modernisation and urbanisation allowed the ‘primitive’ lifestyles of the Boers to be considered in a far more positive light. Such an approach appears to have been rooted in a sense of rising concern in *fin de siècle* Europe regarding the harmful effects of the urban environment on public health and, more fundamentally, ‘racial’ efficiency.<sup>202</sup> Contemporaries frequently expressed alarm about the degenerative potential of Europe’s crowded cities: the right-wing journalist and eugenicist Arnold White, for example, argued that British town dwellers “had begun to

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<sup>201</sup> ‘The Transvaal Boer III’, *The Times*, 1 January 1896, p.13.

<sup>202</sup> Historians such as G. R. Searle and Richard A. Soloway are among those who have argued that such anxiety was an increasingly significant element of the British psyche during this period. See Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995 [first edition 1990]), pp.39-40; Searle, *Eugenics and Politics*, p.20. For a survey of British concerns about degeneration during this period, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Chapter 7.



rot.”<sup>203</sup> The more prominent Paris-based journalist Max Nordau asserted that modern European life was characterized by “degeneration and hysteria”, caused by “the excessive organic wear and tear suffered by the nations through the immense demands on their activity, and through the rank growth of large towns.”<sup>204</sup> In this context, the rural lifestyles of the Boers could be compared with an idealized, pre-industrial age, where the essential values of civilization, from which modern societies had evolved, could be found. In this vein, Froude declared that “the Boers of South Africa, of all human beings now on this planet, correspond nearest to Horace’s description of the Roman peasant soldiers who defeated Pyrrhus and Hannibal.”<sup>205</sup>

The South African War was to provide the culmination of British anxieties concerning its national stamina, as what had been anticipated as the quick and easy defeat of two small and militarily weaker states turned into a drawn-out conflict in which the success of the British was by no means assured.<sup>206</sup> Concerns about British physical efficiency were dramatically reinforced by several serious defeats for British forces at the hands of the Boers, particularly during the ‘Black Week’ of December 1899, when the severe military setbacks shook an increasingly fragile national confidence.<sup>207</sup> G. R. Searle and Richard A. Soloway have highlighted the extensive concerns raised in Britain in response to the high number of volunteers for military service at the time of the South African War who were rejected due to a failure to meet the specified

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<sup>203</sup> Arnold White, *Efficiency and Empire*, (London: Methuen, 1901), p.121. For more detail on White’s contribution to debates on this issue, see Searle, *Eugenics and Politics*, pp.22-23.

<sup>204</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993 [first edition 1895]), p.43.

<sup>205</sup> Froude, *Oceana*, p.37.

<sup>206</sup> Lee, ‘Fiction of Difference’, p.3.

<sup>207</sup> Searle, *Quest for National Efficiency*, p.37.

standards of fitness.<sup>208</sup> The revelation that 40 per cent of potential recruits had been rejected in some industrial towns due to physical problems provoked alarm among contemporary observers such as White, who drew on pre-war perceptions of the Boers to argue that their healthy “vigour” contrasted dangerously with the low levels of “stamina” and “efficiency” of Britain’s urban-bred armed forces.<sup>209</sup> The sense of alarm experienced at this time, a culmination of two decades of growing interest in racial degeneration, also provided the intellectual background against which British wartime imaginings of Boer military and social worlds developed.

### **The impact of British military tactics on civilians in South Africa**

As will be seen, the development of internment policies during the First and Second World Wars would be closely related to the pressure of British popular opinion on their wartime governments. In contrast, the establishment of the South African concentration camps occurred without the general knowledge of the British public and was closely connected with military developments. As has been noted, the exact origins of the concentration camps are unclear and appear to have been informal developments in response to the homelessness of Boer families as a result of the ‘scorched earth’ policy. To a certain extent, therefore, they had the characteristics of “refugee” camps, as the British Government took care to stress when the policy was made public.<sup>210</sup> However, the development of the camps was closely connected to the ‘scorched earth’ policy initiated as part of the British campaign under Roberts,

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<sup>208</sup> Searle, *Quest for National Efficiency*, pp.60-61; Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, pp.41-42.

<sup>209</sup> Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, p.41; White, *Efficiency and Empire*, pp.89-90.

<sup>210</sup> The camps were referred to as “refugee camps” in the official publications on the subject that appeared between 1901 and 1902. See, for example, ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1.

and Spies has argued that the camps were also a significant part of British military strategy in their own right.<sup>211</sup> Under Kitchener, who succeeded Roberts as Commander-in-Chief in November 1900, the internment policy was expanded and its military potential realised. Kitchener made clear his thoughts on the military benefits of the concentration camps in his correspondence with the Secretary of State for War, St John Brodrick, between 1900 and 1901. In December 1900, Kitchener wrote to Brodrick to advise the expansion of the existing internment policy in order to encourage Boer soldiers to surrender and come into the camps to join their families. Once, there, he stated, "We shall then be able to work on the feelings of the men to get back to their farms."<sup>212</sup> This evidence has led Bill Nasson to argue that the concentration camps should be regarded as "hostage sites", which, along with the scorched earth policy, were central to Kitchener's strategy to defeat the Boers and win the war.<sup>213</sup> Kitchener's correspondence makes it clear that the camps policy was also intended to limit the assistance that Boer women could provide to commandos from their farmhouses; he suggested that the extension of the camps would tackle the problem of intelligence-gathering and dissemination by Boer women by removing them from the military zone.<sup>214</sup> In March 1901, Kitchener explained to Brodrick: "The women left in farms give complete intelligence & tell boers [*sic*] of all our movements...When they are brought in...they settle down and are quite happy."<sup>215</sup> The internment of women in concentration camps also cut Boer men off from

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<sup>211</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, pp.188-190.

<sup>212</sup> Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1900: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (01).

<sup>213</sup> Nasson, *South African War*, p.221.

<sup>214</sup> Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1901: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (01); Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1901: National Archives, Kew, WO32/8034.

<sup>215</sup> Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1901: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (01).

potential sources of food supplies; in December 1900 Kitchener complained to Brodrick about the provision of supplies to Boer forces by local farms, and informed him that to tackle the problem he had decided to “bring in the women” from certain areas.<sup>216</sup> Finally, as Nasson has highlighted, the camps policy benefited the British authorities by enabling the suppression of the activities of ‘bittereinder’ women, who might otherwise have encouraged and reinforced the Boer campaign.<sup>217</sup> The camps can therefore be seen as having a number of advantages to the British military authorities in South Africa which directly related to the wider strategy of British victory, and Nasson has described them as a “crucial link in the Kitchener chain of attrition”.<sup>218</sup>

Alexander B. Downes has argued that, when the guerrilla stage of the South African War emerged, the British military authorities began “to view all Boer civilians as active or potential guerrilla supporters.”<sup>219</sup> This was a turning point not only in the nature of the war, but in British attitudes to the ‘enemy’, since it was now much more difficult to precisely define who could, and could not, be defined as a combatant. This issue can be regarded as heralding developments which took place during the ‘total’ wars of the twentieth century, when civilians’ roles in war became increasingly militarized.<sup>220</sup> Lord Roberts’ proclamations of 1900, regarding the punishment of local populations in the event of Boer attacks on British infrastructure, made it clear that he

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<sup>216</sup> Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1900: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (01).

<sup>217</sup> Nasson, *South African War*, p.221. The term ‘bittereinder’ related to Boers who opposed surrender and were determined to fight to the ‘bitter end’.

<sup>218</sup> Nasson, *South African War*, p.222.

<sup>219</sup> Alexander B. Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), p.170.

<sup>220</sup> Strachen and Scheipers, ‘Introduction’, pp.8-9. See also Proctor, *Civilians*, p.11; Slim, *Killing Civilians*, p.190.

considered their civilian status to be undermined by the introduction of guerrilla warfare.<sup>221</sup> However, his successor, Lord Kitchener, appears to have found the issue more problematic, and his correspondence makes it evident that this blurring between civilian and military spheres posed a major problem in determining how to shape British strategy in South Africa. Kitchener expressed particular concern about the extent to which Boer men switched disconcertingly between their civilian and military roles, with soldiers often returning “at intervals to their farms & ... [living] as most peaceful inhabitants.”<sup>222</sup> However, despite Kitchener’s emphasis on the military benefits of interning Boer civilians, there is little evidence that he developed any particular concern about the military capacity of women, specifically. It could be tempting to associate the official expressions of concern regarding espionage among Boer women with the development, later in the twentieth century, of discourses about the danger of female spies. However, in Kitchener’s writings there is no indication that he believed Boer women to be dangerous *as women*, i.e. due to any propensities of the female character, nor did he address the concentration camps issue in terms of male and female roles. His references to female espionage appear to have been just one element of his wider concern about the effectiveness of the Boer forces in using the South African environment and settlements, and their close relationships with the civilian community, to their advantage.

In contrast to later discussions of the camps, which would focus on female and child inmates, Kitchener repeatedly highlighted the benefits of the camps for Boer men,

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<sup>221</sup> XIX, No 5 of 1900, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1900, ‘Proclamations issued by Field-Marshal Lord Roberts in South Africa’, *19th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1900 session (Cmd. 426), Vol. LVI .

<sup>222</sup> Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1900: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (01).

arguing that they were essential in order to enable Boer soldiers to surrender; without the availability of this accommodation, such men would have to return to their farms, where they would be likely to suffer reprisals or be tried for desertion. In addition, the camps enabled surrendered soldiers to bring in much of their “movable property” and avoid its confiscation by the Boer forces.<sup>223</sup> This association between the concentration camps and male inmates is interesting in the light of later discussions of the camps which, as will be seen, would focus almost exclusively on female and child internees. Until the middle of 1901, however, when the issue of camps was thrust into the British public spotlight, the fact that significant numbers of the camps’ inhabitants were women and children was simply not regarded as a major issue by British administrators in South Africa. Paula Krebs has argued that Kitchener considered the camps simply in terms of their place within his military strategy and failed to contemplate how the internment of women and children might be received in Britain, and this is certainly borne out in his correspondence.<sup>224</sup>

In the discussions of the camps which emerged during 1901, defenders of the camps tended to be divided between those who regarded the internment of women as a military necessity and those who argued that the establishment of the concentration camps was a benevolent act by the British government. Kitchener’s correspondence with Brodrick was not made public at this time, but on occasion the latter defended the concentration camps policy in Parliament by making reference to the role of Boer women in military activities. In February 1901, Brodrick reiterated Kitchener’s

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<sup>223</sup> Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1901: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (2); Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1901: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (01).

<sup>224</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.58.

concerns about the use of farmhouses as supply depots, asserting: “There has been an immense amount of treachery in this war, of breach of parole, and a great deal of harbouring of the enemy in farmhouses which had received our protection”.<sup>225</sup> Four months later, in response to angry questions on the concentration camps from MPs, he stated that “the farmhouses occupied by the women became depots from which they got supplies and stores and from which... [Boer soldiers] obtained information of the movements of our troops”.<sup>226</sup> When the official papers on the subject were published in late 1901, certain reports acknowledged that some groups of civilians had been brought into the camp for “military reasons”.<sup>227</sup> To an extent, therefore, the policy was firmly linked to the military potential of the civilians themselves, and this was acknowledged by certain contemporary observers. Millicent Fawcett, for example, supported the internment of Boer women on the grounds that “no one can take part in war without sharing in its risks”, thus implicitly acknowledging a certain military status for Boer women.<sup>228</sup> Similarly, *The Times* cited an assertion that, by assisting the men in the field, Boer women had “forfeited the right to be considered non-belligerents.”<sup>229</sup> In the minds of some British contemporaries, therefore, Boer women had associated themselves with the military forces by rejecting their passive, female civilian roles, and had thereby abandoned their traditional right to considerate treatment.

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<sup>225</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, cols 1270-71.

<sup>226</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, col. 590.

<sup>227</sup> Major George A. Goodwin to Major-General J. G. Maxwell, 22 March 1901 in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 7).

<sup>228</sup> Mrs Henry Fawcett, ‘The concentration camps in South Africa’, *Westminster Gazette*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1901, p.2.

<sup>229</sup> Sarah Brockford, quoted in ‘The concentration camps’, *The Times*, 5 August 1901, p.6.

During the first half of the twentieth century discourses connecting foreignness, femininity and espionage were to become increasingly prominent. However, in 1901, a period during which gender roles in Britain remained starkly delineated, the justification of extensive female internment on such grounds was problematic, an issue of which Brodrick, in particular, appears to have quickly become aware. Despite admissions that female military involvement played at least some part in internment decisions, the dominant tactic of Brodrick and other officials was to publicly play down these considerations and to repeatedly stress that the concentration camps should be regarded as areas of protection for Boer families.<sup>230</sup> From his earliest public defence of the camps, Brodrick frequently referred to the internees as “protected persons”, and the camps were often referred to in public discussions as “refugee camps”, a label which reinforced this ‘protective’ image.<sup>231</sup> In a report which was made public some months later, George A Goodwin, General Superintendent of the Transvaal camps, divided the inmates into three “classes”: those who had entered for their own protection, those who had surrendered and come into the camps for protection, and those whose husbands were still fighting and had been “brought into camp for their own protection against natives, &c., or for military reasons”.<sup>232</sup> This final ‘military’ consideration was strongly overshadowed by the extensive focus on the protective nature of the camps, despite the emphasis in earlier, unpublished correspondence, on land-clearing as a military tactic. Such responses indicate that government officials recognized that reference to female espionage, and the internment of women as, essentially, prisoners of war, would be

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<sup>230</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.62.

<sup>231</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, col. 1021; Krebs, *Gender*, p.71.

<sup>232</sup> Major George A. Goodwin to Major-General Maxwell, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1901 in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 7).



difficult to maintain in an environment in which firmly-delineated, gendered 'separate spheres' remained highly significant. The immediate attempt by Brodrick and others to defend the camps along gendered lines, emphasizing the British government's role as protectors of Boer women and children, indicated the significance of traditional gender ideologies and implicitly acknowledged that the image of the female spy was not compatible with popular ideals which placed women at a safe distance from the military sphere.<sup>233</sup>

In addition to depicting the camps as areas of protection, official, gendered rhetoric often went even further. In his public discussions of the camps, Brodrick not only suggested that the camps were essentially an act of kindness on the part of the British authorities, but specifically argued that they provided havens for "deserted women" who had been left by their Boer soldier husbands to fend for themselves in the middle of a war zone.<sup>234</sup> Paula Krebs has suggested that the cultivation of this idea was important since it not only provided a strong justification for the existence of the camps, but created the sense that Boer men were shirking their roles as male protectors, leaving the British military to take on their responsibilities.<sup>235</sup> The suggestion that the suffering of Boer women was caused by their abandonment by their husbands brought the masculinity of Boer soldiers into question, while the provision by the British of 'protection' for such women solidified the British military's

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<sup>233</sup> For a discussion of attempts to keep British women nurses separate from the military sphere in South Africa, see Christopher Schmitz, 'We too were soldiers': The Experiences of British Nurses in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902', in Gerard DeGroot and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *A Soldier and a Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), pp.49-65; p.59, and Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses 1854-1914*, (London: Routledge, 1988), p.189.

<sup>234</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, col. 1021.

<sup>235</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.62.

own claims to 'civilized' manliness. Such discourses reinforced the established idea of the failure of the Boers as a community to conform to the gender norms generally associated with 'civilized' standards, and drew on the pre-war imagery of the Boers as a backward and uncivilized race.

British criticism of the concentration camps policy developed in Parliament from February 1901, and exploded in June 1901 as a result of the publication of Emily Hobhouse's report. While official repetition of the 'protective' nature of the camps remained its main defence, the government was repeatedly pressured to reveal more information on the camps and to take steps to alleviate the mortality rates.<sup>236</sup> In response, the decision was taken to release reports and statistics on the camps in the form of 'Blue Books', which began to be published in late 1901. In July 1901 the Concentration Camps Commission was despatched to South Africa to investigate conditions in the camps and to make recommendations as to the improvement of their administration.<sup>237</sup> The reports published as a result of these decisions are extremely useful in gauging the ways in which the camps policy continued to be justified by the British administration. The documents contained detailed descriptions of conditions in the concentration camps, as well as observations on the behaviour and customs of the Boer inmates. The reports generally originated with British-appointed officials who tended to be supportive of the British war aims. Members of the Concentration Camps Commission were ostensibly selected for their experience

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<sup>236</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 97 col. 78; Hansard, HC Deb, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, cols 263-4; Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, cols 540-3; Hansard, HC Deb, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, cols 887-9.

<sup>237</sup> Hansard, House of Lords Debates (hereafter HL Deb), 15<sup>th</sup> July 1901, vol. 97, col. 374; Telegram No.23, Chamberlain to Kitchener, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1901: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 75 24622, p.27.

in public health organisation, with Brodrick claiming that none of the members were “specially identified with any form of opinion”.<sup>238</sup> In fact, at least two members of the Commission had publicly spoken out in favour of the camps policy, and the Secretary of the Commission, Lucy Deane, privately admitted that she felt her own, more critical, opinion on the camps policy had led her to feel at odds with the other members.<sup>239</sup> As a result, while some of the authors made recommendations for improvements, and even criticized conditions within individual camps, a notable anti-Boer bias was often detectable in the published reports on the camps. This bias has meant that the Blue Books and the Concentration Camp Commission report have sometimes been regarded as questionable historical sources on camp life. Recently, South African historian Fransjohan Pretorius warned that the indiscriminate use of the blue books can lead to “one-sided” interpretations of camp experiences.<sup>240</sup> However, to this thesis, which aims to analyse British attitudes towards the ‘enemy’, the subjective nature of the reports is extremely useful in gaining understanding about the ways in which both internment policy, and the Boers as a community, were perceived from an elite British perspective.

### **Motherhood and mortality in the concentration camps**

Perhaps the most notable theme of the published reports on the South African concentration camps was an emphasis on the poor domestic habits of the Boer

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<sup>238</sup> St John Brodrick to Emily Hobhouse, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1901, ‘Concentration Camps and Correspondence with Miss Hobhouse’: National Archives, Kew, WO32/8061.

<sup>239</sup> Mrs Henry Fawcett, ‘The Concentration Camps in South Africa’, *Westminster Gazette*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1901, pp.1-2; Jane Waterston to the *Cape Times*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1901, cited in Lucy Bean and Elizabeth van Heyningen (eds.), *The Letters of Jane Elizabeth Waterston 1866-1905*, (Cape Town: Van Riebeck Society, 1983) p.151 (footnote); Lucy Deane to Hyacinthe Mary Deane, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1901: LSE Archives, STREATFEILD 2/11 109.

<sup>240</sup> Pretorius, ‘The white concentration camps’, p.45.

inmates and what were seen as their strange cultural quirks, the more hair-raising of which were often reprinted in the British press.<sup>241</sup> As has been seen, the image of the 'backward' and 'uncivilized' Boer had already established itself during the previous decades and this image was perpetuated and expanded within the reports, which repeatedly berated camp inmates for poor sanitary standards, "careless slovenly habits"<sup>242</sup> and "extreme antipathy to personal cleanliness".<sup>243</sup> The significance of this repeated focus on the 'dirty habits' of the Boers becomes evident when the high mortality rates in the camps are considered. The publication of the reports had been initiated in response to the extensive public concern about the death rates within the camps, particularly among children; the emphasis on the poor sanitation of the Boers made the question of the ultimate responsibility for the high levels of mortality less clear cut. A direct connection between cleanliness and mortality rates was made by a number of commentators on the camps, such as the superintendent of Mafeking Camp, who asserted that the inmates were "a very dirty, careless, lazy lot, and the only way to prevent them from dying is to disinfect anywhere and everywhere".<sup>244</sup> After visiting Irene Camp in July 1901, Kendal Franks, a consulting surgeon to the British forces who was commissioned to undertake an inspection of the camps, stated:

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<sup>241</sup> See, for example, 'The Blue-Book on the refugee camps', *The Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1901, p.8.

<sup>242</sup> G. Pratt Yule, 'Report by Medical Officer of Health, Orange River Colony', 1<sup>st</sup> July 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 101).

<sup>243</sup> Robert James, Medical Officer's report, Johannesburg, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 853), LXVIII.391–779 (p. 69).

<sup>244</sup> N. J. Schwartz, Mafeking 2<sup>nd</sup> Report: National Archives, Kew, CO879/75 (p. 122).

The high death rate among the children, I would like to emphasise...is in no way due to want of care or dereliction of duty on the part of those responsible for the camp. It is, in my opinion, due to the people themselves; to their dirty habits both as regards their own personal cleanliness and the cleanliness of their children and of their surroundings; to their prejudices; their ignorance; their distrust of others...<sup>245</sup>

The decision to publish reports on the camps allowed the British authorities to appear open and transparent in their policy, but the inclusion of such material enabled the prejudices of colonial officials to be repeated and magnified in the British press. *The Times*, for example, published extensive extracts from the reports and presented them as evidence that the “difficulties” experienced in the camps had been “enhanced as much by the habits and conditions of the people themselves as by the extraordinary circumstances of war”.<sup>246</sup> Kitchener, who had previously shown little interest in conditions in the camps, considering them only in light of their military role, seized on such reports as a vindication of his policy. After reading Kendal Franks’ report he wrote to Brodrick, observing that was “impossible to fight against the criminal negligence of the mothers” and raising the question of “whether some of the worst cases could not be tried for manslaughter” (a suggestion which does not appear to have been followed up).<sup>247</sup>

Although the accusations regarding cleanliness were often aimed at the Boer community as a whole, women, as the principal residents of the camps, bore the brunt of the attacks and were often specifically targeted for criticism. A British midwife

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<sup>245</sup> Dr Kendal Franks, ‘The Burgher Camp, Irene, 11th July 1901’, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 166).

<sup>246</sup> ‘The blue book on the refugee camps’, *The Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1901, p.8.

<sup>247</sup> Lord Kitchener to St John Brodrick, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1901: National Archives, Kew, PRO 30/57/22 (2).

in Volkrust Camp, for example, reported: “The women here are not *cleanly* – often diseased.”<sup>248</sup> Dr. Ella Scarlett, Medical Officer at Norvals Pont Camp, and later a member of the Concentration Camps Commission, complained: “I tell a Boer woman to wash her child's face, and she gets a basin of water as black as if half of it was ink, and with a rag from the ground, which she rings out, she wipes the child's face and hands.”<sup>249</sup> As this example suggests, observations by British commentators on Boer women's hygiene habits became implicitly linked to their success, or otherwise, as mothers. Major-General Maxwell, the Military Governor of Pretoria, explicitly connected the death rates with the failure of mothers in observing rules of hygiene, asserting that a “favourite remedy [for sick children] appears to be an absolute refusal to wash the children or any attempt at cleanliness.”<sup>250</sup> Emily Hobhouse, writing in 1902, believed that the British authorities stressed the shortcomings of Boer women in order to absolve themselves of responsibility for the humanitarian crisis in the camps.<sup>251</sup> The blame of mothers and the playing-down of responsibility was certainly a recurring theme among the British administration, even at the highest levels. Maxwell believed that “...the death rate amongst the children is higher than it should be owing to the crass stupidity and neglect by the mothers themselves.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> A. M. Pate, ‘Camp Matron's report’, Volkrust, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 853), LXVIII, pp.391-779; p. 104.

<sup>249</sup> Dr. Ella Scarlett to Sir Edward Ward, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1901: National Archives, Kew, WO32 8061.

<sup>250</sup> Major-General Maxwell to Lord Kitchener, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1901 in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 50).

<sup>251</sup> Emily Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell*, (London: Methuen and Co., 1902), p.146.

<sup>252</sup> Major-General Maxwell to Lord Kitchener, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 45).

Captain A.G. Trollope, Chief Superintendent of the Orange River Colony Refugee Camps, was dismissive of the mortality rates in his report for the British Military authorities, commenting: "...it must be borne in mind that the death rate among Boer children always has been high, even when living in their own homes, and this chiefly on account of the mothers taking so little care of their children."<sup>253</sup>

Leonore Davidoff has suggested that, during the mid-nineteenth century, ideas about domesticity and the home were highly significant in "marking boundaries" between classes, nations and 'races'.<sup>254</sup> Philippa Levine has argued that, by the end of the century, sanitation and hygiene became closely tied to definitions of 'civilized' society and that, simultaneously, the idea of cleanliness became associated with a British ideal of "domesticated womanhood."<sup>255</sup> Levine's argument has focused on the influence of these ideological trends on perceptions of colonial prostitution, suggesting that hygiene was used as way of denoting both racial difference and the idea of moral degradation. Prostitution was sometimes referred to in reports on the camps, but did not emerge as a significant theme, perhaps because of the nature of camp life which was under keen observation and involved a relatively low number of men.<sup>256</sup> However, the severe criticisms of the standards of cleanliness of Boer

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<sup>253</sup> Report on Burgher and Native Refugee Camps in the Orange River Colony, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 108).

<sup>254</sup> Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, (New York: Polity Press, 1995), p.5.

<sup>255</sup> Levine, *Prostitution*, p.208.

<sup>256</sup> Report on Burgher Camp, Vereeniging, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1901, Concentration Camps Commission, 'On the Concentration Camps in South Africa, by the Committee of Ladies Appointed by the Secretary of State for War; Containing Reports on the Camps in Natal, the Orange River Colony, and the Transvaal, (London: Printed for H.M. Stationery Office by Eyre

women, which can be interpreted as attacks on both their femininity and their standards of 'civilization', appear to have created a similar negative sense of cultural and racial 'otherness'. Claims that Boer women failed to conform to 'British' standards of womanhood fostered a sense that the Boers as a society were undeveloped and that their failure to attain 'British' standards of 'civilization' was evidence of their difference and inferiority. Moreover, the focus on the failure of Boer women to adhere to maternal qualities which were felt to be natural or instinctive in 'proper' women was an implication that this was sometimes perceived as a racial, rather than simply a cultural flaw.

In November 1901, Dr. George Pratt Yule, the Medical Officer of Health for the Orange River Colony, conducted an investigation into the high levels of sickness in his region. His final report was hugely critical of the Boer women in the camps, and claimed that much of the cause of the sickness rates could be attributed to factors such as their poor nursing skills and their tendency to give their children unsuitable food.<sup>257</sup> He directly related such difficulties to 'racial' shortcomings in the Boers, asserting: "I think the Dutch are the most phlegmatic race I ever came across. There is no particular care taken of sick children, in fact, they are, in many cases, quite neglected."<sup>258</sup> The idea that poor nursing skills were an innate part of the Boer

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and Spottiswoode 1902), p.181: Millicent Garrett Fawcett papers, Women's Library, 7MGF/E/1.

<sup>257</sup> Dr. G. Pratt Yule's Report, Orange River Colony Camps, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1901 in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1902 session (Cd. 853), LXVIII.391-779 (p. 114).

<sup>258</sup> Dr. G. Pratt Yule's Report, Orange River Colony Camps, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1901 in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1902 session (Cd. 853), LXVIII.391-779 (p. 118). Although Goold-Adams agreed that the connection between infant



character was also emphasized in the visit by Kendal Franks to the concentration camp at Kimberley. Here he recorded the “phenomenon” of discovering a clean tent, inhabited by a “well nourished, well clothed, and happy” family. This apparently unusual sight, he explained, was due to the fact that the mother of the family was of British descent, having Scottish parents. Kendal Franks praised this mother, not only for her standards of cleanliness, but for the fact that she had successfully nursed her children through measles by following the British recommendations regarding warmth and ventilation in the tents. He regarded this example as providing a dramatic contrast to the behaviour of the Boer women in the camp, exclaiming: “What a different story to what I have seen and heard in other tents, and what a different result!”<sup>259</sup> Kendal Franks appeared to endorse the idea that maternal standards were closely related to ‘racial’ inheritance, the implication being that the Boer women in the camp failed to possess the potential to meet British standards of motherhood.

Criticisms of the Boer mothers’ domestic skills were emphasized even when strong evidence pointed to more fundamental problems with camp administration. The issue of rations in the camps is a case in point. Initially, families of Boers who were still on commando were placed on a lower ration scale than those whose husbands had surrendered or were prisoners of war, an inconsistency which was one of the first

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mortality rates and “improperly cooked food” may have had something to do with the “carelessness of the mothers”, he admitted that “it may also be due to our inability in some camps to provide sufficient wood fuel.”: Goold-Adams to Mr. Chamberlain, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1902 session (Cd. 853), LXVIII.391-779 (p. 111).

<sup>259</sup> Dr Kendal Franks’ report on Kimberley, November 1901. in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1902 session (Cd. 934), LXVIII.391-779 (p. 12).

issues to be criticized by camp opponents in Britain.<sup>260</sup> Despite the shift to standardized scales in early 1901, questions about the rations did not go away, and concerns about the adequacy of food were expressed by inmates and opponents of the camps. The General Superintendent of Transvaal Camps reported that in Irene Camp “we have had written complaints that ration scale B is not sufficient to support life” (significantly, this comment was one of the few to be removed from the published version of the reports).<sup>261</sup> Captured burgher, Lieutenant Pieter Strydom, blamed the high death rate in Brandfort camp on the “lack of proper nourishment”<sup>262</sup>, and superintendents frequently reported complaints about the quantity and quality of food, in particular the meat, which became increasingly difficult to obtain as the war dragged on.<sup>263</sup> After the publication of the first blue book, which included information on ration scales, the prominent British doctor, J. S. Haldane, wrote to the Colonial Office with a detailed analysis of their nutritional value. He labelled the rations in Transvaal camps as “very inadequate”, condemned the Orange River Colony rations as “totally inadequate”, and concluded that the “great pre-disposing cause of the enormous mortality is in all probability the inadequacy of the food supply.”<sup>264</sup> A subsequent investigation by Dr. Sidney Martin, an advisor chosen by the Colonial Office, was couched in milder language, but concluded that the rations provided in the camps were “insufficient as a diet of subsistence.” In addition, however, Martin

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<sup>260</sup> Spies, *Methods of Barbarism*, p.185.

<sup>261</sup> G. A. Goodwin to Military Governor, Pretoria, ‘Irene Camp, 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1901’, c. March 1901: National Archives, Kew, WO 32/8008. This sentence was removed from the published version of this report in *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 23).

<sup>262</sup> Memoirs of Lt. P.J. Strijdom, 1900-1902, Natal Archives, transcribed by Elizabeth van Heyningen, <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/mss/bccd/Person/0/0/>, retrieved 29<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

<sup>263</sup> See, for example, Concentration Camps Commission, ‘On the Concentration Camps in South Africa’, p.35; p.95

<sup>264</sup> Memorandum by Dr. J. S. Haldane on the Rations in the Concentration Camps, December 1901: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 75 45124, No 79 (pp.68-71)

also repeated concerns that the dietary value of the food provided in the camps was probably being significantly undermined by the poor cooking skills of the Boer women.<sup>265</sup> To other British officials, it was this latter issue which constituted the main problem in terms of sustenance in the camps. H. Scot Russell, the Medical Officer at Klerksdorp, regarded the rations as “first class” and argued that the dietary problems and related deaths in his camp were due to the Boer women’s old-fashioned cooking skills and inability to make effective use of the ingredients they were provided with.<sup>266</sup>

While criticism of Boer maternal and domestic standards allowed British administrators to distance themselves from responsibility for the mortality rates, this approach also appears to have rested on a genuine inability, and unwillingness, to understand many aspects of Boer culture. A good example of this was the reaction of many British observers to the reluctance of Boer women to allow their children to go into hospital, preferring to nurse them themselves in their tents.<sup>267</sup> Boer internees appear to have been genuinely uneasy at the idea of sending their children to British hospitals: one superintendent reported that the inmates of his camp had “a great suspicion of the ability of the English doctor”, and there seems to have been considerable resistance by parents in some cases to their children being removed.<sup>268</sup>

The official line of the Boer government was that the enforced separation of children

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<sup>265</sup> Dr. Sidney Martin to Colonial Office, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO879 75 882, No. 129 (p.96)

<sup>266</sup> H. Scot Russell, ‘Report by Medical Officer: Burgher Camp, Klerksdorp’, c. December 1901: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 75, (p.126)

<sup>267</sup> Monthly Report for Johannesburg, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1901; Monthly Report for Vereeniging, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1901 in in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 73; p.55).

<sup>268</sup> Report for Belfast: July 1901, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1901 in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 232).

from their mothers was cruel and unnecessary.<sup>269</sup> Elizabeth van Heyningen has suggested that the ability of women to nurse their children at home was an important element of Boer domestic ideology.<sup>270</sup> The image of the caring and nursing mother was also significant in British culture at this time<sup>271</sup>, and this was one area where there might have been expected to be some ideological overlap and understanding; however, tent nursing was almost universally condemned in British reports. Boers were often accused of concealing sick children in their tents, and thus hastening illnesses and allowing disease to spread to other family members.<sup>272</sup> The determination of Boer mothers to care for their children in their tents was interpreted by British observers as evidence of their 'neglectful' characters, and resistance to hospitalization was attributed to the 'ignorance' and 'backwardness' of Boer society in general.

Another area which provoked horror among British observers was the tendency of many Boers to use traditional remedies and medical practices.<sup>273</sup> British doctors recorded with revulsion details of the "disgusting remedies" administered by internees.<sup>274</sup> Practices which attracted particular criticism included painting sick

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<sup>269</sup> Mr. S. W. Burger and Mr. Reitz to Lord Salisbury, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1901, National Archives, Kew, WO32/8034.

<sup>270</sup> van Heyningen, 'Women and Disease', pp.186-187.

<sup>271</sup> Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, 5, 1978, pp.9-65; p.51.

<sup>272</sup> Dr G. Pratt Yule, Report on Orange River Colony Camps, 9 November 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1902 session (Cd. 853), LXVIII.391-779 (pp. 114).

<sup>273</sup> Kendal Franks' report on Krugersdorp, Potchefstroom, and Klerksdorp, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (pp.194-195).

<sup>274</sup> G. B. Woodroffe, Burgher Camp, Irene. Medical Report for the Month of June, 1901, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange

children with “green paint” and creating medicines containing animal dung.<sup>275</sup> Although it is not clear whether these customs were really practised on a wide scale, they were repeatedly highlighted in British reports and used to criticise the mothering skills of Boer women, often being linked to the high mortality rates in the camps. In reference to these customs, the Superintendent of Belfast camp stated: “The great evils we have to contend with are blind ignorance and superstition, and it is as much work for us to battle against these as disease.”<sup>276</sup> The more bizarre stories in official reports about the medical customs of the Boers were re-published in British newspapers<sup>277</sup>, and the idea that Boer mothers were responsible for the death rates gained much support from those who supported the premise of the camps. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who regarded the establishment of camps as the “duty” of the British authorities, argued: “Not only was the spread of the disease assisted by the mother, but in her mistaken zeal she frequently used remedies which were as fatal as the disease.”<sup>278</sup> Such evidence is indicative of the “clash of cultures” in the understanding of medical care in the camps which Elizabeth van Heyningen has highlighted. Boer women were deeply suspicious of unfamiliar medical customs which threatened to undermine their traditional patterns of healing, while British medical administrators regarded resistance to ‘modern’ medical practices as further evidence of Boer

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River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 240).

<sup>275</sup> Reports by Dr. Kendal Franks on the Refugee Camps at Krugersdorp, Potchefstroom, and Klerksdorp, and J. G. Maxwell to Kitchener, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 140; p.50).

<sup>276</sup> Burgher Camp, Belfast. Report for July, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1901, in in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 230).

<sup>277</sup> See, for example, *The Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1901, p.8 and 16<sup>th</sup> December 1901, p.6.

<sup>278</sup> A. Conan Doyle, *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*, (New York: McClure, Phillips & co., 1902); p.81; p.85.

'backwardness'.<sup>279</sup> This relationship between the nursing customs of Boer mothers and the notion of the backwardness of Boer culture was summed up by the pro-imperialist writer Violet Markham, who asserted that their "notions as to the treatment of disease illustrate their standard of civilisation more effectively than any other means which might have come under public notice."<sup>280</sup>

British attitudes towards Boer medical practices contain echoes of much wider discourses on colonial medicine, whereby assumptions about the superiority of British medicine were used to confirm the difference and inferiority of non-white races. Shula Marks has suggested that "by the late nineteenth century Western medical practitioners had come to believe in the single 'universalizable truth' of their own understanding of health care, and to show little tolerance for alternatives."<sup>281</sup> Philippa Levine has argued that, in the colonial context, British medical practice was repeatedly held up as an example of the progress and modernity of British culture in the face of the ignorance and backwardness of indigenous medical practice. Resistance of local populations to British practices was interpreted as evidence of their unenlightened state.<sup>282</sup> Crucially, imperial medical discourse reinforced "the articulation of notions of difference" between colonisers and colonial subjects.<sup>283</sup> Although the case of the concentration camps was unusual because the British were dealing with another white 'race', the use of medical practice to delineate cultural

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<sup>279</sup> Van Heyningen, 'Women and Disease', p.1.

<sup>280</sup> Violet Markham, *The New Era in South Africa With an Examination of the Chinese Labour Question*, (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1904), p.72.

<sup>281</sup> Shula Marks, 'What is Colonial about Colonial Medicine? And What has Happened to Imperialism and Health?', *Social History of Medicine*, 1997, pp.205-219; p.214.

<sup>282</sup> Levine, *Prostitution*, p.9.

<sup>283</sup> Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p.12.

difference was very much in evidence, with British medical practices being used as a symbol of modernity and civilization against which the Boers could be negatively defined.

The language found in reports on the camps had other strong similarities with contemporary references to black colonial subjects. The frequent associations of the Boers with dirt, disease, and cultural backwardness are particularly significant when considered beside discourses attributing these problems to non-white colonial subjects across the empire. The association of the poor sanitary habits of the Boers with high mortality rates has parallels, for example, with reactions to the outbreak of plague in Hong Kong during the 1890s, which was blamed on the dirtiness of the local population.<sup>284</sup> Within a British, middle-class culture which heavily identified itself with ideals of medical progress, cleanliness and sanitation, such associations heightened the sense of difference between British subjects and non-white Others; the use of such language in discussions of the Boers served to create a sense of justification for both the camps and the wider British policy in South Africa.

Steve Attridge has argued that the 'primitivization' of Africa in British literature during the Boer War was significant in justifying imperial expansion in Africa. Just as Said has argued that the British created their own image of the 'Oriental' east, the creation of an 'Africa' as a dark continent occupied by primitive people could be used to legitimize British dominion on that continent.<sup>285</sup> Attridge has noted that, in much

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<sup>284</sup> Levine, *Prostitution*, pp.84-5.

<sup>285</sup> Attridge, *Nationalism*, p.10. Attridge compares this with Said's concept of Orientalism.

fictional literature on the war, Boers were represented as “primitives, part of the arcane and ‘frozen’ map of Africa.” He has argued:

They often appear as representatives of an earlier phase of European civilization, forgotten by history; a people who inhabit an outmoded world of Old Testament values rather than the new gospel of progress. As such, they have a dual role; they share an affinity with ‘superstitious’ and primitive blacks, but are also poor white brothers, subsumed by the dark continent and in need of guidance back to the path of progress.<sup>286</sup>

These trends in late-Victorian literature can also be clearly discerned in British writings on the concentration camps. In a period when belief in racial hierarchies was highly significant, a colonial war against a ‘white’ race, and the internment of ‘white’ families, was potentially problematic. However, the emphasis in official literature on the camps on cultured, hard-working doctors, the benefits of a British education system, and the never-ending battle of British administrators to instil notions of hygiene into the camp inmates, utilised ideas which were already well-established in imperial discourses. The ‘whiteness’ of the Boers was undermined by constant references to their dirty habits and uncivilized lifestyles, themes which implicitly associated them with non-white, and thus ‘inferior’ colonial subjects and with the concepts of racial and cultural difference which were already significant elements of imperial ideology. Such associations were not unique to the Boers. As both Philip Cohen and L. Perry Curtis, Jr. have noted, nineteenth century stereotypes of the Irish borrowed language and imagery from racial discourses on black ‘inferiority’.<sup>287</sup> Indeed, Curtis has argued that the attribution of ‘black’ characteristics to problematic ‘white’ social groups was a trend found across Europe during the nineteenth

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<sup>286</sup> Attridge, *Nationalism*, pp.166-167.

<sup>287</sup> Cohen, ‘The Perversions of Inheritance’; pp.74-75; L. Perry Curtis, Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971), p.1.



century.<sup>288</sup> By making such associations in regard to the Boers, British observers sought to provide an implicit justification for British policy in South Africa by framing it in the language of a civilizing mission.

While the tone and language of reports on the camps were reminiscent of wider colonial discourses, commentators also frequently made comparisons between Boer culture observed in the camps and the lives of the poor in Britain. Dr. Kendall Franks, for example, asserted that the “squalor and dirt [of the families in the camps] would equal, if not surpass, some of the residences of the poor in the British Isles, such as Whitechapel, St. Giles, and the Liberties in Dublin”.<sup>289</sup> Other camp observers utilised language and styles of reporting which were strikingly similar to reports on British urban poverty. The following passage, from an investigation of infant mortality in Britain in 1907, is worth quoting at length, because it demonstrates the notable overlaps between the language and themes of discourses on these two questions:

Few facts receive more unanimous support from those in intimate touch with this question [of infant mortality] than the ignorance and carelessness of mothers in respect of infant management. Such ignorance shows itself not only in bad methods of artificial feeding, but in the exposure of the child to all sorts of injurious influences, and to uncleanly management and negligence. Death in infancy is probably more due to such ignorance and negligence than to almost any other cause, as becomes evident when we remember that epidemic diarrhoea, convulsions, debility, and atrophy, which are among the most common causes of death, are brought about in large measure owing to improper feeding or ill-timed weaning; bronchitis and pneumonia are due not infrequently to careless exposure (indoor or outdoor); and death from measles and whooping-cough is largely caused by mismanagement of nursing.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, pp.13-14.

<sup>289</sup> Dr. Kendall Franks, cited in van Heyningen, ‘Women and Disease’, p.195.

<sup>290</sup> G. Newman, *Infant Mortality: A Social Problem*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1907), p.262.

Many reports on the camps were produced by medical personnel, and the Concentration Camps Commission included British-trained doctors, Jane Waterston and Ella Scarlett. Van Heyningen has argued that the Victorian medical profession was highly influential in moulding middle-class ideologies, especially in terms of associations between dirt and immorality, and that doctors were particularly likely to operate within traditional class structures and prejudices.<sup>291</sup> However, the recurrence of such class-based imagery also feeds into the wider tendency of British elites to imagine the empire in familiar terms. David Cannadine has highlighted the significance of “domestic-imperial analogies” in shaping attitudes to both the working class at home and colonial subjects. He has argued that anxieties about the “dangerous classes” in British cities were reinforced through comparisons with black colonial subjects; in turn, the “inferiority” of the latter could be emphasized through language depicting them as the “overseas equivalent” of British slum-dwellers.<sup>292</sup> A similar overlap between domestic and imperial discourses is evident in British discussions of the Boer internees, and the connections between language used to describe both black and white colonial and domestic subjects is indicative of the complexity of racial thinking during this period. Ann Laura Stoler has argued that British ‘bourgeois’ identities were frequently reinforced in the wider colonial context by an intertwining of both class and racial thinking, and were defined by their contrast with both the British working class and the non-white ‘Other’. She has suggested that in many colonial settings such class and racial categories intermingled and overlapped.<sup>293</sup> Both Cannadine and Stoler have highlighted the widespread unease

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<sup>291</sup> van Heyningen, ‘Women and Disease’, pp.194-195.

<sup>292</sup> Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp.5-6.

<sup>293</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Cultivating bourgeois bodies and racial selves’, in Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.87-119; pp.90-91.

regarding the social status of poor whites in the colonies and a sense that, in many cases, even people born in the colonies of European parentage were seen as lacking in true 'Europeanness'.<sup>294</sup> As well as being underpinned by distinct racial hierarchies, many colonial societies were defined by anxiety about who had the right to be classed as 'European'.<sup>295</sup> Discourses on the Boers can be seen to display similar uncertainties about racial categorisation: the culture and habits of camp inmates were attacked with language which was more than suggestive of attitudes widely articulated towards both the 'white' British working class and non-white colonial 'Others'. The use of such language by British camp staff, and its incorporation within observations and plans for camp administration, also suggests such ideas went far beyond theoretical conceptualisations of Boer society and had a practical impact on day-to-day life in the camps.

Reports on the camps also make it evident that assumptions about both Boers and the British poor were strongly influenced by gender ideologies. Commentators on the concentration camps emphasized the poor standards of motherhood among Boer women through comparisons with British working class culture. Jno. C. Velenski, a Civil Surgeon to British troops in South African, wrote to the British Medical Journal to publicise his observations regarding the "outrageous ignorance on the part of...[Boer] mothers with regard to the dietary of children", which he argued was "about on parallel with the ignorance displayed by the poorest classes in England"<sup>296</sup>. Similarly, Lucy Deane, a member of the Concentration Camps Committee, who had previously

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<sup>294</sup> Stoler, 'Cultivating bourgeois bodies and racial selves', pp.90-91; Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp.124-5.

<sup>295</sup> Stoler, 'Cultivating bourgeois bodies and racial selves', pp.90-91.

<sup>296</sup> Jno. C. Velenski, 'Mortality Among Boer Children', *British Medical Journal*, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1901, p.1640.

worked as a factory inspector in Britain, commented that Boer women were “as ignorant of Cooking (wholesome) for children, and of all that pertains to Health as the most ignorant of our slum girls”.<sup>297</sup> It may not be a coincidence that this repeated focus on the maternal shortcomings of Boer women took place at the turn of the twentieth century, a time when, Anna Davin has argued, a “powerful ideology of motherhood” was developing, which was particularly significant in contemporary discourses on British infant mortality rates and declining birth rates.<sup>298</sup> As Davin has shown, this was often evident in the solutions sought by the medical and philanthropic workers to the high child mortality rates which were widely regarded as a problem of British working-class, urban life. While the physical conditions of poverty were sometimes identified as the causes of poor health and infant deaths, many contemporaries also argued that much responsibility lay in parental – and particularly maternal – ignorance.<sup>299</sup> A letter to the *British Medical Journal* in 1900 is typical of this approach:

Dr. Porter...estimates that probably over 50 per cent. of the infantile mortality in Stockport, and a corresponding proportion of non-fatal damage to infant life, result from errors of diet and lack of intelligent parental care; and he points out that while insanitary conditions, which are also important factors in promoting infantile mortality, are often capable of being summarily dealt with, the effect of maternal neglect and ignorance is much more difficult to combat.<sup>300</sup>

Davin has argued that approaches to motherhood during this period were defined by “authority of state over individual, of professional over amateur, of science over

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<sup>297</sup> Lucy Deane to Hyacinthe Mary Deane, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1901: LSE Archives, STREATFEILD 2/11 87.

<sup>298</sup> Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, p.13.

<sup>299</sup> Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, pp.14-16.

<sup>300</sup> ‘Infant mortality and Maternal Education’, *British Medical Journal*, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1900, p.38.

tradition, of male over female, of ruling class over working class.”<sup>301</sup> This shares striking similarities with the discourses of difference that historians have identified within British imperialism, whereby colonial ‘otherness’ was underpinned at its most fundamental level by ideologies of opposites, not only between ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’, but between perceptions of cleanliness and dirt, modernity and tradition, order and disorder. British reactions to the camps, and their focus on their female inmates, demonstrate the way in which gender assumptions could be vital in binding such ideas together.

### **The ‘civilizing’ impact of internment**

Many reports on the camps provided a strong sense of the necessity for introduction to the camps of ‘civilized’ British values. One superintendent described the enforcement of sanitary discipline as a “sort of education” for the Boers, and, in reference to the same subject, another expressed hopes of “teaching them to conduct themselves in a more civilised manner than they have been accustomed to.”<sup>302</sup> In a number of camps, practical attempts were made to ‘improve’ the Boers through adult education classes. Although some contemporaries, including Dr. Scarlett, felt that Boer adults were beyond help, others, such as Henry McCallum, the Governor of Natal believed that adult education was essential to assist the “future work of conciliation and settlement.”<sup>303</sup> Young men and women were often

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<sup>301</sup> Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, p. 13.

<sup>302</sup> David Murray, Belfast: Report for July, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1901 and A.A. Allison, Heidelberg, Monthly Report for July, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p.232; p.233).

<sup>303</sup> Dr. Ella Scarlett to Sir Edward Ward, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1901: National Archives, Kew, WO32 8061; Governor of Natal to High Commissioner, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 77, p.225.

encouraged to enrol in camps schools, and evening classes were arranged in some camps.<sup>304</sup> Unsurprisingly, considering the extensive attention given to the shortcomings of Boer women, classes sought to provide gender-appropriate instruction. In the Orange River Colony classes in lace-making, knitting, and sewing were introduced in certain camps for female inmates.<sup>305</sup> In Natal, women's cookery classes were discussed (although it is not clear whether they were implemented); these, it was felt, would ultimately be greatly appreciated by the "men folk" of the colony. Educative papers were provided for the inmates on topics such as sanitation and hygiene.<sup>306</sup>

The 'enlightenment' of the Boers in 'civilized' standards, however, was also an underlying theme of more general administration of the camps. A British sanitary inspector reported favourably on Krugersdorp camp's "washing drills", which were designed to ensure cleanliness among Boer children, stating: "Lessons learnt by this will probably not be forgotten."<sup>307</sup> The belief in the British responsibility to 'improve' the Boers, particularly in terms of hygiene and sanitary practices, is demonstrated in the recommendations attached to the introduction of matrons into the camps, advocated by the Ladies Commission, and put into place in December 1901. The

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<sup>304</sup> J. H. Corbett, Report upon the Burgher Camp Schools at Heidelberg, Standerton, Volksrust, and upon the Government Schools at Marthinus Wesselstroom and the Nigel, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 277); General Superintendent of Burgher Camps, Natal, 'Monthly Report. March 1902', 12<sup>th</sup> March 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 77, p.164.

<sup>305</sup> 'Report on Camps in Orange River Colony for February', 11<sup>th</sup> March 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 77 (p.201)

<sup>306</sup> Governor of Natal to High Commissioner, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 77, p.225.

<sup>307</sup> W. F. Curry, Assoc. San. Inst., 'Report on Condition of Burgher Camp, Krugersdorp. 19<sup>th</sup> December 1901': National Archives, Kew, CO879/77, p.30.

Commission advised: “The duties of the camp matron shall be to teach mothers the care of children, to inculcate by all means in her power, habits of personal cleanliness and order, the airing of tents, scrupulous cleanliness in the preparation of infants’ food and milk and all matters pertaining to hygiene...”<sup>308</sup>

This paragraph neatly sums up the British ideal of motherhood, combining childcare skills with domestic order and cleanliness. Eliza Riedi has suggested that the recruitment of female teachers for the camps was underpinned by the idea that women could act as agents of imperialism by disseminating British values to young children, effectively acting as surrogate imperial mothers.<sup>309</sup> The expected role of the camp matrons is an even clearer indication of the way that women were encouraged to contribute to the imperialist cause through the dissemination of the ideology of British motherhood, without necessarily being mothers themselves. In addition to issuing practical domestic advice, it was also hoped that camp nurses and matrons, through their own behaviour, would provide the Boer women with positive illustrations of the caring and nurturing character expected of ‘civilized’ femininity. W. K. Tucker, General Superintendent of the Transvaal camps, believed that an enormous benefit of the female camp staff was their ability to provide “examples of true British womanhood” to the Boers, asserting:

The moral effect of the association of these earnest, noble-minded and cultivated ladies with the people of the veld, devotedly applying themselves to

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<sup>308</sup> Concentration Camps Commission, ‘On the Concentration Camps in South Africa’, p.22; Amendment to Circular 87, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 934), LXVIII.391-779 (p. 55).

<sup>309</sup> Eliza Riedi, ‘Teaching Empire: British and Dominion Women Teachers in the South African War Concentration Camps’, *English Historical Review*, CXX, 489, 2005, pp.1316-1347; p.1322.

the Nursing of the sick and ministering to the comfort and welfare of the aged, and the distressed, cannot fail to be productive of much good in many ways.<sup>310</sup>

The significance of Anglicisation to the aims of the British camps administrators is also evident in the development of schools for Boer children. Education was regarded as one of the most positive elements of the camps by both supporters and opponents; Hobhouse, for example, referred to the schools as the “only bright spot in the camp life” during the first few months of 1901.<sup>311</sup> Many camps had unofficially initiated schooling facilities early in their development; however, from March 1901 the British administration began to look into organizing education more systematically.<sup>312</sup> Although education in the camps was described as “non-political”<sup>313</sup>, there was little attempt to hide the hope that the schools might also develop into vehicles for the transmission of British values to the Boers.<sup>314</sup> Initially many teachers were Boers, but British administrators urged instruction to take place in English wherever possible; E. B. Sargent, the British Director of Education in South Africa described this as a “golden” opportunity.<sup>315</sup> There seems to have been a sense among British observers that the teaching of English would go hand-in-hand with an education for Boer

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<sup>310</sup> W. K. Tucker to Major-General Maxwell, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO 879 77 (p.18)

<sup>311</sup> Hobhouse, *Brunt of the War*, p.121.

<sup>312</sup> Circular No. 264, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 33).

<sup>313</sup> E. B. Sargent, Letter to British teachers employed in the South African camps, c. December 1901, in E.B. Sargent, *Transvaal and Orange River Colony, Public Education: Report of the Director of Education For The Period November, 1900, to February, 1904*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), p.92.

<sup>314</sup> ‘Extract from a letter addressed by the Director of Education to Lord Milner, with regard to the Appointment of English Teachers for the Concentration Camps’, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1901, in E. B. Sargent, *Report of the Director of Education*), p.87.

<sup>315</sup> E. B. Sargent, Report on Schools in Burgher Camps, by Director of Education, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 172).



children in British values. Lucy Deane celebrated the opportunity the camps provided for education not only in the English language, but in “English ways and methods.”<sup>316</sup> Kendal Franks stressed the importance of a “loyal Britisher” being employed as head teacher of the school at Heidelberg, due to “the enormous influence upon the future of South Africa which the education of the rising generation will exercise, politically as well as intellectually.”<sup>317</sup> The importance of teachers possessing a suitably ‘British’ attitude, and the ability to instil such attitudes into their pupils, was stressed even more strongly by Sargant, who was hugely enthusiastic about the establishment and potential of camp schools. Faced with a scarcity of reliable, South African English-speaking teachers, Sargant recommended the employment of British women in the camp schools<sup>318</sup>; eventually around 200-300 British women were recruited, as well as additional female teachers from Canada, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>319</sup> Writing to Milner concerning the recruitment of these teachers, Sargant insisted that the women selected should be of “patriotic mind” and should be willing to bear the inconveniences of camp life in order to teach Boer children “our language and our ideals.”<sup>320</sup>

Despite the negative racialization of the Boer prisoners apparent in much official writing on the camps, the focus on their education and improvement suggests that

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<sup>316</sup> Lucy A. Deane to Sir Edward Ward, 27 September 1901: National Archives, Kew, WO32 8061 (p.5)

<sup>317</sup> Kendal Franks’ Report on Heidelberg, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 300).

<sup>318</sup> Sargant, *Report of the Director of Education*, p.87.

<sup>319</sup> Chamberlain to Milner, Telegram No.95, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1902 and Milner’s reply, Telegram No. 128, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO 879/75/44350. For a discussion of the recruitment of teachers for the South African concentration camps, see Reidi, ‘Teaching Empire’.

<sup>320</sup> Sargant, *Report of the Director of Education*, p.87.

the British were hopeful of welcoming them back into the fold of 'civilization'. There is much evidence that the Boers were regarded as possessing the potential for improvement, and the extent to which this was based on perceptions of their 'whiteness' is particularly evident when their treatment is contrasted with that of black South Africans interned in nearby camps. While education in the 'white' camps was a major administrative theme, similar policy in the 'black' camps does not appear to have been considered by the British authorities until May 1902, when Major G. F. de Lotbinière, the Superintendent of the Native Refugees Department, vetoed the idea of establishing schools in the camps under his jurisdiction, arguing that "the introduction of a new element in the shape of a Schoolmaster or Clergyman...would only tend to unsettle the natives' present system of control and weaken the hands of my Superintendents."<sup>321</sup> There is some evidence that schools were established on an informal basis in certain camps, however. Society of Friends representatives William Alexander and Lawrence Richardson, who visited a number of 'black' camps, reported both publicly and privately that schools were provided, while a report on the Burgher Camp at Belfast in October 1901 indicated that a school may have been established at the nearby 'black' camp.<sup>322</sup> Superintendents had a certain amount of

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<sup>321</sup> Lotbinière to Lagden, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1902: TA, SNA 8, 1037/02, cited in Warwick, *Black People*, p.146.

<sup>322</sup> 'Report', December 1902, in *W. H. F. Alexander and Lawrence Richardson, 'Letters etc re visit to S Africa on Friends' S African Relief 1902*: Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Box P2/20 (p.4); Lawrence Richardson, Journal entry for 14<sup>th</sup> November 1902 regarding a meeting with Wilson Fox, Head of Native Refugee Department, in Arthur M. Davey (ed.), *Lawrence Richardson Selected Correspondence*, (Cape Town: Van Riebeck Society, 1977), p.95. The report on the Belfast Camp recorded: "Natives in school, 225." Since the camp report for August recorded only 20 black children in the entire camp, and there is little indication in any official reports that there was a large black population within this camp, it is likely that this figure refers to children at the nearby 'black' camp. Belfast: School Report for October, 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1902 session (Cd. 853), LXVIII.391-779 (p. 64). Belfast: Monthly Report, August, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal,

freedom in their administration of the camps, and records indicate that schools had been established in certain 'white' camps before official instructions had been issued for this to go ahead; it is certainly possible, therefore, that unofficial education facilities could have been similarly developed in some 'black' camps.<sup>323</sup> However, there is no evidence that this practice was widespread, and de Lotbinière's remark confirms that education for black internees did not become part of British policy. The difference in the approach to education in the 'black' and 'white' camps suggests that, despite criticisms of the Boers as backward and culturally degenerate, their 'whiteness' enabled the British to envisage them as having the potential to develop into 'civilized' colonial subjects. British criticism of Boer racial attitudes had encouraged significant support for their cause among black Africans during the war.<sup>324</sup> However, the neglect of the welfare of African internees, and of the wider interests of the black and Asian communities during and immediately after the war, would lead to widespread disillusionment among these groups.<sup>325</sup>

### **The image of the 'enemy' and debates on internment**

During the early months of the South African War there was a significant amount of popular support in Britain for the conflict. Indeed, it was argued by contemporary observer J.A. Hobson that the 'jingoistic' popular outbursts which accompanied British military successes such as the relief of Mafeking, were indicative of the hold

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Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 347).

<sup>323</sup> Replies to circular telegram No. 264, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 33). Peter Warwick has dismissed the possibility of school facilities in the 'black camps' in light of de Lotbinière's remarks: Warwick, *Black People*, p.146.

<sup>324</sup> Warwick, 'Black People', p.189.

<sup>325</sup> Warwick, *Black People*, p.160.

which imperialism had over the popular imagination.<sup>326</sup> While historians disagree over the extent to which this enthusiasm had genuine substance, a general sense of passive support for the war, at the very least, is indicated by the Conservative Party's victory in the 'khaki election' of October 1900.<sup>327</sup> In opposition to the war stood a small but vocal group of 'pro-Boers', including well-known figures such as Leonard Courtney, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, David Lloyd George and C.P. Scott, all of whom were members of the South Africa Conciliation Committee (SACC), which was established in January 1900 and campaigned for the British Government to seek peace terms with the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.<sup>328</sup> The anti-war message of the 'pro-Boers' was reinforced in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian*, which was edited by Scott and was the largest and most influential publication to protest against the Government's policy.<sup>329</sup> In contrast, support for the war was offered by several leading London newspapers, including *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Morning Post*, all of which could claim a far wider circulation than the *Guardian*.<sup>330</sup> In Parliament, criticism of the conflict tended to come from Labour and Irish Nationalist MPs, who drew parallels between the

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<sup>326</sup> J.A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism*, (London: Grant Richards, 1901), pp.1-2; pp.31-32.

<sup>327</sup> For historians' debates on the extent of popular imperialism, see Richard Price *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [first edition 2004]).

<sup>328</sup> Hope Hay Hewison, *Hedge of Wild Almonds: South Africa, the Pro-Boers and the Quaker Conscience 1890-1901*, (London: James Currey, 1989), p.110; Stephen Koss (ed.), *The Pro-Boers: The Anatomy of an Antiwar Movement*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p.xxv.

<sup>329</sup> Koss, *Pro-Boers*, pp.xxx-xxxi.

<sup>330</sup> Arthur Davy, *The British Pro-Boers, 1877-1902*, (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1978), p.162. It should be noted, however, that despite the preponderance of pro-war newspapers and journals, Krebs has suggested that it was likely that a "cross-fertilization" of news was common, whereby many contemporaries established their opinions by accessing newspapers of conflicting political leanings: Krebs, *Gender*, p.49.

British government's campaign against the Boers and its resistance to Irish independence.<sup>331</sup> The Liberal Party, which might have been expected to provide a natural centre of opposition to the war, was divided on the issue during the conflict's early stages, with many Liberal Imperialists expressing support for the war, and the party leadership reluctant to take a firm position either way.<sup>332</sup> During the first months of the war, therefore, the 'pro-Boers' remained a small, although active, minority.

Andrew Thompson has argued that the lengthening of the South African War as it began its guerrilla phase led to a growing sense of war weariness among the British public by the spring and summer of 1901.<sup>333</sup> It was within this context that Hobhouse's report concerning the British government's use of civilian internment in South Africa was able to have such an impact. The publication of Hobhouse's report in early June has been regarded as a particularly significant development in consolidating opposition to the war, particularly within the Liberal Party. It has been argued that it was the exposure of the existence and conditions of the concentration camps that prompted the Liberal leadership, which had previously wavered in its approach to the war, to take a decisive stance against the entire conflict.<sup>334</sup> In a speech of June 1901, in which he referred to Hobhouse's report, the Liberal leader, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, condemned the "methods of barbarism" which, he argued, defined the way the war in South Africa was being fought, and Pakenham

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<sup>331</sup> See, for example, responses from William Redmond, John Dillon and Keir Hardie, Hansard, HC Deb, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, cols 1021-2 and HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, cols 573-629.

<sup>332</sup> Koss, *Pro-Boers*, p. xxv-xxvi.

<sup>333</sup> Thompson, Andrew, 'Imperial Propaganda during the South African War', in Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie (eds.), *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), pp.303-328; p.316.

<sup>334</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p.508.

has described the exposure of the camps as “the shock that at last dislodged Campbell-Bannerman from his place on the tight-rope between the two liberal factions.”<sup>335</sup> The exposure of the concentration camps gave momentum to the pro-Boer movement and gave the campaign against the war a moral weight it might not otherwise have gained.

Although support and opposition for the war was divided principally on party lines, the humanitarian nature of the crisis in the camps meant that concern about the issue was often held to be non-political. In a Commons debate of June 1901, Lloyd George argued that the British government had a responsibility to improve conditions in the concentration camps, whether or not the conflict itself was construed as right or wrong: “Assuming the policy of the war to be perfectly right, assuming it to be a perfectly just and necessary war, surely it does not follow that we ought to pursue a policy of extermination against children in South Africa”.<sup>336</sup> In October 1901, a letter was published in *The Times* from the future Bishop of Oxford, Canon Gore, demanding that urgent action be taken to address the mortality rates and conditions in the concentration camps, but suggesting that the “matter can be isolated from all other questions as to the policy or methods of the war”.<sup>337</sup> In June 1901, Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton, a representative of the imperialist and pro-war organisation, the Victoria League, approached the War Office to propose that the League should raise funds to assist with the welfare of the inmates of the concentration camps.<sup>338</sup> Examples such

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<sup>335</sup> Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p.508.

<sup>336</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, col. 580.

<sup>337</sup> *The Times*, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1901, p.8.

<sup>338</sup> Secretary of State’s Circular on Proposals by Mrs Humphrey Ward and Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1901: National Archives, Kew, WO 32/8008 (p.49). For background on

as these indicate the difficulty of clearly categorizing people as opponents or supporters of the camps. Similar issues are indicated in the correspondence of Lucy Deane, the Secretary of the Concentration Camps Commission. As has been seen, while the Commission did not shirk from providing criticism of certain elements of the administration of individual camps, neither did it, as a government-appointed body, criticize the underlying policy of the camps. Deane admitted that she was alone among the committee members in taking an anti-British stance on the subject of the camps. However, she also claimed that, by the end of their time in South Africa, and in response to what they had seen, not only she, but the entire Commission, believed the camps policy to be a “huge mistake”:

We brought the women in to stop them from helping their husbands in the War and by so doing we have undoubtedly killed them in thousands as much as if we had shot them on their own doorsteps, and anyone but a British General would have realised this long ago.<sup>339</sup>

If the attitudes of ‘pro-war’ observers towards the concentration camps were not always straightforward, the same can be said about ‘pro-Boer’ opinions. Bill Nasson has noted that a pro-Boer attitude did not necessarily equate with a particularly positive image of the Boers or the Boer government, but that many believed that “however reactionary or corrupt the Boer states, this did not justify an aggressive and unjust war.”<sup>340</sup> An example of differences of opinion in pro-Boer circles are evident in the experience of the Society of Friends’ South African Relief Committee, which sent a number of representatives to South Africa between 1900 and 1902 to provide

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the Victoria League see Eliza Riedi, ‘Options for an Imperialist Woman: The Case of Violet Markham, 1899-1914’, *Albion*, 32, 1, 2000, pp.59-84; p.74.

<sup>339</sup> Lucy Deane to Hyacinthe Mary Deane, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1901: LSE Archives, STREATFEILD 2/11 109.

<sup>340</sup> Nasson, *South African War*, p.252.

philanthropic support to civilian victims of the war. In 1901, members of the committee expressed frustration at the apparently positive stance towards the internment policy taken by two of their colleagues who had been sent to South Africa to work in the camps. The two women in question, Anna Hogg and Annie Frances Taylor, expressed sympathy for camp inmates and worked hard to alleviate conditions in the camps, but, despite being members of an organisation which stood in opposition to the camps, they at no point attacked the policy itself, to the apparent frustration of their fellow committee members in Britain. Their reports led to lively criticism from their colleagues, who expressed concern that Hogg and Taylor were not giving enough attention to the mortality rates and that they had adopted a pro-Government stance. The women disagreed with their fellow committee members over the role of the British authorities in the camps policy and the best steps to be taken to improve the living conditions among the internees, and eventually the committee decided that the women should be told to suspend their duties and “take some rest on the coast.”<sup>341</sup> This episode demonstrates that it was not always possible to determine a person’s opinion on the camps by dividing them into straightforward 'pro-' and 'anti-' Boer categories. While the following discussion will address the dominant discourses which developed in opposition to the camps, these were by no means universal, and contemporaries identified themselves with the war and with the camps in a variety of ways.

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<sup>341</sup> W.H.F. Alexander, *The Friend*, 8 November 1901; ‘Friends’ South African Relief Fund. Report of Committee to the Yearly Meeting’, May 1902, *Extracts from the Minutes and Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of Friends Held in London*, (London: Office of the Society of Friends), pp.136-7; *Friends South African Relief Committee. Minutes 1899-1903*, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1901: Library of the Religious Society of Friends.



As has been seen, the South African camps developed as a direct consequence of military attempts to disable the Boers' guerrilla network, and Kitchener's correspondence with Milner indicates that the camps were, in part, formed as a tactic to encourage Boer soldiers to surrender. The integral place of internment policy within the South African conflict contrasted with the civilian internment experiences of the First and Second World Wars, when camps were located well away from areas of military activity and were not associated with primary military strategies. To many opponents of the concentration camps, internment policy was the most prominent example of the British military's wider desecration of the civilian sphere in South Africa. Such critics argued that, when officials presented the camps as evidence of British benevolence, or shifted blame for the death rates to the Boer women, they ignored the fact that the camps were a direct result of the British military's policy of "devastation and denudation".<sup>342</sup> To many 'pro-Boer' observers, the establishment of the camps, and the heavy consequences of military action on the civilian population, was evidence that the war in South Africa was being conducted in a way which challenged the "rules of civilised warfare".<sup>343</sup> An editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* was typical in regarding the concentration camps as a consequence of the immorality of the wider British military strategy, attacking "the policy of devastation as a means of conquest", which it described as "a policy common in barbarous warfare but long abandoned by civilization."<sup>344</sup> Criticism of the camps was therefore not only significant in itself, but was frequently used to underline opposition to the entire conflict.

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<sup>342</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1901, p. 7.

<sup>343</sup> Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War*, p.107.

<sup>344</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1902, p. 7

### **The role of 'Britishness' in shaping opposition to internment**

The increasing expression of opposition to both the war and internment during 1901 contrasted with the generally supportive popular reactions towards internment policy which would develop during the First World War. During the latter conflict, the 'totality' and proximity of the war meant that any expression of criticism could be construed as a desire to undermine national survival. Between 1914 and 1918, the demonization of the enemy in the media, and the immediacy of the conflict, would lead to the close association of internment with the preservation of British civilian safety and security, and sympathy for interned enemy civilians was liable to be labelled as unpatriotic.<sup>345</sup>

In contrast, during 1901, vigorous debate on the moral premise of the war was able to develop. The distant, colonial nature of the conflict in South Africa allowed contemporaries to discuss and debate the policy, and to utilise patriotic language, without the question of national survival becoming a major consideration. In addition, while the concept of patriotism during the First World War was frequently associated with pro-war rhetoric, the South African War saw the concept being utilised by both pro- and anti-war campaigners. To many contemporaries who supported the South African War, the anti-war stance of the 'pro Boers' represented a disregard of patriotic principles. Particularly during the early months of the war, when popular support was high, opponents of the conflict were attacked by pro-war MPs and newspapers for being unpatriotic, unmanly, and un-British in failing to support the military cause. During the jingoistic atmosphere of the first half of the war, anti-war meetings were frequently invaded by hecklers or broken up, and 'pro-Boers' sometimes faced

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<sup>345</sup> See Chapter 2.

physical attack.<sup>346</sup> In response to these developments, 'pro-Boers' argued that their opposition to the war represented a "genuine and lofty patriotism" which placed value on British "honour" and morality.<sup>347</sup> Hugh Cunningham has noted that the anti-war campaign at this time was characterized by a "radical patriotism", which was closely connected with an early nineteenth-century tradition whereby patriotic language was utilised as a "tool of opposition" by radical groups and individuals.<sup>348</sup> Contemporaries who opposed the Boer War thus raised questions about the ultimate meaning of 'patriotism', often arguing that their own stance towards the war was evidence of a genuine loyalty and a pride in their country which was missing in the "false and fevered patriotism of war time" and the shallow "jingoism" which was felt to be incited by the pro-war press.<sup>349</sup> The concentration camp debate gave the government's opponents the opportunity to reclaim the idea of patriotism by holding the entire concept up to question, and the concentration camps debate, with its emphasis on morality within national policy, provided a particularly effective opportunity for doing this. In October 1901, for example, an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* commended Canon Gore's demand for action to combat the death rates in the camps for the sake of Britain's "honour" as "a breath of genuine and lofty patriotism at last". The editorial concluded:

...We could ask everyone who feels that patriotism is really virtue, and that one really owes...special duty to one's country and not merely to one's family within it and to humanity around it – we would ask him to try to think of this matter now, while its issue is still un moulded, as men will think of it in a

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<sup>346</sup> Bernard Porter, 'The Pro-Boers in Britain', in Peter Warwick and S.B. Spies (eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, (Longman, 1980), pp. 239-257; p.239.

<sup>347</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 October 1901, p. 4.

<sup>348</sup> Cunningham, Hugh, 'The language of patriotism', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Vol. 1: History and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.57-89; p.9; pp.26-27.

<sup>349</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1902, p.5; Hobson, *Psychology of Jingoism*, p.8.

hundred years, when it will be asked dispassionately whether we did what we could in our generation to make our country's figure in history lofty and worthy of love.<sup>350</sup>

The development of an anti-internment discourse rooted in specific understandings of 'Britishness' was highly significant in debates on the South African War, and set a precedent which would be repeated half a century later. While little opposition to civilian internment would emerge during the First World War, such policy would become a major focus of controversy during the Second World War, when critics of internment frequently framed their attacks around the idea that the policy undermined established 'British' principles, including justice and fair-play. This pattern of anti-internment rhetoric can be said to have originated during the South African War, when the incompatibility of civilian internment and true 'Britishness' became one of the central themes of opposition to the concentration camps. This was particularly notable in a major debate on the issue in the House of Commons on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, when anti-war MPs repeatedly argued that the internment policy cast a shadow over Britain's reputation. C.P Scott called the forced internment of Boer families a "disgrace", stating: "if children die and women fall ill it is upon us that the responsibility lies, and upon the fair fame of this country lies the discredit."<sup>351</sup> John Ellis argued that the "honour" of Britain was called into question by the concentration camps policy, while Lloyd George demanded that a solution be found to the problem, for "the sake of the credit and good name of this country".<sup>352</sup> While Ellis made explicit reference to Britain's reputation with the international community, most of these

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<sup>350</sup> Canon Gore, cited in *Manchester Guardian*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1901, p. 4. The original letter from Canon Gore was published in *The Times*: 'Concentration Camps. To the Editor of the Times', *The Times*, 28 October 1901, p. 8.

<sup>351</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, col. 603.

<sup>352</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, col. 589; col. 574.

speeches appear to have more been closely related to a powerful discourse of 'Britishness' which was associated with moral leadership and civilized culture, ideals which were called into question by the involvement of civilians in military policy. William Redmond's assertion, for example, that internment policy was not merely a "discredit to this country" but "to the very name of civilisation" was typical of the close association made between 'Britishness' and 'civilization' by anti-war campaigners.<sup>353</sup> Emily Hobhouse drew on similar language in her attempts to publicise the camps, reporting: "The Boers in the camps were pondering over their condition and saying to themselves, "Where is the vaunted civilisation of England? Where their boasted humanitarianism..."<sup>354</sup> As has been discussed, the failure of the Boers to live up to 'British' standards of civilization was a major theme of the writings of camp defenders. The utilisation of the concept of 'civilized Britishness', albeit in widely disparate ways, by both supporters and critics of the camps, indicates the extent to which this idea was fundamental to the British imagination at the turn of the century. Repeated references to such ideas by opponents of the camps can be regarded as a conscious attempt to utilize traditional concepts of 'Britishness' in support of their cause.

To many pro-Boers, the development of British military policy in South Africa raised worrying questions about the moral integrity of modern British life. Frequent comparisons with the British values of the past, and reference to the "history and traditions" of Britain and "the inheritance of admiration and respect won for us by our forefathers" implied that the concentration camps policy was indicative of a decline in

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<sup>353</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, col. 616.

<sup>354</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1901, p.7

traditionally 'British' values.<sup>355</sup> In an address of October 1901 entitled 'A Hundred Years Ago and Today', the Bishop of Hereford argued that, in its wartime policies, Britain had betrayed the principles of freedom it had fought for during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>356</sup> To those who thought along these lines, this suggested that the British were losing the qualities of a 'civilized' society and turned on its head the assumption that modernization and imperial achievement were necessarily positive developments. The centrality of ideas about tradition and modernity to both sides of the debate on internment indicates the significance of these themes in British culture at the turn of the century. It also reinforces the fact that definitions of 'civilization' were essential to the construction of national identities during this period.

Another notable trend in pro-Boer opposition to internment was the depiction of the policy as symbolic of the increasing corruption of British society and the moral decline of the British Empire. In Parliament in February 1901 John Dillon described the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony as "two small States fighting for their national existence against the cruel and unprovoked aggression of an Empire which is too large already to be wholesome."<sup>357</sup> This theme of flawed imperialism became common in the arguments of pro-Boers and camp opponents. In a speech against the camps in November 1901, Campbell-Bannerman raised the question of whether Britain's conduct towards the Boers indicated that British imperialism was slipping "into the first stage of the moral paralysis with which the dissolution of empires begins". He asserted that British imperial policy in South Africa was becoming

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<sup>355</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, Monday 24 June 1901, p.10; Friday 25 October 1901, p.6.

<sup>356</sup> Bishop of Hereford, 'A Hundred Years Ago and Today', *Manchester Guardian*, Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October 1901, p.6.

<sup>357</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, col. 1146.

characterized by a “coarse indifference for the rights of weaker States” and “growing indifference to the maintenance of honourable traditions of national chivalry and humanity”, classing these as “symptoms for which a historian instinctively looks when tracing the beginnings of a great decline and fall.”<sup>358</sup>

However, while a number of contemporaries expressed concern about the possible corruption and decline of the British Empire, they rarely attacked the tenets of imperialism itself. Campbell-Bannerman, for example, stressed that, despite his criticism of the Government’s policy in South Africa, he wished “to maintain British supremacy in that part of the world.”<sup>359</sup> Marouf Hasian, Jr. has noted that Hobhouse, despite her fierce opposition to the camps, never extended her criticism to the concept of imperialism itself. Hasian has argued that the belief in imperialism and the idea of the civilizing mission was such an essential part of British society that “even colonial reformers who considered themselves to be *anti-imperial* had to speak in the vernacular of the time.”<sup>360</sup> This view has been reinforced by Mark Hampton, who has noted that even those contemporaries who could be considered to be open critics of imperialism, generally did not oppose the idea of empire itself, but the aggressive force which was seen to embody imperial expansion.<sup>361</sup> Thus, individuals such as Campbell-Bannerman and Hobhouse were not unusual in constructing their criticism of the camps within a framework of imperial beliefs. This trend reinforces Krebs’ assertion that critiques of the South African concentration camps were limited by the

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<sup>358</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1901, p.5.

<sup>359</sup> *Westminster Gazette*, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1901, p.9.

<sup>360</sup> Hasian, ‘“Hysterical” Emily Hobhouse’, p.159

<sup>361</sup> Hampton, ‘Press, Patriotism, and Public Opinion’, p.180.

powerful hegemonic ideologies which underpinned British society at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>362</sup>

Of particular note in discussions of the South African policy was the frequency with which references to 'Britishness' and 'civilization' were underpinned by strongly gendered language. This contrasted with later developments during the Second World War, when understandings of 'Britishness' were vital to the anti-internment campaign but gender ideologies were rarely called upon to reinforce them. During the South African War, due to the large numbers of women and children interned in the camps, gender roles and responsibilities became a crucial part of debates. The scorched earth and concentration camps policy were depicted as particularly barbaric because they were regarded as violent policies implemented by the 'male' military forces against defenceless women and children. As such, they ran contrary to ideals of male chivalry and the protection of women, concepts which were widely believed to be essential facets of both 'civilization' and 'Britishness'.<sup>363</sup> James Keir Hardie was typical in stating: "War upon men is, in all conscience, bad enough; but war upon women and children by means of concentration camps and similar methods is an outrage of which no civilised nation in these days should be guilty."<sup>364</sup> In a letter to the *Daily News*, one reader demanded: "How much further down the abyss of infamy is our dear old land's honour and name to be dragged, while the very nations we lately led so proudly, with the watchwords of Chivalry and Righteousness on our banners, look on in wonder and shame?"<sup>365</sup> Correspondents in the liberal press

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<sup>362</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.35.

<sup>363</sup> Mangan and Walvin, 'Introduction', p.1; Hall, 'Of Gender and Empire', pp.46-7.

<sup>364</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1901, vol. 97, cols 755-6.

<sup>365</sup> Letter to the editor, *Daily News*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1901, p.6.



expressed distress that such a policy could be conducted by “the England which has always been famed for its chivalrous thought for women”.<sup>366</sup> While it was appropriate and even admirable to “Fight men like men”, the idea that the masculine British authorities were inflicting suffering on women and children, who traditionally commanded their protection, was held to be extremely distasteful.<sup>367</sup>

This discourse was reinforced by depictions of brave Boer men desperately fighting to protect their homes, and innocent and defenceless Boer women made to suffer at the hands of the British. In contrast with those who supported the camps, pro-Boers often expressed a sense of racial kinship between themselves and the Boers, defined in particular by shared values regarding the sanctity of the family and the protection of women. In the House of Commons, Francis Channing expressed admiration of the “passionate determination” of the Boer soldiers “to make any sacrifice to defend their homes” arguing that this was a sentiment that was common to all men of the “Anglo-Saxon race”.<sup>368</sup> In his critique of the war, David Lloyd George expressed a similar belief in the shared masculine values of Briton and Boer, declaring: “The love of men for their children, for their home, for their country, and for humanity - we are ranging all these passions against settled government under the British flag in Africa.”<sup>369</sup> While such language contrasted sharply with attempts by pro-war commentators to emphasize the failure of Boer men to fulfil their duties to their families, the underlying gender ideologies were virtually identical. As Krebs has

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<sup>366</sup> Letter to the Editor from ‘An Englishwoman’, ‘The Nation and the War’, *Manchester Guardian*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1901, p.6.

<sup>367</sup> E.G. Taylor to the Editor, ‘The Nation and the War’, *Manchester Guardian*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1901, p.7.

<sup>368</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, cols 1265.

<sup>369</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95 col. 583.

observed, “much writing about the camps, on both sides of the issues, assumed certain shared notions in its readers about men’s obligations to women”.<sup>370</sup> The integrity of Boer men rested on the extent to which they were perceived to conform to British masculine ideals, and while camp supporters connected their failure to do so with the Boers’ wider shortcomings as a ‘civilized’ race, their opponents used the same concepts to stress the kinship between Briton and Boer.

Depictions of Boer women by pro-Boers also differed sharply from those of apologists for the camps, with descriptions abounding in the liberal press of “helpless women and poor little children”.<sup>371</sup> In contrast to supporters of the camps, who stressed the failure of Boer women to live up to British ideals of ‘civilized’ femininity, camp opponents sought sympathy for the plight of Boer women by stressing their ‘womanly’ qualities. Thus, the women Emily Hobhouse encountered in the camps were “quiet”, “gentle”, “delicate” and “motherly”, descriptions that subtly reinforced a vision of Boer women as victims.<sup>372</sup> Within such a discourse there was little room for discussion of the significant minority of male inmates of the camps, despite the fact that in some camps the male population comprised a sizable minority.<sup>373</sup> Reports from Maritzburg made it clear that single men, as well as those with families, were resident in the camps, while other reports remarked on the negative feeling towards

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<sup>370</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.55.

<sup>371</sup> E. G. Taylor to the Editor, ‘The Nation and the War’, *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1901, p.7.

<sup>372</sup> Emily Hobhouse, *Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies* (London: Friars Printing Association 1901), Appendix A, pp.19–32.

<sup>373</sup> In Pietersburg Camp in May 1901, for example, 246 men were recorded, in comparison with 361 women, and 509 children. J. E. Tucker, ‘Monthly Report, Burgher Camp, Pietersburg’, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 69).

surrendered men in the camps from those women whose husbands were still fighting for the Boers.<sup>374</sup> Despite this evidence of a fairly strong male presence in the camps, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise have noted that “received wisdom is that the camps were composed of women and children and very elderly people, with all Boer men supposedly loyalists on commando.”<sup>375</sup>

This interpretation of internment as a female experience is one which can be seen most obviously in Boer recollections of the concentration camps, which tended to place an emphasis on the suffering of women and children.<sup>376</sup> Liz Stanley has argued that such an approach was central to the role of the camps in consolidating Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>377</sup> The unveiling of the *vrouemonument* (‘women’s monument’) in Bloemfontein in 1913, inscribed in dedication “To our heroines / and beloved children”, was an important symbol around which emerging nationalism could take shape.<sup>378</sup> This form of commemoration emphasized the strength, courage and national loyalty of the Afrikaner woman, whilst at the same time reinforcing the righteousness of the Boer cause by highlighting British male brutality against a vulnerable social group. In doing so, it excluded camp inmates who did not fit this image, including men, but also black internees of either sex.<sup>379</sup> The ‘forgetting’ of the

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<sup>374</sup> G. P. Appleby, Regulations for Refugee Camp, Maritzburg, c. March 1901 and N. J. Scholtz, ‘Report for May, Burgher Camp, Irene’, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1901, in ‘Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal’, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LXVIII.1 (p. 40; p.50).

<sup>375</sup> Stanley and Wise, ‘Putting it into Practice’, paragraph 2.28

<sup>376</sup> A relatively small number of men died in the camps (Stanley puts the figure at 1,670), and they were not commemorated on the national memorial which was established at Bloemfontein in 1913. Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, p.59.

<sup>377</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, pp.47-49.

<sup>378</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, pp.48-53.

<sup>379</sup> Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, pp.52-53; p.59.

men in the camps was a process which was also at work in contemporary British discourses of opposition to the camps. In the Commons debate of the 17<sup>th</sup> June, Irish nationalist MP William Redmond referred to “the camps of defenceless and helpless, women and children”<sup>380</sup>, and the influence of this perception was also evident in the responses of readers of the liberal press, whose letters regarding the camps frequently emphasized the innocence of “unoffending women and children”<sup>381</sup> and the suffering that resulted in “broken-hearted mothers and dead children”.<sup>382</sup> Krebs has argued that the gendering of the camps in such a way was a deliberate “political strategy” on the part of campaigners such as Hobhouse and others to present an image of camp inmates as ‘victims’ of British military policy in South Africa.<sup>383</sup> The absence of male inmates from pro-Boer visions of the camps is a further indication of the significance of gender ideologies in framing opposition to internment policy. Just as the inclusion of men in the commemoration of the camps would have complicated the image of female martyrdom which was fostered in post-war Afrikaner nationalist discourses, so the discussion of the thousands of civilian men who resided in the camps would have detracted from the arguments of the camp opponents in Britain during the war, which hinged on the duties of Britain towards innocent women and children.

In his examination of the development of anti-German atrocity stories during the First World War, Adrian Gregory has suggested that there quickly developed an “equation

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<sup>380</sup> Hansard, HC Debate, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, cc. 612.

<sup>381</sup> Letter from H. Parratt, *Manchester Guardian*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1901, p.6.

<sup>382</sup> Letter from ‘H.H.’, *Manchester Guardian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1901, p.5.

<sup>383</sup> Krebs, *Gender*, p.71.

between civilians and “women and children”.<sup>384</sup> The repeated links between the phrases “innocent non-combatants” and “women and children” meant that references to the former automatically evoked images of the suffering of the latter, even when reports were in fact referring to other categories of civilian.<sup>385</sup> This development is strikingly similar to the way in which the concentration camps came to be regarded as ‘women and children’s camps’, with the significant number of male camp inmates being overlooked. The widespread association of civilian internment with women and children during the South African War, with the exclusion of male civilians, may suggest that the wartime imagining of a gendered civilian sphere was a trend which had begun to develop earlier than Gregory has suggested. Indeed, the huge controversy which erupted over the military victimization of women and children in South Africa may have been vital in strengthening the significance attached to the gendered separation of military and civilian spheres. As will be explored in subsequent chapters, there is evidence that the memory of the South African concentration camps controversy had a long-term influence on the way in which subsequent British wartime governments chose to ‘gender’ their internment policy. In addition, moral objections to perceptions of the force of the ‘male’ military sphere being wielded against the ‘female’ civilian sphere, similar to those expressed by pro-Boers in 1901-2, would later become a prominent theme of anti-German rhetoric during the First World War.<sup>386</sup> John S. Ellis has suggested that it was no coincidence that there were similarities between First World War anti-German propaganda and

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<sup>384</sup> Adrian Gregory, ‘A Clash of Cultures: The British Press and the Opening of the Great War’, in Troy R. E. Paddock, *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion and Newspapers in the Great War*, (London: Prager, 2004), pp.15-50; p.28. This point has also been stressed by Proctor in *Civilians*, p.4.

<sup>385</sup> Gregory, ‘Clash of Cultures’, p.28.

<sup>386</sup> See Chapter 2.

the themes adopted by critics of the British government's policy towards civilians during the South African War, since a number of prominent pro-Boers, most notably Lloyd George, went on to form the Liberal Government that went to war in 1914.<sup>387</sup>

### **British-Boer affinity**

For gendered discourses of responsibility and victimhood to be really effective, it was important for opponents of the camps to be able to construct an image of the Boers to which British people could easily relate. Consequently, camp critics frequently claimed that the Boers, as a community, were highly respectable, and that not only their social status, but their behaviour, was very much in keeping with middle-class values. While apologists for the camps highlighted the 'difference' of Boer internees through references to their poor social habits and comparisons with the British urban poor, pro-Boer commentators sought to achieve the opposite by stressing that the camp inmates were "persons of good social position."<sup>388</sup> The extent to which the issue of class could be a key point of conflict between opponents and supporters of the camps is evident in the account of Miss Van Warmelo, a South African nurse, of Irene Camp:

. . . when I spoke to the Superintendent Scholtz . . . he said that the Irene people were of the worst sort, a class utterly unused to any of the comforts of life; that they were far better off in the camp than they could ever have been in their own homes. *It is not true.*

Some of them are undoubtedly quite without education, but the majority of them are the families of rich farmers, accustomed to every comfort and even

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<sup>387</sup> John S. Ellis, ' "The Methods of Barbarism" and the "Rights of Small Nations": War Propaganda and British Pluralism', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 30, 1, 1998, pp.49-75; pp.74-75.

<sup>388</sup> 'Relief in South Africa', *The Friend*, vol. 41, no. 17, 1901, 239.

luxury of civilisation, to food of the most wholesome and nourishing description, to fine homes and warm clothing.<sup>389</sup>

Camp life was commonly depicted in pro-Boer discourses as being particularly objectionable due to the contrast experienced by inmates with their lives outside the camps. This is very obvious in Hobhouse's writings. In her report on the camps she made a point of describing many of the women she met as "respectable" and remarked on certain women being "well-to-do" or characterized by "dignity and breeding",<sup>390</sup> while in a later publication she noted with distaste that, due to "the stingy supply of fuel which is allowed, women of the most noble families of South Africa have been obliged to gather with their own hands fuel consisting of dry cow-dung in order to prepare food for themselves and their children."<sup>391</sup> In a similar vein a reader of the *Manchester Guardian* asserted:

We are told with unblushing effrontery that the women and children have all and more than all their usual comforts in these camps—that is, we suppose, that the children of well-to-do farmers are accustomed to lie on mattresses, or without them, under canvas, on the ground, often in mud and sometimes in water. If these unfortunate people have their usual comforts why are they dying?<sup>392</sup>

The repeated allusion to the class and 'respectability' of the Boers allowed such contemporaries to emphasize the cultural similarities between Boer and middle-class Briton, and thus encourage empathy towards concentration camp inmates. It was common for critics of the camps to ask British audiences to put themselves in the place of the Boers. Thus one *Manchester Guardian* reader argued: 'I do not think an

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<sup>389</sup> Hobhouse, *Brunt of the War*, p.184.

<sup>390</sup> Hobhouse, *Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies*, Appendix A, 24–5, 22–3.

<sup>391</sup> Hobhouse, *Brunt of the War*, p.108.

<sup>392</sup> Bishop of Hereford, 'A hundred years ago and today', *Manchester Guardian*, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1901, p. 6.

Englishman would relish the idea of his wife being made a prisoner and his children being allowed to die of hunger and disease for no other crime than defending his country.<sup>393</sup> While many camp supporters used class-related language in order to define the Boer as the Other, opponents did the opposite by encouraging the idea of cultural similarity between the British and the Boers in an attempt to kindle compassion for both the families in the concentration camps and the soldiers whose families were suffering. This trend reinforces Cannadine's assertion that British reactions to empire could be based on perceptions of similarity as well as difference. However, the focus of British compassion on 'white' Boers rather than 'black' Africans indicates the significance of 'race' in shaping these perceptions, a factor which is underplayed in Cannadine's work.<sup>394</sup>

While the emphasis on class by British supporters of the Boers ostensibly highlighted cultural, rather than racial, similarities between the two communities, it was essentially perceptions of the 'whiteness' of the Boers which allowed them to be repeatedly endowed with middle-class values. In his speech to the House of Commons in February 1901, Dillon expressed his support for the Boers on the grounds that "these people, who after all are a Christian nation and a white race, shall have the same rights which the civilised nations of Europe have been accustomed to accord one another in their wars."<sup>395</sup> Such references to the 'whiteness' and 'Europeanness' of the Boers, and the association of these qualities with the idea of 'civilization', highlighted the racial underpinnings of pro-Boer

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<sup>393</sup> Alfred Hexham to the Editor, 'The Nation and the War', *Manchester Guardian*, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1901, p.10.

<sup>394</sup> Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, p.123.

<sup>395</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, col. 1161.



discourse. The significance attached to the 'whiteness' of the Boers was also indicated by the fact that they alone, as a social group, became the focus of debate and controversy. As has been noted, thousands of black South Africans were also affected by the farm burnings and 'scorched earth' policy, with around 115,700 people living in segregated camps for non-whites by May 1902.<sup>396</sup> However, their fate was almost completely overlooked by campaigners against the camps policy.<sup>397</sup> The 'black' camps were mentioned in passing in some of the official published reports, and Hobhouse also briefly raised the issue in her publications (although she only actually visited 'white' camps); therefore, the experiences of non-white South African civilians were not hidden from the British public.<sup>398</sup> Despite the huge amount of attention and debate which the Boer camps attracted, however, very few British observers demonstrated concern about the conditions and mortality rates for black civilian internees.<sup>399</sup> While the Boer concentration camps became headline news in

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<sup>396</sup> Warwick, *Black People*, p.145. See also: Warwick, 'Black people and the war', pp.204-5; Mohlamme, 'Black People in the Boer Republics', Chapter 4; Mongalo and du Pisani, 'Victims of a white man's war'. For discussion of non-white inmates of the 'white' concentration camps, please see: Stanley, *Mourning Becomes*, Chapter 7; André Wessels and Annette Wohlberg, 'Black people and race relations in the largest Anglo-Boer War concentration camp: Merebank, 1901-1902', *New Contree*, 49, 2005, pp.33-47.

<sup>397</sup> Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, p.145.

<sup>398</sup> A.G. Trollope, 'Report on Burgher and Native Refugee Camps in the Orange River Colony', 15 July 1901, and General Superintendent, Transvaal, 'Fortnightly Statistical Returns Supplied to Army Headquarter', 11 September 1901, in 'Reports, &c., on the working of the refugee camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal', *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 1902 session (Cd. 819), LSVIII.1 (pp. 105-110 and p.313 respectively); Hobhouse, *Brunt of the War*, p.350.

<sup>399</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that members of the Concentration Camps Commission visited certain 'black' camps, but no official report was produced by the committee. Jane Waterston to James Stewart, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1901, in Bean and van Heyningen, *Letters of Jane Elizabeth Waterston*, p.151; Photographs labelled 'On the native compound, Kimberley', 'Kaffir location Klerksdorp', 'Kaffir location, Standerton', and others in Concentration Camps Commission, 'On the Concentration Camps in South Africa, by the Committee of Ladies Appointed by the Secretary of State for War; Containing Reports on the Camps in Natal, the Orange River Colony, and the Transvaal, (London: Printed for H.M. Stationery Office by Eyre and Spottiswoode 1902): Millicent Garrett Fawcett papers, Women's Library, 7MGF/E/2.

Britain, the experiences of non-white internees were largely ignored. The *Manchester Guardian* rarely discussed the 'black' camps<sup>400</sup>, and an attempt by the Aborigines Protection Society to bring official attention to the matter appears to have had no significant effect.<sup>401</sup>

Perhaps the closest attempt to engage with the experiences of black internees was made by the Society of Friends, who sent representatives to South Africa with the specific aim of investigating the condition of civilians regardless of their 'race'. Joseph Rowntree embarked on his initial visit to South Africa in early 1901, for example, with the aim of ascertaining "how Friends in England can best transmit any assistance to victims of this terrible war, of whatever race", and Anna Hogg stressed that the Society's aim was to help "all sufferers."<sup>402</sup> When Richardson and Alexander visited South Africa in 1902, one of their specific aims was to investigate the conditions of "The Natives, who had to some extent been concentrated in camps of which little could be learned in England", as well as the welfare of the more well-publicised civilian victims of the war.<sup>403</sup> Consequently, the pair made a point of speaking to (white) officials involved in the running of the black camps as part of their investigation of the welfare of black civilians.<sup>404</sup> In practice, however, it seems that

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<sup>400</sup> An isolated exception was: 'A Native Concentration Camp,' *Manchester Guardian*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1902, published almost a year after the controversy had first emerged.

<sup>401</sup>; H. R. Fox Bourne to Joseph Chamberlain, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1902, and reply, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1900: National Archives, Kew CO879/ 77/11767.

<sup>402</sup> 'Pickering and Hull Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1900', *FSARFC Minutes; The Friend*, Vol. XLI, No. 32, 9 August 1901, p.525.

<sup>403</sup> Report by William Henry F. Alexander and Lawrence Richardson, December 1902, p.1, *Friends' South African Relief Fund, Minutes of Committee, held 1<sup>st</sup> of First-month, 1903*: Library of the Religious Society of Friends, S Box P2/20.

<sup>404</sup> W.H.F. Alexander, *Letters etc re visit to S Africa on Friends' S African Relief 1902*, p.66; p.83; p.125: Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Box P2/20; Richardson and Alexander, 'Report', p. 7. Richardson and Alexander reported that, despite severe sufferings

although many of the Friends who visited South Africa spent some time in 'black' concentration camps, none of them immersed themselves in the lives and welfare of the black camps as they did with the white camps.<sup>405</sup> Hogg's account of her early visit to the black and the white camps at Port Elizabeth emphasized the way in which even sympathetic observers preserved a sense of distance from the black internees. In her report, Hogg gave the white internees a collective voice: "The one sigh from all – 'How long will it be?'" , suggesting that she verbally engaged with at least some of the Boer internees. Her observations of black internees, however, indicated a lack of engagement between herself and the camp inmates. Her descriptions of black internees who "wander at will in the park adjoining" and "seem to huddle together over their little bits of fire and just bask in the sunshine" contained strong strains of discourses of black primitivism.<sup>406</sup>

While camp opponents attempted to dispel myths about the behaviour and habits of the Boers, writings on the black internees suggest that even the most sympathetic contemporaries were hampered by the persistence of prejudices against non-whites. Fox Bourne's letter requesting an inquiry into the black camps, for example, stated that the Society understood that sanitary problems were bound to be a particular

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during the war, the condition of the black population was now satisfactory, however, it should be noted that this conclusion was apparently reached entirely by reference to the "testimony" of white South Africans and seems to have been accepted unquestioningly by the visiting Quakers. There is no record of any discussion with black camp inmates or, with one possible exception, an indication that Richardson and Alexander visited a black camp in order to gain first-hand confirmation of the reports they received.

<sup>405</sup> All the women who travelled to South Africa on behalf of the Society of Friends took up positions in 'white' camps. There is limited evidence that some of these women had involvement with the black camp inmates: Anna Hogg, for example, recorded visiting a "coloured people's camp" near Fort Elizabeth. *The Friend*, Vol. XLI, No. 29, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1901, p.471.

<sup>406</sup> *The Friend*, Vol. XLI, No. 29, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1901, p.471.

problem in the black camps, due to the “condition of native life.”<sup>407</sup> Similarly, Richardson expressed surprise when a doctor who worked in a black camp informed him that the inmates were extremely clean.<sup>408</sup> Perhaps the most interesting example, however, is that of Hobhouse, who raised the issue of the fate of black Africans in her publications but explained that she didn’t have the time or the resources to investigate the black camps herself. In her reports on the Boer camps, Hobhouse made a point of reporting what she saw as the “indignities” suffered by Boer women at the hands of black men.<sup>409</sup> This was a theme which was to be reiterated repeatedly in the post-war writings of Boer women; in a community where black Africans were indisputably regarded as second class citizens by the Boers, their employment by the British Army, and their subsequent involvement in the rounding up of families for removal to the camps, was seen as a particular insult.<sup>410</sup> Despite the fact that the Boer community was notorious for its prejudice towards black Africans, Hobhouse gave some validity and voice to these attitudes by using them in her portrayal of the victimhood of the white women. Such approaches also consolidated a sense of difference and 'otherness' in terms of the black internees, which contrasted strongly with the way in which white internees were depicted by camp supporters, particularly in terms of the emphasis on the cultural similarities

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<sup>407</sup> Aborigines Protection Society to Colonial Office, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1902: National Archives, Kew, CO 879/77/11767, No.71 (p.145)

<sup>408</sup> Alexander, *Letters etc*, p.66.

<sup>409</sup> Hobhouse, *Report*, p.25; p.29.

<sup>410</sup> Dampier, ‘Everyday Life’, pp.202-223; pp.209-213. This reaction has parallels with the European reaction to the stationing of French colonial soldiers on the Rhine as part of the Allied occupation of Germany. As Iris Wigger has noted: “Campaigners argued that France was committing a crime against civilisation by allowing...allegedly ‘primitive black troops’ to be stationed in Europe with power over a ‘white civilised people’.” In this case, too, hostility towards the black troops centred on their potential threat to white women. Iris Wigger, ‘Black Shame’ – the campaign against ‘racial degeneration’ and female degradation in interwar Europe’, *Race and Class*, 51, 3, 2010, pp.33-46; pp.34-5.

between Briton and Boer. The exclusion of non-white internees from British discourses on the camps contrasted significantly with the intense controversy surrounding the ethics of 'white' internment, and is indicative of the continuing significance of 'whiteness' in British ideologies. In contrast to the extensive campaigns initiated by pro-Boers in support of white internees, black victims of the concentration camp system were forgotten: an almost complete silence existed towards their experiences, although at least 14,000 black South African civilians died.<sup>411</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The British image of the 'enemy' during the South African War was strikingly dependent on gendered thinking: the iconic image of the South African War, on which racialization of the Boers hinged, was that of the captive Boer woman. Whether imprisoned for her military activities, offered protection as an abandoned soldier's wife, or criticized as a failing mother, the Boer woman was inextricably connected to the way the war was imagined in Britain. Women came to be perceived as possessing a certain military status, either as actors in their own right, or, as critics of the war argued, by being used as weapons by the military authorities, and the support and involvement of Boer women in the conflict foreshadowed the developments of the 'total wars' of the twentieth century. The focus by the British media on the involvement of women in military policy (as participants or victims) provided the context for an image of the Boer to emerge which was highly gendered. While this image was built on established foundations, it was heightened and

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<sup>411</sup> Warwick, *Black People*, p.145.

crystallized by wartime experiences which brought Boer women's performances as wives and mothers into sharp focus. The reports of British administrators and investigators, which stressed the failure of the Boers (and specifically Boer women) to live up to prescribed standards of 'civilization', provided an important means of justifying the war and reinforced a sense of difference between the British and their enemies. The grounding of this imagery in ideas about feminine ideals of domesticity and motherhood reinforces Levine's contention that British observers used perceptions of a society's women as yardsticks for measuring levels of colonial civilization. During the South African War this process was reinforced by discourses which judged Boer soldiers in terms of their relationships with women and their responsibilities as husbands and fathers. However, language utilised in the camp reports also strongly implied that gender 'norms' could also be related to 'racial' inheritance.

The factor which made the concentration camp issue more complicated and emotionally charged was the 'whiteness' of the Boers: a colonial war against a white European race was an event which had no clear precedent and it invited a mixed reaction from British observers. While opponents of the war repeatedly emphasized the sense that the Boers were 'like us', and argued fiercely that they possessed 'civilized', 'white' European values, many of their contemporaries stressed the 'otherness' of the Boers by using language which attributed to them the same failings of gender relations and roles which were commonly associated with black, 'uncivilized' races. Although the Boers were white, the constant association with 'dirt', and their labelling as 'uncivilized', implicitly associated them with non-white, and thus

'inferior' colonial subjects. This process was part of a wider pattern of British attitudes towards marginalised white groups. The underlying significance of racial assumptions in British ideologies in this period is also indicated by the pro-Boer lobby's distance from, and silence on, the subject of the black concentration camps. This contrasted strongly with the attempts of camp opponents to establish a connection between themselves and the white concentration camps inmates and indicates the extent to which concepts of national identity, 'respectability' and 'civilization' had a racial edge. It seems apparent that the 'whiteness' of Boer concentration camp inmates allowed them to be included under the umbrella of a 'civilized' society. Therefore, while British opponents of the concentration camps in South Africa rarely attempted to construct a racial 'other' in the way which was common among camp supporters, ideas about similarity and difference based on race and colour were ultimately just as significant in underpinning their arguments.

The South African concentration camps controversy also provides an interesting insight into British attitudes towards gender, 'civilization', and national self-image, themes which would remain significant in discourses surrounding later internment episodes. The questions raised over British conduct in relation to Boer civilians encouraged wider concerns to be expressed about the possible decline of 'British' qualities such as justice, fair play, and chivalry. Suggestions that the British authorities were eschewing such values in their South African campaign allowed anti-war campaigners to attempt to reclaim notions of national identity and patriotism in support of their own cause. Whilst apologists for the camps often depicted these values as representing something incontrovertibly 'British', against which the habits

of the Boers could be contrasted, camp opponents used the concepts in a much more inclusive and encompassing way. In doing so, both camp opponents and supporters called upon very similar imagery relating to British national identity. Just as Hasian has argued that opposition to internment could develop without undermining a dominant British acceptance of the principle of imperialism, so it can be said that the debates were underpinned by a shared acceptance of a dominant, middle-class ideology of national identity which placed an emphasis on ideals of honour, fair play, and respectability. Equally, however, an examination of the discourses of camp opponents suggests that within this fairly rigid framework there could be confusion, disagreements, and conflicting ideas, as evidenced by the examples of the Quaker representatives in South Africa and the Concentration Camps Commission. This is a reminder that even against the background of the “hegemonic” British ideologies identified by Krebs, the identities and loyalties of individuals were not always straightforward and could sometimes come into conflict.

The South African War thus provides an unusual insight into the way that the imagery of a white ‘enemy’ could develop in a colonial setting with a distinctly racial edge, and reinforces the significance of gender ideologies in early twentieth century British definitions of difference. However, the association of internment with such gendered and racialized images of the ‘enemy’ was also significant in setting a precedent for discourses that developed around later British wartime internment episodes. As later chapters will discuss, the outrage caused by the internment of women and children and the general sense that the civilian sphere had been invaded by the military, had an impact both on the development of twentieth century ideals about the separation



of military and civilian spheres, and the morality of the internment of women. Also highly significant in terms of wider internment patterns was the utilisation of concepts of 'Britishness' in opposition to the policy, a development which would be seen again during the Second World War. Despite its unique position as a colonial conflict between two 'white' races, the internment policy of the South African War should therefore be regarded as a significant precursor of later developments in civilian wartime experiences.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE FIRST WORLD WAR

### Introduction

As “the first modern, global war”<sup>412</sup> the First World War mobilized vast sections of the British population in a way which had simply not been necessary during the South African War due to its distant, colonial context. While the extensive involvement of civilians in the earlier conflict had offered a foretaste of some of the features of ‘total’ warfare, its physical distance had meant that the majority of British people had not felt its impact in any meaningful way. In contrast, during the First World War, British civilians - and indeed civilians across the world - were closely involved in the conflict as targets of military attacks, as sources of labour, and as victims of internment and relocation policies.<sup>413</sup> In May 1915, future British Prime Minister Andrew Bonar Law stated in the House of Commons that the conflict should be regarded not as “a war between armies but a war between nations” and argued that “every individual, whether civilian or not, has got to throw his weight into the scale.”<sup>414</sup> This perception that the war involved all British subjects in a fight for national survival meant that attitudes towards the enemy became even more central to popular discourses than they had during the South African War. Both the relative proximity of the hostilities, and the fact that large numbers of ‘enemy aliens’ were settled within British communities, meant that the ‘enemy’ could be perceived as a far more menacing reality, and between 1914 and 1918, not only Britain, but all belligerent nations,

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<sup>412</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.3.

<sup>413</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.3.

<sup>414</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, vol. 71, cols 1841-78.

implemented some form of civilian internment policy to tackle this issue.<sup>415</sup> While the development of Boer enemy imagery provided insights into British attitudes and values at the turn of the twentieth century, the more intense racialization of the German people which reinforced British discourses on internment during the First World War indicated the profound impact that ‘total war’ could have on British perceptions of outsiders, and specifically the ‘enemy other’. However, the conceptualization of the enemy between 1914 and 1918 was also underpinned by a number of themes which had been significant during the South African War, particularly understandings of gender, race and national identity.

In Britain, internment of male enemy aliens of military age was introduced in August 1914, shortly after the outbreak of hostilities. Initially, the policy was implemented fairly slowly and somewhat erratically; disagreement developed between the Home Office and War Office as to who should take responsibility for decisions on the release of individual internees, and a shortage of accommodation for internees meant that the policy was frequently halted.<sup>416</sup> However, the policy was suddenly and dramatically revised on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1915 when Prime Minister Herbert Asquith announced in the House of Commons that the British Government would be introducing a “comprehensive” policy of “segregation and internment” of German civilians and other enemy aliens resident in Britain.<sup>417</sup> Five days earlier, a British passenger liner, the *Lusitania*, had been sunk by a German u-boat off the coast of

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<sup>415</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.205. For a comparative analysis of international internment policies during the First World War, see Stibbe, ‘Civilian Internment’.

<sup>416</sup> ‘Correspondence as to the internment and release of alien enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915’: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

<sup>417</sup> ‘Correspondence as to the Internment and Release of Alien Enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915: Prime Minister’s Statements’: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

Ireland, with extensive loss of civilian life.<sup>418</sup> Since then, waves of violence and rioting had erupted in British towns and cities against premises and businesses known to be owned by Germans or other individuals of 'enemy' origin. In his announcement, Asquith made it clear that the decision to introduce general internment was influenced by these events, stating that the government had been compelled to respond to "progressive violation by the enemy of the usages of civilised warfare and the rules of humanity, culminating...in the sinking of the "Lusitania". The decision to extend internment policy, he explained, had been taken in consideration of the outbursts of "righteous indignation" which the sinking of the ship had provoked in British communities.<sup>419</sup> In response to these events, policy towards all enemy civilians was to be severely tightened, with male enemy aliens of military age being made subject to internment, and women, children and men over military age to repatriation to their country of origin. By November 1915, 32,440 male enemy aliens had been interned, and between May 1915 and June 1916 around 10,000 people were repatriated.<sup>420</sup>

British responses to 'enemy aliens' during the First World War, in terms of both policy-making and popular attitudes, have received increasing attention from historians in recent years, although these subjects arguably continue to constitute a

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<sup>418</sup> The *Lusitania* had been travelling from New York to Liverpool when it was torpedoed by a German u-boat off the coast of Ireland on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1915. It sank in eighteen minutes with the loss of over a thousand lives, mostly British, American and Canadian.

<sup>419</sup> 'Correspondence as to the internment and release of alien enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915: Prime Minister's Statements': National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

<sup>420</sup> Panayi, 'Intolerant Act' pp.59-60.

relatively neglected area of research.<sup>421</sup> The very lack of scholarly attention afforded to internment has been regarded as reflective of a general reluctance for academics and public alike to address subjects which threaten an established understanding of British history, and 'Britishness' itself. Nicoletta F. Gullace has pointed to the ability of such a subject to "disturb more familiar narratives of victimhood and violence" in British history, while Richard Dove has described internment as a "confused and shabby policy" which sits uneasily with British wartime images of "unity, courage, endurance, and final victory."<sup>422</sup> Indeed, it is widely agreed that the historic lack of attention given to the subject of British internment policies during both world wars may be due to the difficulty of aligning such episodes with beliefs in a tradition of British tolerance and with a national self-image which has been constructed as a point of contrast with the repressive policies of other European states during the twentieth century.<sup>423</sup> Similarly, examples of violence towards enemy aliens north of the border have been seen as a challenge to a specific Scottish belief in its community as one "historically free from racism and xenophobia."<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Recent publications on internment include: Saunders, 'The stranger in our gates'; Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment'; Stefan Manz, 'Civilian Internment in Scotland during the First World War', in Dove, *Totally Un-English?*, pp. 83-97. Publications on anti-German hostility include: Ben Braber, 'Within our Gates: A New Perspective on Germans in Glasgow during the First World War', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 29, 2, 2009, pp.87-105; Catriona M. M. Macdonald, 'May 1915: Race, Riot and Representations of War', in Catriona M. M. Macdonald and E.W. McFarland (eds.), *Scotland and the Great War*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), pp.145-172; Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens, Enemies: Fictive Communities and the Lusitania Riots of 1915', *Journal of Social History*, 2005, pp.345-367.

<sup>422</sup> Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens and Enemies', p.361; Dove, 'A matter which touches the good name of this country', pp.11-16.

<sup>423</sup> Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*, (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), p.298.

<sup>424</sup> Manz, 'Civilian Internment', p.94.

While these powerful discourses of national identity have been blamed for restricting modern scholarship on enemy aliens during the First World War, their influence on the contemporary events themselves are also significant. The idea of a 'tolerant' Britain has been regarded as an enduring belief which has spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Colin Holmes has suggested that it was strong enough to act as a restraint on potentially restrictive policies, such as the introduction of immigration controls under the Aliens Act of 1905, which he argues was a far more "muted measure of control" than it might otherwise have been.<sup>425</sup> The limitations of this ideology have also been addressed, most notably by Tony Kushner and Sherman Kadish, who have both argued that, historically, British tolerance towards newcomers has been conditional on immigrants demonstrating the desire to assimilate into British society.<sup>426</sup> As has been seen, contemporary understandings of 'Britishness' had been vital in shaping debates on internment policy during the South African War. Belief in British traditions of tolerance and justice would also become central to critiques of internment policy during the Second World War. However, the implementation of internment during the First World War caused far less contention than such policies had done in 1901 or would do in 1940, and this chapter will examine whether the lack of substantial debate on internment meant that belief in British 'liberal' traditions had less significance during this conflict.

The issue of a 'tradition' of British tolerance also raises questions about the place of popular antipathy towards Germans, and the restrictive policies implemented against

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<sup>425</sup> Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?*, pp.14-15.

<sup>426</sup> Tony Kushner, 'Beyond the pale? British reactions to Nazi antisemitism, 1933-39', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 8, 1, 1989, pp.143-60; p.45; Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.34; Kadish, *Bolsheviks*, p.55.

them, in the wider history of British relations with minority groups. A number of historians have stressed the importance of considering wartime hostility towards Germans in a broader historical context. Colin Holmes has suggested that legislation against the German minority during the First World War had its roots in pre-war anti-alienism, which was expressed most obviously in the introduction of the 1905 Aliens Act. Despite Holmes' belief in the comparatively limited nature of this act, it has been regarded as the piece of legislation which ended Britain's "open door" policy on immigration. Evidence submitted in favour of its implementation revealed examples of resentment and prejudice towards immigrants of all nationalities.<sup>427</sup> Arguably the most notable targets of such prejudice were Russian Jews, many of whom settled in Britain during the late nineteenth century after fleeing the oppressive Tsarist regime. Hostility towards Jewish immigrants has been regarded as stemming not only from perceptions of their economic threat, but also from ideas about their potential as criminals or disseminators of radical ideas, and was frequently underpinned by more established anti-semitic prejudice based on sinister ideas about Jewish financial and political influence.<sup>428</sup> In addition to evidence of widespread antisemitism, violence against other minority groups, such as riots against the Chinese community in Cardiff in 1911, suggests that general xenophobia and suspicion against outsiders were not new phenomenon in British society.<sup>429</sup> As Stefan Manz has stressed, "the paradigm

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<sup>427</sup> Kadish, *Bolsheviks*, p.45; Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp.68-69.

<sup>428</sup> Kadish, *Bolsheviks*, p.52; Lunn, 'Political Antisemitism'.

<sup>429</sup> Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?*, pp.21-22. For discussion of the experience of Chinese immigrants in Britain prior to the First World War see J. P. May, 'The Chinese in Britain, 1860-1914', in Colin Holmes (ed.), *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), pp.111-124.

of xenophobic terminology did not spring up out of the blue in August 1914 but had developed in the *pre-war* decades”<sup>430</sup>

While prejudice against immigrants was therefore a feature of pre-war British society, Stella Yarrow has argued that, prior to the start of the twentieth century, Germans were rarely targets of such intense hostility as other immigrant groups.<sup>431</sup> German immigrants often successfully established themselves within British communities, married British subjects, or rose to positions of political or economic influence within local areas.<sup>432</sup> Yarrow has noted that the German community was not a “homogeneous” one, and accounts of wartime riots against Germans indicated that German homes and businesses were scattered across British cities.<sup>433</sup> References to the “enemy in our midst” and the “stranger in the gates”, which emerged during the First World War, actually indicate the extent to which Germans had established themselves at the heart of British communities prior to the outbreak of war.<sup>434</sup> That the German community was fairly assimilated may explain why, in general, less hostility was evident towards them during the nineteenth century than to other minority groups who appeared more distinctly ‘different’.<sup>435</sup> This was reinforced by widespread beliefs in the shared racial origins of Britons and Germans. Panayi has suggested that the idea of racial kinship between the two countries was prevalent

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<sup>430</sup> Manz, ‘Civilian Internment’, p.94.

<sup>431</sup> Yarrow, ‘Impact’, p.98.

<sup>432</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, pp.20-21.

<sup>433</sup> Stella Yarrow, ‘The Impact of Hostility on Germans in Britain, 1914-1918’, in Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn, *Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Frank Cass, 1990), pp.97-112; p.97; Pat O’Mara, *Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1968 [first edition 1934]), pp.225-228.

<sup>434</sup> The texts referred to here are: Panayi, *Enemy*, and Saunders, ‘The stranger in our gates’.

<sup>435</sup> Yarrow, ‘Impact’, p.98.



throughout the nineteenth century, but grew particularly significant towards its end, when belief in “Racial Anglo-Saxonism” became “almost ubiquitous”.<sup>436</sup> However, despite this evidence of assimilation and acceptance, historians have pointed to the development of a certain degree of anti-German feeling from the turn of the century onwards, linked to the deterioration of diplomatic relations between Britain and Germany and perceptions of the international threat posed by the latter.<sup>437</sup> James Hampshire has highlighted the growing tendency in popular literature for Germans to be presented as spies, and Panayi has suggested that the perceived militancy of German society played a part in the development of negative imagery of the German people as a whole.<sup>438</sup> As has been noted in examination of prejudice against the Boers, dominant pre-war understandings of a nation or ‘race’ can be vital in shaping the way that wartime ‘enemy’ imagery develops.

A recurring theme of the historiography on this subject is the sense that increasing hostility towards Germans could be related to wider wartime xenophobia. Panayi, for example, has stressed that the anti-German riots of May 1915 should be considered “in the context of the anti-alienism and general intolerance” that characterised British society during the First World War.<sup>439</sup> Gullace has highlighted the fact that, during anti-German rioting, shops and businesses appear to have been targeted for having foreign, rather than simply German-sounding names.<sup>440</sup> As well as such “random

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<sup>436</sup> Panikos Panayi, *German Immigrants in Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, 1815-1914*, (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp.209-210.

<sup>437</sup> Panayi, *German Immigrants*, p.237.

<sup>438</sup> James Hampshire, ‘Spy Fever in Britain, 1900 to 1914’, *Historian*, 72, 2001, pp.22-27; p.24; Panayi, *German Immigrants*, p.237.

<sup>439</sup> Panikos Panayi, ‘The Lancashire Anti-German Riots of May 1915’, *Manchester Region History Review*, II, 2, 1988, pp.3-11; p.10.

<sup>440</sup> Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, p.352.

xenophobia”, however, historians provide examples of wartime hostility and violence towards other specific ethnic groups, particularly Russian Jews.<sup>441</sup> It has also been suggested that antisemitism informed anti-German propaganda, with the themes of Jewish international conspiracy and the “hidden hand” of malevolent German-Jewish influence gaining dominant places in contemporary discourses.<sup>442</sup> In his discussion of the experiences of the Jewish community in Britain during the First World War, David Cesarani has highlighted an increase in antisemitism, arguing that both the British authorities and the public became much less willing to “accommodate Jewish difference”.<sup>443</sup> As will be seen, the development of prejudice against enemy aliens within a wider culture of xenophobia and antisemitism would be a pattern repeated during the Second World War.

A growing antipathy towards aliens of any nationality has also been identified within official policy-making as the war developed. Ben Braber, for example, has suggested that restrictive measures against ‘enemy aliens’ should be considered in light of the experiences of other minority groups who were targeted by wartime legislation, such as Lithuanians and Russian Jews, who faced conscription into the British armed forces or repatriation to Russia under the terms of the Anglo-Russian Military

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<sup>441</sup> David Cesarani, ‘An Embattled Minority: The Jews in Britain During the First World War’, in Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn (eds.), *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right, and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Frank Cass, 1990), pp.61-81; p.75.

<sup>442</sup> Gisela C. Lebzelter, ‘Antisemitism – a Focal Point for the British Radical Right’, in P. M. Kennedy and A. J. Nicholls (eds.), *Nationalist and Racist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp.88-105; p. 96.

<sup>443</sup> Cesarani, ‘An Embattled Minority’, p.63; p.75. See also Mark Levene, ‘Going against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-18’, in Michael Berkowitz et al, *Forging Modern Jewish Identities: Public Faces and Private Schools*, (Ilford: Vallentine Mitchell & Co., 2003), pp.81-114.

Convention of March 1917.<sup>444</sup> From February 1916 restrictions against all foreign nationals were strengthened as increasing numbers of aliens of all nationalities were required to register with the police. David Saunders has regarded this as evidence that, as the war progressed, the British authorities came to address the 'alien' issue "in terms which went beyond the logic of the war-time conflict."<sup>445</sup> Discrimination against aliens has also been identified in the implementation of legislation which ostensibly had little to do with foreign nationals; Gerry R. Rubin has argued that the operation of the Retail Business (Licensing) Order of 1918, introduced to limit competition to the businesses of British men who had been drafted into the Armed Forces, was characterized by prejudice against foreign business-owners, who generally received a much stricter application of the Order than those perceived to be of British origin.<sup>446</sup> The ultimate proof of the xenophobic undercurrents in British policy-making has been found in the debates preceding, and the ultimate implementation of, the 1919 Aliens Restriction Act which gave the Government the power to continue wartime restrictions on foreign civilians, and which Panayi has described as a "vindictive" measure.<sup>447</sup>

Sonya Rose has argued persuasively that the identification and targeting of out-groups is one of the fundamental means by which societies cement their national identity during wartime. Rose has concentrated her analysis on the Second World War, arguing that a sense of British cohesion and collective identity was

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<sup>444</sup> Braber, 'Within Our Gates', p.100-102.

<sup>445</sup> David Saunders, 'Aliens in Britain and the Empire During the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 4, 1985, pp.5-27; pp.8-9.

<sup>446</sup> Gerry R. Rubin, 'Race, Retailing and wartime regulation: The retail business (licensing) order 1918', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 7, 2, 1988, pp.184-205.

<sup>447</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, p.289. See also Yarrow, 'Impact', pp.97-112; p.109, and Saunders, 'The stranger in our gates', pp.31-2.

strengthened through the classification of certain groups as “enemies within” society, whose allegedly negative characteristics could be depicted as the antithesis of ‘British’ values.<sup>448</sup> These out-groups might include enemy aliens and foreign nationals, but also British citizens who failed to conform to expected ideals of civic contribution and patriotic zeal.<sup>449</sup> One significant contribution to this issue in terms of the First World War has been Gullace’s analysis of the ‘*Lusitania* riots’ of May 1915.<sup>450</sup> In this case study, she has highlighted the ways in which widespread and heavily emotive depictions of the sinking of the *Lusitania* in the British press led to a shift in the ways that many people imagined themselves as part of a community, with personal connections with German neighbours becoming subsumed by powerful feelings of “kinship” with the victims of German atrocities.<sup>451</sup> To Gullace, therefore, the pull of national identity during wartime can be strong enough to overcome close personal ties. She has argued that the extensive dissemination of atrocity stories during the First World War had a two-fold role to play in the shaping of British identities, both by strengthening feelings of “fictive kinship” through identification with atrocity victims, and by intensifying prejudice towards Germans within local communities.<sup>452</sup>

Asquith’s reference in his speech of May 1915 to the “progressive violation by the enemy of the usages of civilised warfare and the rules of humanity” was a theme which would have been entirely familiar to his audience. From the earliest days of the war, newspapers and periodicals attempted to depict the conflict itself as a result of

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<sup>448</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, pp.71-72.

<sup>449</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p.71.

<sup>450</sup> Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, p.345.

<sup>451</sup> Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, p.350.

<sup>452</sup> Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, and Enemies’, p.347.

German aggression, and this theme widened rapidly and dramatically to include the dissemination of violent atrocity stories which depicted the German soldier, as well as the wider German state, as utterly barbaric. Much atrocity propaganda focused on the experiences of Belgian civilians, who were reported to have suffered rape, murder, and mutilation at the hands of German troops.<sup>453</sup> While many of these stories were published in the press and were of dubious origin, they were given a stamp of authority in May 1915 when an official commission, headed by Lord Bryce, reported on the treatment of Belgian civilians and published explicit descriptions of the atrocities allegedly inflicted upon them.<sup>454</sup> Although in the post-war years doubt was cast on the validity of these stories, and on the foundations of the Bryce Report itself, it has been generally agreed that such atrocity propaganda played a fundamental role in inspiring anti-German hostility during the war.<sup>455</sup> The relationship between this atmosphere of hostility and the introduction of repressive policies against German civilians has been acknowledged by historians of internment. Matthew Stibbe, for example, has stated that the development of a specific stereotype of the enemy was essential in determining the treatment of enemy civilians.<sup>456</sup> Cate Haste has argued that not only did atrocity propaganda lead Germany as a nation to become “the focus of a poisonous hatred which consumed the civilian population”, but that the propaganda also demonized the German people as a ‘race’, representing them as

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<sup>453</sup> For discussion of the development of First World War propaganda see Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War*, (London: Allen Lane, 1977), Nicoletta F. Gullace, ‘Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War’, *The American Historical Review*, 102, 3, 1997, pp.714-747 and Gregory, ‘Clash of Cultures’.

<sup>454</sup> The impact of the Bryce report is discussed in detail in Gullace, ‘Sexual Violence’, pp.717-718

<sup>455</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p.107.

<sup>456</sup> Stibbe, ‘Civilian Internment’, p.54.

the “antithesis of Christianity.”<sup>457</sup> The racialization of ‘the German’ through atrocity propaganda, the potential blurring of imagery of the German soldier and the German civilian, and the use of such images to rationalize policy-making, will be central themes of this chapter.

The dissemination of atrocity stories highlights the significance of the relationship between the press, public opinion, and appeals for internment. Many major newspapers, including *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* took an explicitly anti-German stance and, as well as circulating atrocity stories, a number of newspapers campaigned against Germans living in Britain. Panayi has argued that the press therefore played a “crucial” role in fostering hostility towards enemy aliens.<sup>458</sup> The influence of the press on public opinion is notoriously difficult to fully assess, however. Adrian Gregory has suggested that readers often selected the newspaper which concurred with their existing attitudes or political views, a point which would imply that the content of newspapers often reinforced individuals’ viewpoints rather than dramatically changing them.<sup>459</sup> Haste has provided some evidence to suggest that the influence of the press had certain limitations, citing as an example the humane behaviour of local people in Sussex towards a Zeppelin pilot who had been shot down at a time when aerial attacks were causing particular alarm; however, her analysis of the connection between this incident and press coverage of the risk from zeppelins is rather vague.<sup>460</sup> Gregory has argued that the role of the national press in disseminating anti-German feeling has been overstated, asserting that atrocity

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<sup>457</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p.107.

<sup>458</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, p.3.

<sup>459</sup> Gregory, ‘Clash of Cultures’, p.19.

<sup>460</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p.97.

stories and Germanophobic content were not as prominent as has often been suggested.<sup>461</sup> In addition, a recent historiographical shift towards local interpretations of internment and anti-German feeling has highlighted the possible significance of the less prominent, but nonetheless popular, local newspapers. Catriona M. MacDonald has suggested that the local press had a major, but often overlooked, role to play in the development of anti-German feeling through its reports on casualties in local regiments and on the local victims of events such as the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Such reports had the potential to give the impact of the war a much more personal dimension.<sup>462</sup> By underlining the local tragedies which formed the nucleus of national events, local newspapers gave more personal and emotive meanings to the idea of the 'enemy': "In this way, the international became national; the national, local; and the local, personal."<sup>463</sup>

The significance of gender in the formulation of policies on 'enemy aliens' during this period has received fairly limited attention from historians, although recent work, particularly by Proctor and Gullace, has begun to address the issue.<sup>464</sup> However, more general considerations of women's wartime roles, and contemporary conceptions of gender identities, have become key themes of the historiography of the First World War. Issues such as the development of British women's political consciousness, the significance of their roles in the workplace, and changing notions

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<sup>461</sup> Gregory, 'Clash of Cultures', p. 26.

<sup>462</sup> MacDonald, 'May 1915', p.163.

<sup>463</sup> MacDonald, 'May 1915', p.163.

<sup>464</sup> Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War*, (London: New York University Press, 2003); Gullace, 'Sexual Violence'.

of masculinities and femininities have provoked wide historical discussion.<sup>465</sup> Gender ideologies have been regarded as essential in underpinning wartime identities. While traditional historians, such as Arthur Marwick, have argued that the experience of war work was liberating for women and that the 1918 extension of the franchise was evidence that the war shook the foundations of traditional gender assumptions, other scholars have regarded the issue as more complex.<sup>466</sup> For example, Susan Grayzel has asserted that the war strengthened the value placed on motherhood in British society, while Susan Kingsley Kent has argued that anxieties fuelled by perceptions of female wartime liberation ultimately led to post-war attempts to re-establish a traditional gender order.<sup>467</sup> Wartime gender ideologies appear to be significant to the experience of German civilians in a number of ways. As Gullace has highlighted, gender could be used as a tool to enhance understandings of citizenship and perceptions of who could and could not be judged as 'belonging' to British society, debates which affected enemy aliens as they became classed as 'anti-citizens'.<sup>468</sup> Gender ideologies were also central to the formulation of atrocity propaganda which depicted women as victims of a highly aggressive, militaristic and masculine German war machine and thus helped to define a specific image of 'the German'.<sup>469</sup> In

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<sup>465</sup> One of the original proponents that women made considerable social and political advances is Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991 [first edition 1965]). More recent interpretations of these points include: Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*; Gullace, "*The Blood of Our Sons*"; Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, (London: Croom Helm, 1989); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Sybil Oldfield (ed.), *This Working Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

<sup>466</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, pp.95-105.

<sup>467</sup> Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, p.3; Kent, *Making Peace*, p.22.

<sup>468</sup> Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens, and Enemies', pp.347-50.

<sup>469</sup> For a discussion of the significance of gender in atrocity stories, see Gullace, 'Sexual Violence', p.724-729.



addition, the development of internment itself was a strongly gendered experience as a policy which was directed, in general terms, only at men. This chapter will examine what this reveals about wider discourses on masculinity and femininity, and their association with the military and civilian spheres.

In light of an abundance of literature relating to the gendering of experiences of the First World War, it seems surprising that little consideration has been given to the policies towards women of enemy nationality in Britain, or to differences in the treatment of men and women and their experiences as 'enemy aliens'. This contrasts with the historiography on the Second World War, which has begun, on a limited scale, to engage with the experiences of female 'enemy aliens'.<sup>470</sup> In terms of the First World War, Panayi and J. C. Bird have highlighted the different practical implications of official policy on men and women, which involved internment within Britain for men and repatriation to Germany for women.<sup>471</sup> However, deeper analysis of the decision-making behind these differing policies has not yet been undertaken and Stibbe has described the wives and families of internees as the "forgotten victims" of internment policies.<sup>472</sup> In addition, with the exception of work by Tammy Proctor on female spies, little attention has been given to the experiences of the small number of women interned under Regulation 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) as being of 'hostile origin or association'.<sup>473</sup> In light of the highly

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<sup>470</sup> See, for example, Miriam Kochan, 'Women's Experience of Internment', in Cesarani and Kushner, *Internment of Aliens*, pp.147-166 and Charmian Brinson, 'Loyal to the Reich? National Socialists and Others in the Rushen Women's Internment Camp', in Dove, "*Totally Un-English*"?, pp.101-120.

<sup>471</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, J. C. Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians in Great Britain 1914-1918*, (London: Garland, 1986)

<sup>472</sup> Stibbe, 'Civilian Internment', p.73.

<sup>473</sup> Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, Chapter 2.

gendered debate on the treatment of women and children during the Boer War, and strong opposition to this earlier British policy defined by notions of chivalry towards women, it seems pertinent to question whether these ideals had any influence during the First World War. If not, further questions may need to be raised about whether such gender ideologies continued to have significance and, if so, how they were reconciled with the policy of repatriation. This chapter will address this issue and will attempt to ascertain whether a popular image of the German woman came close to being conceived. Examination of official sources indicates that the treatment of women was a subject which received considerable attention from government officials, and this chapter will utilise both the public and private responses of the British authorities, records of charitable institutions such as the Society of Friends, and the records of individuals held at the Imperial War Museum and Manx National Library, to provide insight into the wartime experiences of enemy alien women.

Tammy Proctor's investigation into female espionage in Britain comes closest to addressing the development of specific imagery of the 'enemy' female. Her analysis is constructed against both a wider consideration of attitudes towards women in Britain during the war, and the highly gendered operation of the intelligence services, wherein she argues that the contribution made by women was overshadowed by their depiction as "harlots of the state."<sup>474</sup> Proctor has argued that, within the 'spy fever' that gripped Britain between 1914 and 1918, the few female agents who were arrested were regarded as a particular threat, and that single, foreign women could

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<sup>474</sup> Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, p.148.

be depicted as an “evil influence”.<sup>475</sup> Using MI5 branch reports and the recollections of former intelligence service officials, Proctor has suggested that female spies were often seen as doubly subversive; by practicing espionage they constituted a practical threat to British national security, but they were also regarded as dangerous due to perceptions of them as emotional, unstable, and seductive. This latter image, she has argued, was particularly significant, and was underpinned by wider anxieties about “female sexual betrayal” and the sense that this could ultimately result in “the instability of the nation.”<sup>476</sup> Proctor’s suggestion that fears about female sexuality and foreignness combined to create an image of the female spy as a particularly potent threat to the nation offers some useful insights into possible connections between national identities, gender and race. However, her focus on espionage means that she does not address the way that ‘ordinary’ German women were regarded in British society. Scope remains for investigation into the extent to which the ‘dangerous spy’ came to typify all German women, or whether evidence exists of more tempered attitudes towards female ‘enemy aliens’.

This chapter will specifically consider the impact of ideologies of race, gender and national identity on British policy-making on ‘enemy aliens’ during the First World War. It will examine the extent to which the development of a specific image of the enemy impacted on policy-making towards enemy aliens in Britain, and will analyse the roles of race and gender assumptions in generating such images. The chapter

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<sup>475</sup> Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, p.43.

<sup>476</sup> Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, p.43. For a discussion of perceptions of the danger of female sexuality during the First World War, and attempts to limit the spread of VD to British troops by implementing legislative controls against women, see Angela Woollacott, ‘‘Khaki Fever’ and Its Control. Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29, 2, 1994, pp.325-347.

will also address the significance of gender in decisions on internment, and will examine the experiences of enemy alien women, both in terms of the impact of the internment of male family members, and of the small number who were interned in their own right.

### **Imagining the enemy**

Throughout the war, British attitudes towards enemy aliens were closely related to popular perceptions of the activities and behaviour of German military forces. During the early weeks of the conflict, such perceptions focused significantly on the responsibility of the German leadership in orchestrating the war. Press reports frequently highlighted the aggression of German political and military leaders, particularly the Kaiser, who was widely depicted as a power-crazed despot responsible for leading Europe into war.<sup>477</sup> Highly significant to this early form of anti-German rhetoric was widely-expressed outrage concerning the illegality of the invasion of Belgium, a German military act which violated the Treaty of London of 1839.<sup>478</sup> During the early days of the war, while lamenting the necessity of the war to the British Ambassador to Berlin, the German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg referred to this treaty as a “scrap of paper” and unwittingly coined a phrase which would be wielded by British propagandists throughout the war as evidence of German disdain and disregard for international laws and the principles of fair play and freedom.<sup>479</sup> The significance of this form of anti-German hostility for enemy aliens in Britain was that it created a division between the behaviour of the German leadership and ordinary German people, meaning that that an association between German civilians

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<sup>477</sup> *Daily Mail*, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.3.

<sup>478</sup> Gullace, 'Sexual Violence', pp.719-723.

<sup>479</sup> Gullace, 'Sexual Violence', p.720.

and German military actions was not necessarily automatic. The imposition of blame on the 'brutal' German leadership could allow the German people to be presented as its misguided victims. On 13<sup>th</sup> August 1914, for example, the *Daily Mail* cited, under the title 'Kaiserism Must Go', an article by the socialist Robert Blatchford in which he presented the war as the result of "devilish" scheming by the German leaders, who had "deceive[d] their own people" into becoming embroiled in conflict.<sup>480</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> August, a regional newspaper published a sermon by a local clergyman arguing that the British people had "no grudge against the German people," and describing the conflict as not "a war against a race", but a "war against a caste."<sup>481</sup> Although the press also gave increasing attention to reports from Belgium of German atrocities, which developed throughout August, the focus on the flaws of the German military and political leadership allowed a separation to be made between the German authorities and the German people. This distinction enabled some contemporaries to express sympathy towards enemy nationals living in Britain. Less than a fortnight after the outbreak of war, for example, the *Brighton Herald* addressed the issue of enemy aliens in positive tones:

We are at war with Germany and Austria, it is true. But we are not at war with the individuals of the German colony in Brighton – harmless, respectable men and women finding themselves, by no fault of their own, at war with the country of their adoption, and torn with grief and anxiety knowing not what the morrow may bring forth.<sup>482</sup>

This is not to suggest that hostility towards German civilians did not exist during the early weeks of the war, but that at this stage it was sometimes tempered by

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<sup>480</sup> 'Kaiserism Must Go', *Daily Mail*, 13 August 1914, p.6.

<sup>481</sup> Report on a sermon by Rev. J. G. Henderson, *Eastbourne Chronicle*, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.2.

<sup>482</sup> 'Under the Shadow of War. The Bomb Myth', *Brighton Herald*, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.8.

examples of tolerance and with a recognition that not all enemy aliens should be regarded a threat. This inclination towards sympathy may have been related to the nineteenth-century tradition of positive attitudes towards German immigrants, based particularly on ideas of cultural and 'racial' affinity, which had only relatively recently begun to be undermined by the political tension of the pre-war period.<sup>483</sup> In the early weeks of the war a certain ambiguity in attitudes towards enemy aliens can be detected even in the more aggressive sections of the press. For example, on 12<sup>th</sup> August the *Daily Express* called on the Government to introduce general internment as a method of safeguarding national security, but acknowledged the fact that this would cause inconvenience to numbers of "innocent" enemy aliens.<sup>484</sup> In Parliament, calls for tighter restrictions against enemy aliens were, at this stage, not extensive, and although some MPs raised the issue of internment, such a policy was most often discussed with reference to groups of enemy aliens who were perceived as being particularly dangerous, such as the unemployed or those suspected of espionage.<sup>485</sup>

While demands for internment were not as widespread as they were later to become, enemy civilians – and particularly Germans – quickly came to form the focus of the popular 'spy fever' which swept the country from August 1914.<sup>486</sup> Concerns about possible German espionage began appearing in the press within days of the

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<sup>483</sup> Panayi, *German Immigrants*, p.237.

<sup>484</sup> 'The Alien Peril', *Daily Express*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.1.

<sup>485</sup> On 28<sup>th</sup> August the subject of internment was referred to in the House of Commons. Hunt recommended the internment of all unemployed Germans, while Hume Williams suggested that all male enemy aliens should be interned. Lord Charles Beresford called for stricter measures against Germans suspected of being spies. Hansard, HC Deb, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1914, vol. 66, cols. 266-8.

<sup>486</sup> Although Austrians and Hungarians also became the target of spy fears, German spies had been central to such discourses since the turn of the century owing to the increasingly competitive and aggressive nature of Anglo-German relations, and they remained the main focus of the wartime spy panics.

outbreak of hostilities, and tales of the activities of German spies had become so widespread by the end of August that the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, made an attempt in the House of Commons to scotch the rumours.<sup>487</sup> Espionage was a popular theme in the press, and the *Daily Mail* and the right-wing, nationalist periodical, *John Bull*, were particularly active in warning their readers about the spy threat in Britain.<sup>488</sup> German and Austrian waiters, who were employed in large numbers in London hotels and seaside resorts, became particular targets of suspicion.<sup>489</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> August, W. E. Pead, an Englishman on holiday in Wales, recorded in his diary his suspicion of German waiters working in the hotel where he was staying. His concerns about their potential espionage activities (based on their unpleasant “attitudes” at dinner) led him to embark on a night-time investigation of apparent spy signalling, which turned out to be the beam of the local lighthouse.<sup>490</sup> During August 1914, a London woman recorded in her diary the extensive rumours concerning spies and their arrests which were circulating the city.<sup>491</sup> Such evidence indicates the extent to which concerns about espionage quickly became part of the everyday lives of ordinary people. The power of ‘spy fever’ to infect even more tolerant circles can be seen in the responses of the *Manchester Guardian* to the

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<sup>487</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1914, vol. 66, col. 268. McKenna informed the House that, in regard of espionage activities, “no evidence of actual malpractice has come to the knowledge of the police”. Hampshire has noted that, during the war pre-war years, the German spy had been a frequent villain in popular works of fiction, as well as texts pertaining to be ‘non-fiction’. It was therefore not surprising that ‘spy fever’ flourished so rapidly in August 1914. Hampshire, ‘Spy Fever’, pp.23-24.

<sup>488</sup> ‘British Waiters Only – Too Many Germans’, *Daily Mail*, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1914; ‘Points for Patriots. Keep your eye on the aliens!’, *John Bull*, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1914, p.10; ‘Knights of the Napkin’, *John Bull*, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914, p.3.

<sup>489</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, p.157.

<sup>490</sup> W.E. Pead, ‘War Diary, Vol. 1: Aug 5, 1914 to Nov 20, 1918’, Entry for 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914: Imperial War Museum, London, 06/28/1.

<sup>491</sup> Diary of a London Lady (Anonymous), 7<sup>th</sup> August 1914; 8<sup>th</sup> August 1914; 13<sup>th</sup> August 1914; 30<sup>th</sup> August 1914: Imperial War Museum, London, MISC 29 ITEM 522.

issue. At the end of August the newspaper reassured its readers that the authorities had matters in hand regarding potential espionage, and criticized other newspapers for their “panicky” reaction to the enemy alien issue.<sup>492</sup> Within two months however, the same newspaper was asserting that “the extent and the minuteness of Germany’s pre-war arrangements for spying and collusive action in neighbouring countries” went “beyond all previous experience.”<sup>493</sup>

While potential enemy espionage was a major theme of the press during August and September 1914, media attention was perhaps even more preoccupied during this period with emerging reports of the “appalling brutality” of German troops in Belgium.<sup>494</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> August, the *Daily Mail* reported that German forces had shot Belgian peasants, burned property, executed local officials and used civilians as human shields.<sup>495</sup> Such stories were given legitimacy two weeks later when an official report from the Belgian authorities confirmed that extensive atrocities had been committed by German troops, including the rape of young girls and the mutilation of children.<sup>496</sup> From this point, German atrocities became central to British justifications of the war, and even the *Manchester Guardian* began to attack the German forces for continuing to “strain their belligerent rights and to inflict wholly unnecessary suffering and pain on non-combatants.”<sup>497</sup> A focus on atrocity reports provided a clear moral justification for the war, and the extent to which such stories permeated popular consciousness is evident from contemporary accounts of the

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<sup>492</sup> ‘The Spy Peril’, *Manchester Guardian*, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.2.

<sup>493</sup> ‘The Right Way to Do It’, *Manchester Guardian*, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1914, p.4.

<sup>494</sup> ‘German Brutality’, *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.2.

<sup>495</sup> ‘German Brutality’, *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.2.

<sup>496</sup> ‘German Savageries – Belgians’ Protest’, *Daily Mail*, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.4.

<sup>497</sup> ‘War and its laws’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p.4.



time. A London resident, for example, recorded the widespread sense of “furious indignation” which was developing in response to reports of atrocities by the end of August 1914.<sup>498</sup> Similarly, Kent woman Ethel Bilbrough repeatedly recorded in her diary her horror at reports of German atrocities, utilising language which mirrored that used in media and propaganda accounts.<sup>499</sup>

The increasing centrality of atrocity stories to popular perceptions of the war meant that the rhetorical separation in British discourses between the German people and their leaders was rapidly undermined. Repeated reports of the barbarity of German troops fostered the idea that the aggressive tendencies of the German government were shared by its people. While British newspapers occasionally mitigated atrocity stories with the opinion that not all German troops could be capable of such crimes<sup>500</sup>, this approach became less frequent as the initial months of the war passed. The stark imagery of propaganda posters warned the British public of the disturbing levels of German brutality, which was increasingly depicted as a problem which permeated all levels of the German military, from policy-makers to the lowest ranks. Gregory has associated the development of atrocity stories over the winter of 1914 to 1915, when their scope expanded to include the air raids on civilian targets and the use of poison gas in the trenches, with a shift in popular attitudes towards the enemy. He has suggested that the predominance of atrocity stories in the British

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<sup>498</sup> ‘Diary of a London Lady (Anonymous)’, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1914: Imperial War Museum, London, MISC 29 ITEM 522

<sup>499</sup> ‘The First World War Diary of Mrs E.M. Bilbrough’, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1915: Imperial War Museum, London, Documents.630. The impact of newspaper reports on Bilbrough’s attitudes is also indicated by her frequent inclusion of press clippings to reinforce her condemnation of atrocities.

<sup>500</sup> H. Hamilton Fyfe, ‘The Barbarity of German Troops – Sins Against Civilisation’, *Daily Mail*, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1914, p.4.

media overshadowed the discourses which had been found earlier in the war involving criticism of the German Government and military culture. The relentless focus on the brutality and savagery of German troops led to the development of an explanation for German aggression which rested on a belief in the inherent racial flaws of the entire German population.<sup>501</sup>

This shift can be seen most acutely in responses to the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, an event which came shortly after reports of poison gas attacks by German forces in the trenches, and was represented in the British press as the ultimate evidence of German inhumanity towards innocent civilians and violation of the rules of 'civilised' warfare.<sup>502</sup> The attack on the *Lusitania* appears to have had a tremendous impact on the British psyche. Bilbrough described it as an "unparalleled outrage", while Kate Courtney, a leading figure in the Society's of Friends' charitable campaign for the support of enemy aliens, suggested that the intense reaction it provoked was likely to represent an "epoch in the war"<sup>503</sup>. In response to the sinking, the *Daily Mail* led the right-leaning popular press in describing the "German foe" as a "stabbing, slashing, trampling, homicidal maniac, dead to all sense of respect for the laws of God and man."<sup>504</sup> The incident appears to have represented a highly significant moment in consolidating a dominant discourse which saw all Germans as inherently inclined towards cruelty and barbarism. From this point, sections of the press turned increasingly to 'racial' explanations of German behaviour, suggesting

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<sup>501</sup> Gregory, 'Clash of Cultures', p.41.

<sup>502</sup> 'The sinking of the *Lusitania*', *The Times*, 8 May 1915, p.5; *Daily Mail*, 8 May 1915, p.3.

<sup>503</sup> Kate Courtney Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1915: LSE Archives, COURTNEY/36 1912-19.

<sup>504</sup> *Daily Mail*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.3.

that such savagery was only possible due to the nature of the German people.<sup>505</sup> The publication, shortly after the *Lusitania* incident, of the Bryce report, only reinforced such understandings.<sup>506</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> May, the *Daily Mail* featured an article by its former Berlin correspondent, Frederic William Wile, who argued that his time in Germany had given him insight into the German “character”, which was distinguished by a “...callousness towards brutality, rapine, and life-taking [that] reaches a point among the rank and file of German people which is as incredible as it is revolting.”<sup>507</sup> Even the generally more sober *Times* declared that the incident had provoked the “intensest [*sic*] anger because it makes finally clear, even to the doubters and the indifferent, the hideous policy of indiscriminate brutality which has placed the whole German race outside the pale of civilized communities.”<sup>508</sup>

The racialization of the German people in response to atrocity reports had potentially serious repercussions for enemy aliens in Britain since the logical extension of such ideas suggested that these Germans civilians shared the apparently inherent propensity towards brutality demonstrated by their kinsmen on the continent. An explicit association between German civilians in Britain and the atrocities of the German forces was made in the right-wing press. This included the infamous demand by *John Bull's* editor, Horatio Bottomley, for a “vendetta” against Germans in Britain. Bottomley argued that all individuals of German origin should be ostracized

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<sup>505</sup> Gregory, ‘Clash of Cultures’, p.38. For examples, see Frederic William Wile, *Daily Mail*, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.8; *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1915; Horatio Bottomley, ‘Now for the Vendetta’, *John Bull*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.7.

<sup>506</sup> *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages appointed by His Britannic Majesty's government and presided over by the Right Hon. Viscount Bryce*, (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1915)

<sup>507</sup> Frederic William Wile, *Daily Mail*, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.8.

<sup>508</sup> ‘The Outlaws of Civilization’, *The Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.9.

from British society and he made explicit connections between German atrocities and German civilians in Britain, stating:

Picture how today the German barber, the German butcher, the German baker and the German financier are grinning, and in their hellish hearts exalting over the tragedy of the *Lusitania*. Remember that the German is by instinct a spy, a sneak, a murderer, a ruffian, a barbarian – and that, whether ‘naturalized’ or not, always a German.<sup>509</sup>

The widespread violence against enemy alien civilians in response to the *Lusitania* sinking indicates the extent to which the press campaign against the Germans as a ‘race’ resonated with sections of the British public. Within days of the news of the *Lusitania* disaster, outbreaks of rioting occurred against German civilians in British towns and cities, including Liverpool, London, and Manchester.<sup>510</sup> These attacks have been regarded as some of the most significant incidents of racial violence in Britain during the twentieth century, and were particularly remarkable in the fact that they were part of a global phenomenon, with similar scenes erupting as far away as Russia, South Africa and New Zealand.<sup>511</sup> The idea that the physical violence exhibited in the riots was related to a belief in the shared culpability of German civilians for the crimes of German troops was widely-accepted by contemporaries. The *Daily Mirror* claimed to understand, although not condone, the “outburst of fury

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<sup>509</sup> Horatio Bottomley, ‘Now for the Vendetta!’, *John Bull*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.7.

<sup>510</sup> For discussions of the riots see: Panayi, *Enemy*, Chapter 8, pp.223-258; Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, Enemies’, pp.345-267

<sup>511</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, p.223. A recent conference of international scholars at De Montfort University, ‘Germans as Minorities During the First World War: An International Comparative Perspective’, concluded that May 1915 was a highly significant moment in the development of anti-German hostility globally. Hostility towards local Germans, which fell short of actual violence, was also observed in smaller districts with a low alien presence. For example, in Brighton, a prohibited area with a cosmopolitan reputation, an anti-German demonstration took place outside a pub managed by a naturalized German: ‘Anti-German Demonstration’, *Brighton Herald*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.12.

against men of the same blood as those who sank the Lusitania.”<sup>512</sup> One Sheffield woman defended her role in riots against German civilians by linking them with atrocities by German troops: “Look at what the Germans have done to the poor Belgian babies,” she protested, “They have cut their little heads off. I do not think it is right...”<sup>513</sup> Pat O’Mara, a working-class Liverpudlian who was involved in the riots, later recalled that his mother was “beyond reasoning” in her belief that Germans civilians deserved internment, and that “to prove her point she showed me reports of the latest German atrocities.”<sup>514</sup> Right-wing groups would continue to capitalize on this theme throughout the war; a British Empire League poster of 1918, for example, entitled ‘Once a German, Always a German’, showed a brutish-looking German officer carrying a bloodstained knife away from a female corpse superimposed beside an identical man wearing civilian clothes and carrying a briefcase in place of a knife.<sup>515</sup>

To a certain extent, the association of ‘enemy’ civilians with the atrocities carried out by the German military forces was indicative of the more general blurring between civilian and military spheres evident in twentieth century ‘total’ warfare.<sup>516</sup> Britain’s war effort demanded commitment from its civilian population as well as its combatant forces, and it is unsurprising that enemy civilians could be imagined as equally engaged with their nation’s war aims. However, the racialization of the German people, particularly from 1915 onwards, took this pattern to an extreme which would

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<sup>512</sup> ‘London Mob’s Wild Outburst Of Fury Against Germans’, *Daily Mirror*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.2.

<sup>513</sup> Cited in Gerald Newton, ‘Germans in Sheffield 1817-1918’, *German Life and Letters*, 46, 1, 1993, pp.82-101, p.90.

<sup>514</sup> O’Mara, *Autobiography*, p.174.

<sup>515</sup> British Empire League, ‘Once a German, Always a German’, 1918, Imperial War Museum Poster Collection, Q 80141.

<sup>516</sup> Stibbe, ‘Civilian internment’, p.51.

not be repeated to anything like the same extent during the following 'total' war of 1939-1945. During the Second World War, which was widely considered to be a war of ideologies, most contemporaries would acknowledge a distinction between the possession of enemy nationality and an individual's support for enemy aims. In contrast, the First World War was regarded as a conflict of nations (and, increasingly, of 'races') with national survival ultimately at stake.<sup>517</sup> As depictions of the war as a conflict between good and evil became consolidated, German civilians became increasingly associated with the negative image of the German nation. The readiness with which the racialization of the enemy occurred was also likely to have been related to pre-war discourses which, as has been seen, linked the power of the nation with the 'racial' strength of its subjects.<sup>518</sup>

Particular evidence of the significance of racial thinking in perceptions of enemy aliens can be found in popular attitudes towards naturalized Germans. Throughout the war, the Home Office came under considerable pressure from certain MPs to introduce restrictive measures, including internment, against naturalized people of German origin. Such individuals, it was argued, were more likely to pose a threat to national security than the ordinary enemy alien, since, firstly, they tended to be wealthier (a naturalization certificate had to be paid for) and were presumably therefore more influential; and, secondly, because they could hide their identities, protected by their British citizen status, and live more effectively as the 'enemy in the midst.'<sup>519</sup> The increasing racialization of the enemy led to particular hostility towards

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<sup>517</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, p.79.

<sup>518</sup> Searle, *Quest*, pp.60-61; Searle, *Eugenics and Politics*, pp.22-23.

<sup>519</sup> See, for example, Hansard, HC Deb, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, vol. 71, cols 1646-8; Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, cols. 822-824.

British citizens of German origin, whose British citizenship on paper, it was argued, could not belie their German heritage. The most infamous example of such attitudes was Horatio Bottomley's racist rant in *John Bull*, during which he argued that "you can't naturalize an unnatural beast – a human abortion - a hellish freak. But you can exterminate it."<sup>520</sup> However, milder expressions of such attitudes were also evident in other areas of the press, as well as in Parliament. In the House of Commons, Lord Charles Beresford remarked that he did "not think that naturalisation can change a man's nature."<sup>521</sup> Meanwhile, the *Daily Mail*, asked: "What alchemy in our English air changes the German blood? What is there in the "scrap of paper" of a naturalisation oath that makes a German not a German still?"<sup>522</sup> Those contemporaries who were most belligerently anti-German called for internment to be extended to naturalized Germans, an action which the government resisted on the grounds that it would undermine British civil rights.<sup>523</sup> However, in June 1915, the Defence of the Realm Act was extended to include Regulation 14B, which allowed the internment of persons of "hostile origin or association" if held to be necessary by the authorities.<sup>524</sup>

In Asquith's speech of 12<sup>th</sup> May 1915, outlining the government's plans for general internment, the Prime Minister made a clear link between atrocity stories, public violence and internment decisions, which strongly indicated that the government

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<sup>520</sup> 'Now for the Vendetta!', *John Bull*, 15 May 1915, p.6.

<sup>521</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1914, vol. 68, col. 1382.

<sup>522</sup> *Daily Mail*, 12 May 1915, p.4. For discussion of the power of the image of the 'scrap of paper', and the relationship of this image with wider stories of German atrocities, see Gullace, 'Sexual Violence', pp.219-223.

<sup>523</sup> The Government's position on the subject of naturalized Germans was outlined by Sir John Simon in the House of Commons in June 1915: Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, cols 815-91.

<sup>524</sup> For discussion of the introduction and administration of this regulation see A. W. Brian Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious*, pp.5-34.

believed that a racialized conceptualization of the enemy had taken root with the public. Asquith's reference to the "progressive violation by the enemy of the usages of civilised warfare and the rules of humanity" echoed the sentiments which had been building in the press for several months. Although the Prime Minister attempted to draw a distinction between "innocent and unoffending" German civilians in Britain and the actions of the German military, the content of his speech made it clear that the government believed that, for significant sections of the British population, this distinction had become blurred.<sup>525</sup> The calls for wholesale internment in the press and Parliament during 1914-1915 repeatedly emphasized the potential danger of the "enemies within our midst".<sup>526</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> May, as riots continued in British cities, Conservative MP Lord Robert Cecil, who was shortly to be appointed Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, based his support for general internment on the horrors of German atrocities:

I think, after poisonous gas, after the "Lusitania," and the terrible Blue Book now published [the Bryce report], it is really absurd to suppose that we have any right to think that the Germans are not capable of any crime. We have no right to assume that they will act as ordinary human beings, and we are therefore, bound to take all possible precautions to protect ourselves and the people of this country against the most dastardly, treacherous, and cruel attacks that the mind of man can conceive...<sup>527</sup>

The threat that the German military forces represented could be regarded as even more potent when it translated into a danger within Britain's borders. Two months earlier, Lord Charles Beresford had attacked enemy aliens in language which underlined their association with the military enemy: "We must remember we have

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<sup>525</sup> 'Correspondence to as the Internment and Release of Alien Enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915: Prime Minister's Statements': National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

<sup>526</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, vol. 71, cols 1841-78.

<sup>527</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, vol. 71, col. 1845.



got men in the trenches and in the field who are laying down their lives for the country, and those men are all anxious. They are leaving behind them hotbeds of treason, which is far more dangerous to the life of this country than the German submarines with which we are confronted.”<sup>528</sup> The language in Beresford’s statement not only created the image of a vulnerable civilian population left at the mercy of the enemy, it also hinted at the insidious, potentially corrupting danger of German footholds of culture in Britain. By doing this he drew on a number of elements of the wider anti-German imagery which had become well established in the British media and twisted them into an emotive appeal for internment. This tactic of tapping into fears about the vulnerability of a nation whose men (and natural ‘defenders’) were fighting overseas was not uncommon in calls for internment, and the policy could be given particular moral weight when depicted as essential for “the safety of our women, our wives, and our daughters”, as asserted by Conservative MP Sir William Joynson-Hicks.<sup>529</sup> The gendered language deployed in these appeals is particularly significant because it drew on sentiments with which the British public were already familiar through their exposure to atrocity propaganda. The gendered undercurrents in discussions of atrocities, from which had emerged the image of the German as aggressive, brutal and male, meant that threat of enemy alien men in Britain could be seen as particularly significant. This goes some way to explaining why calls for general internment were almost always aimed at male enemy civilians.

Imagery representing women and children as victims of German aggression was central to many of the most notorious atrocity stories of the war. German brutality

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<sup>528</sup> Lord Charles Beresford, Hansard, HC Deb, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915, vol. 70, cols 833-916.

<sup>529</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915, vol. 70, cols. 833-916.

towards innocent civilians was highlighted in reports of a number of incidents, including the bombing raids carried out on British towns and cities, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and the execution of British nurse Edith Cavell by German forces in Belgium. Reports of the *Lusitania* sinking, which took place on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1915, repeatedly emphasized the deaths of babies and young children, and the *Daily Mail* embellished its stories with photographs of the children who had drowned in the attack.<sup>530</sup> When British towns were targeted by German bombers in 1917, contemporary diarist, Ethel Bilbrough, lamented the victims in tones which echoed the press reporting on German atrocities: “poor old women, helpless children, babies in arms, all were ruthlessly mutilated, killed and wounded’.<sup>531</sup> John Hartigan has argued that atrocity stories were particularly shocking to British wartime audiences due to the great significance placed in British society on the protection of women, children, and the home (and what Gregory has described as the “cult of domesticity”<sup>532</sup>), as well as ideals relating to justice and fair play. Atrocity stories could be highly effective in engendering ongoing support for the war because they kindled fears about the ability of German forces to strike at some of the most sacred areas of British life.<sup>533</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> May, for example, the *Daily Mail* warned its readers that Germany had “declared war to the death...on every British man, women, and child non-combatant” and warned that the atrocities committed in Belgium would “be as nothing to the burnings, tortures, and massacres that will dumbfound the world if

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<sup>530</sup> Untitled page of photographs, *Daily Mail*, 11<sup>th</sup> May, back page; ‘The Charnel House’, *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.8.

<sup>531</sup> Bilbrough diary, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1917: Imperial War Museum, London, Documents.630.

<sup>532</sup> Gregory, ‘Clash of Cultures’, p.30.

<sup>533</sup> John Hartigan, ‘Volunteering in the First World War: The Birmingham Experience, August 1914-May 1915’, *Midland History*, 24, 1999, pp.167-186; p.180.

German troops obtain even temporary footing in England”.<sup>534</sup> Although the atrocity stories would probably have provoked shock in any community it is likely that British propagandists used them to reinforce the antipathy of German tactics to ‘British values’ and deepened their impact by stressing the vulnerability of Britain in general, and its women and children in particular.<sup>535</sup>

One of the most significant elements of atrocity stories was their ability to highlight German abuse of the civilian sphere, and it has been convincingly argued that such reports formed the basis for more complex gendered imaginings of the war. Susan Kingsley Kent has argued that reports of widespread and brutal rapes of Belgian women encouraged the conceptualization of the war itself in sexual terms, ensuring that “the rape and sexual mutilation of women dominated contemporaries’ imaginings and representations” of the conflict.<sup>536</sup> Gullace has argued that one of the most significant ways in which sexual crime became central to the wartime imagination was the extent to which reports of the rape of Belgian women by German soldiers quickly became subsumed within a broader gendered discourse, underpinned by the image of the violation of the nation of Belgium itself by the predatory German state.<sup>537</sup> As the war progressed, British, and later American, propagandists utilised this image repeatedly, and posters of Belgian women being attacked by German soldiers, or depicting Belgium itself as a violated woman, were still being produced in 1918.<sup>538</sup> Such imagery reinforced the strict gendering of the civilian and military

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<sup>534</sup> *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.4.

<sup>535</sup> Gullace, ‘Sexual Violence’, p.734.

<sup>536</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, p.25.

<sup>537</sup> Gullace, ‘Sexual Violence’, p.743.

<sup>538</sup> ‘Remember Belgium’, US War Bonds Poster, 1918: Imperial War Museum, London, Art.IWM PST 0303.

spheres and fed into an image of the German state itself as a brutal 'male' aggressor against more passive nations.

Gullace has argued that, in utilising atrocity stories as propaganda, the British authorities were drawing on lessons which they had learnt from the South African War. She has suggested that the "humiliating propaganda defeat" represented by the concentration camps scandal made the British government aware of the importance of maintaining a positive national image, and ensured that they were "prepared to take the moral offensive" during the First World War.<sup>539</sup> The furore over the British 'scorched earth' policy in South Africa had demonstrated the significance, in British imaginations, of maintaining a division between military and civilians spheres. It is likely that this earlier experience had an impact on First World War propaganda, since, in their criticism of German treatment of non-combatants British observers tended to draw on similar ideas concerning 'civilized' behaviour and values, including themes such as the sanctity of the home and the protection of women and children. As has been seen, debates on the behaviour of the British military towards civilians in South Africa had been extremely divisive and had led many contemporaries to the question the validity of 'British' beliefs and practices. In contrast, by presenting an image of the German military as an invading force perpetrating barbaric behaviour towards civilians, First World War propagandists encouraged a dominant, anti-German discourse to develop which offered a justification for the war and a sense of cohesion among the British public.

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<sup>539</sup> Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp.19-20.

## British self-image

While atrocity stories were highly significant in creating a climate in which internment became acceptable, they also played a second role; that of defining and reinforcing a particular form of British national self-image. The use of imagery which crudely outlined the violation by the Germans of accepted levels of morality also implicitly made a point about what *British* morality should constitute. Hartigan has argued that when propaganda stressed the disregard of the German 'enemy' for the sanctity of the home, the honour of women and the safety of children, it held a particular resonance because these were ideals which were understood to be essential foundations of British society.<sup>540</sup> At the same time, however, it is likely that the propaganda played a role in reinforcing the significance of such themes to the British public. The scandalised tone of much of Britain's anti-German propaganda underlined the sense that German behaviour was alien and incomprehensible, and represented the antithesis of British values. The German violation of Belgian neutrality in August 1914, for example, was used to justify Britain's position in the war, but the self-consciously moralistic response to the event was significant because it implicitly stressed the 'British' belief in fairness, justice and the integrity of international law.<sup>541</sup> The demonization of the Germans therefore both drew on and reinforced ideas about what it meant to be British. As Jay Winter has argued: "The First World War helped mould British national identity by providing a host of hateful symbols against which the nature of the 'British way of life came into high relief."<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Hartigan, 'Volunteering', p.180.

<sup>541</sup> For discussion of the way in which the invasion of Belgium was presented in the British press, see Gullace, 'Sexual Violence'.

<sup>542</sup> J. M. Winter, 'British national identity and the First World War', in S.J.D. Green and R.C. Whiting (eds.), *The boundaries of the state in modern Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.261-277; p.268.

The idea that German military atrocities stemmed from the savagery of the German people enabled the war to be depicted, in its starkest form, as essentially a battle between good and evil. The repeated allusions to the war as a clash between barbaric Germany and civilized Britain, reinforced an idealised version of British national identity and the significance of values and institutions the British held dear. The antithesis of German culture to British customs and values was particularly emphasized in the utilisation of the concept of 'civilization' in wartime propaganda. The brutality of the reported atrocities in Belgium, labelled "Sins Against Civilisation", was used to demonstrate German abandonment of civilized norms.<sup>543</sup> The development of an image of the enemy defined by its barbaric tendencies and its failure to conform to British standards of 'civilization' had significant similarities with the discourses which developed regarding the Boer as the 'enemy' during the South African War. While the definition of 'barbarism' differed, with the Boers having been criticized for their backwardness rather than their brutality, both conflicts saw the development of imagery which highlighted the negative traits of the 'enemy' and reinforced what was felt to be significant in terms of British 'civilized' values and achievements. In both cases, gender assumptions were essential to this imagery. While the backwardness of the Boer community was underlined by perceptions of the failure of Boer women to conform to 'civilized' levels of domesticity and maternal care, the brutishness of the Germans was typified by the abandonment by German men of 'civilized' gender codes which placed a high value on the male role as protector of women and children.

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<sup>543</sup> Hamilton Fyfe, 'The Barbarity of German Troops – Sins Against Civilisation', *Daily Mail*, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1914, p.4.

The justification of anti-German sentiment with references to British values became more difficult to sustain, however, when such sentiment developed into violence, and this was most clearly evident in reactions to the *Lusitania* riots. While much of the right wing popular press had been heavily involved in the anti-German campaign and had led calls for internment, such newspapers expressed uneasiness at the outbreaks of violence. Although the British media universally condemned the sinking of the *Lusitania* there was uncertainty over how to respond to the riots; a tense mixture of support for the anti-German sentiments the violence epitomized and concern that this violence might undermine Britain's reputation for tolerance, was widely evident. While calls for internment could be reconciled with Britain's positive self-image, serious aggression against German civilians, with victims including women and children, was more difficult to justify. As a result, even the belligerent *Daily Mail* paid lip service to condemning the violence, expressing its "regret [for] the form which British indignation is taking against the Germans in Britain".<sup>544</sup> Similarly, *The Times* appears to have been torn between satisfaction that the public was embracing its anti-German message, and alarm at the stain the riots threatened to leave on Britain's reputation. One editorial applauded the "evidence that the public has been roused to a consciousness of the formidable character of the German menace" but deplored the violence itself for undermining "the immemorial English reputation for steadiness and dignity".<sup>545</sup>

It is also significant to note that anti-German sentiment was not an isolated example of wartime hostility towards minorities. Historians such as Panayi have argued that

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<sup>544</sup> *Daily Mail*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.3.

<sup>545</sup> 'Internment the only remedy', *The Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.9.

anti-Germanism should be considered within the context of a general increase in xenophobia and racism during the war.<sup>546</sup> One significant example of this was a rise in antisemitism, directed in particular at Russian Jews, who became the victims of a hostile press campaign in 1917. Ostensibly based on resentment that Russian Jews were exempt from conscription, the campaign provided a platform for the expression of old prejudices about Jewish disloyalty, untrustworthiness and foreignness, and led to rioting against Jews in Leeds and Bethnal Green.<sup>547</sup> It is also important to note that the *Lusitania* riots, although initially motivated by anti-German hostility, often came to target other foreign nationals as well as British subjects with foreign connections: simply a non-British name was sometimes enough to attract the hostility of rioters.<sup>548</sup> Gullace has argued that the “random xenophobic quality” of the riots was still essentially a manifestation of anti-Germanism; the hostility against other foreign nationals “was about eradicating any cultural presence that hinted at or evoked thoughts of the enemy.”<sup>549</sup> However, it may be more accurate to regard wartime anti-German sentiment as the most recent manifestation of a tradition of anti-alienism in British society and to interpret the outbreaks of violence and hostility against other minority groups during the war as evidence of wider wartime xenophobia. Evidence of this can be found in government intelligence reports during a resurgence of anti-German hostility during the summer of 1918, which claimed that there existed a “general hostility towards aliens whether German or not.”<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Panayi, ‘Intolerant Act’, pp.54-56.

<sup>547</sup> Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?*, p.25; Kadish, *Bolsheviks*, p.52.

<sup>548</sup> Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, Enemies’, p.352

<sup>549</sup> Gullace, ‘Friends, Aliens, Enemies’, p.352.

<sup>550</sup> AIR 560/16/15/60, cited in Panayi, *Enemy*, p.216.



The hostility towards, and restrictions against, foreign nationals can be interpreted as evidence of an increasing sense of the exclusivity of British ‘membership’ during the war years. The pattern identified by Rose in her study of the Second World War, of a strengthening of British cohesion and collective identity through the classification of certain groups as “enemies within” society, whose allegedly negative characteristics could be depicted as the antithesis of ‘British’ values, was also a significant theme of the First World War.<sup>551</sup> Between 1914 and 1918, groups who might pose a threat to the war effort – not only aliens, but British subjects including naturalized Germans, socialists, ‘slackers’, and conscientious objectors – became objects of both popular and official suspicion.<sup>552</sup> As has been seen, hostility towards naturalized Germans reached fever pitch in certain areas of the press during the early summer of 1915,<sup>553</sup> while conscientious objectors were subject not only to imprisonment, public antagonism and violence due to their lack of commitment to the war effort, but had their citizenship rights curtailed in the post-war years.<sup>554</sup> These examples demonstrate the huge significance of the idea of ‘Britishness’ during the war, but also the extent to which the concept became much more rigid and non-negotiable. During the South African War, contemporaries of different political persuasions had been able to use the concept of ‘Britishness’ fairly flexibly to reinforce their beliefs, but this became far more difficult during 1914-1918, as concepts of loyalty to the nation took on a much more urgent tone. ‘Un-Britishness’ could now be connected with a threat to the war effort and thus, potentially, a physical threat to the nation itself. The

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<sup>551</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p.71

<sup>552</sup> The case of COs is a particularly striking example of this: as British nationals who denied support to the cause they were stripped of their rights of citizenship, and faced imprisonment during the war itself and were disenfranchised during the immediate post-war years. Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, pp.180-183.

<sup>553</sup> See, in particular, all issues of *John Bull* for May 1915.

<sup>554</sup> Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, p.180.

introduction of internment policy should, therefore, be considered as perhaps the most high profile symptom of the extent to which British wartime cohesion was enabled by the repression of minority groups.

### **The female enemy alien**

As has been seen, the gendered nature of much anti-German propaganda meant that the image of the 'enemy' was predominantly, although not exclusively, male. Public anxiety tended to focus on specific groups of men, such as German and Austrian waiters, or those attacked by Bottomley who were regarded as 'typical' German small businessmen, including bakers and butchers.<sup>555</sup> Although Proctor has suggested that, when female spies were identified, they caused particular concern, this appears to have been more notable in the reactions of the security services than in popular discourses.<sup>556</sup> Women received considerably less attention than men and, during the early weeks of the war, references to them were more likely to be sympathetic or positive. On 19<sup>th</sup> August 1914, for example, the *Daily Express*, which a week earlier had produced an article supporting general internment of male enemy aliens, published a story concerning "Kindly German Women" who smuggled food and cigarettes to British soldiers held as prisoners of war near Berlin.<sup>557</sup> This article contrasted significantly with the negative reports relating to German soldiers on the continent at this time, and may indicate that German women were associated with traditional gender stereotypes which presented women as inherently gentler and less dangerous than men. This point is reinforced by evidence that the experiences of German women in Britain during the early weeks of the war were often more positive

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<sup>555</sup> Horatio Bottomley, 'Now for the Vendetta!', *John Bull*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1915, p.7.

<sup>556</sup> Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, p.43.

<sup>557</sup> 'Kindly German Women', *Daily Express*, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1914, p.4.

than those of their male counterparts. Although a considerable number of German women were made unemployed during the opening weeks of the war, there was a significant difference in public reactions to these individuals in contrast with unemployed German men. As the authorities began rounding up unemployed German men for internment, British charities, such as the International Women's Relief Committee, had already begun working to assist German and Austrian women who had been made unemployed or had been stranded in Britain on the outbreak of war. These organizations appealed to the chivalrous emotions of the British public, launching charitable campaigns on behalf of "helpless women, innocent victims of this wicked war", almost always placing an emphasis on the youth and vulnerability of such women.<sup>558</sup> The Emergency Committee of the Society of Friends (FEC), which was established in August 1914 to assist enemy aliens in distress, found that support and accommodation was far easier to organise for women than for men.<sup>559</sup> It would appear that, during the early stages of the war, traditional gender assumptions, concerning both beliefs about society's responsibility of protection towards women and the difference between male and female natures, were strong enough to overcome (or at least keep in abeyance) anti-German prejudice against female enemy aliens.

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<sup>558</sup> 'The International Women's Relief Committee', *Jus Suffragii*, Vol. 8, No. 13, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1914, p.162.

<sup>559</sup> First Report of the FEC, c. September 1914, p.5: Library of the Society of Friends, Pers/Emergency. A detailed account of the work of the FEC was produced by committee member Anna Braithwaite Thomas in 1920: Anna Braithwaite Thomas, *St. Stephen's House: Friends' Emergency Work in England 1914 to 1920*, (London: Emergency Committee for the Assistance of Germans, Austrians and Hungarians in Distress, 1920). The role of women members of the FEC has been addressed in Katherine Storr, *Excluded from the Record: Women, Refugees and Relief 1914-1929*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), however the Committee was formed of both male and female members.

During parliamentary debates on the enemy alien question during 1914-1915, certain MPs called for female, as well as male, internment to be introduced, arguing that women had the potential to pose as serious a threat to national security as men.<sup>560</sup> In January 1915, during a House of Lords debate on the restrictions against aliens, the Earl of Crawford argued that all enemy aliens, including women, should be excluded from 'prohibited areas', for this reason.<sup>561</sup> On 3<sup>rd</sup> March, Conservative MP James Mason expressed surprise that female internment had not yet been proposed by the government, arguing that "no one will doubt that a woman is fully as capable as a man of being a dangerous spy".<sup>562</sup> Such statements indicate that a shift in attitudes was taking place and that hostility towards enemy aliens was no longer focused so predominantly on men. However, despite an increasing tendency for contemporaries to consider women, as well as men, as potentially dangerous, a serious campaign for female internment did not develop, and MPs appear to have been satisfied that the repatriation of women, children, and other enemy non-combatants, announced by Asquith in his speech of the 13<sup>th</sup> May, was an appropriate policy.<sup>563</sup> Liberal MP Joseph King appears to have been isolated in his concerns about the implications of repatriation for thousands of "offenceless" women and children<sup>564</sup>, although some

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<sup>560</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1915, vol. 70, cols 696-7; Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, col. 873.

<sup>561</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1915, vol. 18, cols 272-86. 'Prohibited areas' included large sections of the British coast and areas regarded as being of military significance. For a list, see Order of the Privy Council, Second Schedule, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914: National Archives, Kew, KV1-65 330/1. Although enemy aliens were excluded from 'prohibited areas' under the Aliens Restriction Order, individuals could be permitted to remain at the discretion of local Chief Constables.

<sup>562</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915, vol. 70, col. 833. Arguments about the potential danger of female enemy aliens were also made in the House of Commons by Frederick Booth, Hansard, HC Deb, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1915, vol. 70, col.695 and by R. McNeill, Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, col.873.

<sup>563</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, col. 173.

<sup>564</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, vol. 71, cols 1841-1878.

MPs made it known that they supported the right of appeal against repatriation in order to prevent women (particularly British-born wives of enemy aliens) being treated in a way which was “wrong, unjust, and cruel”.<sup>565</sup> Although such language contained faint echoes of the sentiments that pervaded wartime propaganda and had been central to debates in South Africa fourteen years earlier, regarding the importance of considerate treatment of women, serious opposition to repatriation on these grounds did not emerge. Indeed, the lack of protest against repatriation is particularly notable given the huge amount of debate which had taken place in parliament over the treatment of enemy women during the South African War.

There are a number of likely reasons for this. During the First World War, enemy civilians in Britain were regarded as a potential threat to British safety and security in a way which had not been an issue during the war in South Africa, when contemporaries had been able to observe the conflict from a safe distance, and to adopt moral stances on the treatment of women without having to consider the safety or welfare of British civilians. Between 1914 and 1918, discussions of the treatment of female enemy aliens took place in a ‘total war’ context, amid prominent discourses of national survival which gave the enemy civilian question a far more urgent tone. In addition, the British Government’s careful resistance of general female internment meant that the more obvious, negative parallels between the treatment of civilians during the two conflicts could be avoided.<sup>566</sup> It is also likely that the dominant ‘enemy alien’ discourse which had developed by May 1915, depicting all Germans as racially

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<sup>565</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, cols 815-91.

<sup>566</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, the avoidance of female internment by the British Government was almost certainly a consequence of the controversy experienced during their experiment with such a policy during the South African War.

flawed and potentially dangerous, was now powerful enough to compete with gendered ideologies relating to the care and protection of women. In the context of such discourses, repatriation can be regarded as a form of racial removal. Panayi has described the wartime and immediate postwar expulsion of 'enemy aliens' as "ethnic cleansing", and the largely positive popular reception of repatriation, within a highly racialized Germanophobic context, indicates that this is likely to be accurate perception.<sup>567</sup> Repatriation was uncontroversial because it tackled a threat which could be imagined in both security and racial terms in a way which could be construed as more lenient and considerate than internment. Discourses relating to the danger of the German 'race' could be pacified without seriously undermining British 'traditions' of chivalry towards women.<sup>568</sup>

Although wartime atrocity stories continued to focus on the behaviour of the German male, the tendency to regard German brutality as a form of racial essentialism meant that negative characteristics could logically be extended to individuals of both sexes. The racial shift in enemy imagery during 1914-1915 therefore made it increasingly difficult for German women to avoid hostility. As anti-German hostility took root, women with German surnames (even those who were British-born and only German by marriage) found their employment prospects severely limited, and charitable organisations which provided support for the wives and families of internees, such as

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<sup>567</sup> Panikos Panayi, *An Immigration History of Britain: Multicultural Racism Since 1800*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2010), p.214. When the war was over, the majority of enemy alien internees were repatriated.

<sup>568</sup> Repatriation has not been viewed as such a lenient policy by modern historians. Panayi has described the implementation of internment and repatriation as a form of "ethnic cleansing". Panikos Panayi, 'Pride and prejudice: The Victorian roots of a very British ambivalence to immigration', *The Independent* (online edition), 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/pride-and-prejudice-the-victorian-roots-of-a-very-british-ambivalence-to-immigration-2016353.html>, retrieved 07/03/2012.

the FEC, began to struggle to raise funds.<sup>569</sup> During the anti-German rioting of May 1915, German civilians became victims of attacks regardless of their sex. Examples of ongoing violence from their neighbours were reported by women who were repatriated to Germany in the following months. This was potentially bad publicity for the British Government, given its engagement in a propaganda campaign which condemned the German forces for their brutality towards women, and in response to the allegations the Home Office launched an investigation which concluded that many of the women's stories were inaccurate or exaggerated. However, the subsequent report could not deny that extensive violence against German families – women and children included - had occurred around the time of the *Lusitania* sinking.<sup>570</sup>

Although the masculine bias of anti-German propaganda continued throughout the conflict, German women also came to be occasionally represented in its imagery as the war progressed. This was a development which represented a significant shift from the sympathetic attitudes towards German women evident in August 1914. In April 1917, *The Times* published stories of the brutal behaviour of German nurses, who, it was alleged, taunted wounded British soldiers and refused them food and water. *The Times* reported: "German women have behaved to British wounded – not in isolated cases, but in many hundreds of cases, systematically and of set purpose – with a brutality which, a few years ago, we would have thought incredible in any women with white skins".<sup>571</sup> This contrasted sharply with the *Daily Express* story of

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<sup>569</sup> FEC Minutes, 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 1916: Library of the Society of Friends, FEWVRC/EME/EXEC M2.

<sup>570</sup> 'Alleged Mistreatment of German Women and Children in the UK 1915-16': National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10787/298199.

<sup>571</sup> *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1917, p. 5.

August 1914, which had represented the 'kindly' natures of German women as a refreshing change from the atrocities reported from the front line.<sup>572</sup> The image of the German nurse violating traditional female caring and nurturing roles was repeated in a propaganda poster entitled 'Red Cross or Iron Cross' which depicted a German Red Cross nurse denying water to a wounded British officer.<sup>573</sup> While the title of the piece drew on established ideas about the insidious influence of German military culture, the principal image of the poster implied that German brutality was imbued in women as well as men, and that it was powerful enough to defile those positive attributes which were accepted as an essential part of 'civilized' feminine nature.

### **British-born women**

While the racialization of the enemy came to involve imagery relating to Germans of both sexes, one group of female 'enemy aliens' was more difficult to categorize: the British-born wives of enemy aliens, who had taken on their husbands' nationalities upon marriage. Under the 1870 Nationality Act, a British woman who married a foreign national automatically lost her nationality of birth and took on that of her husband, a policy which, particularly in the interwar years, would unite a range of disparate feminist groups in opposition. In turn, the Act ensured that foreign women marrying British men became British subjects.<sup>574</sup> Inter-marriage between British women and German men had been common during the pre-war decades, perhaps linked to the unusually high degree of assimilation of German immigrants into British

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<sup>572</sup> 'Kindly German Women', *Daily Express*, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1914, p.4.

<sup>573</sup> 'Red Cross or Iron Cross', c.1917: Imperial War Museum Poster Collection, Q 71311.

<sup>574</sup> Page Baldwin, 'Subject to Empire', p.522; pp.529-30. The Act affected foreign women marrying British men in the same way, and Page Baldwin has also noted that the Act also excluded married women from applying for naturalization, classing them in the same category as "infants, lunatics and idiots" (p.526).



communities.<sup>575</sup> As a result, thousands of British-born wives of Germans, Austrians and Hungarians, many of whom did not speak their husband's language and had no other ties with their husbands' countries of origin, became technically 'enemy aliens' in August 1914. As enemy nationals, these women were subject to all elements of the Aliens Restriction Order.<sup>576</sup> The issue of British-born women was one which drew conflicting and confused reactions from contemporaries, who appear to have been unsure whether the British roots or German connections of the women should be seen as more significant. This uncertainty is evident in the pages of *John Bull* which, in December 1914, stated: "We have a good deal of sympathy with those Englishwomen married to German or Austrian subjects who now find themselves "aliens" in their own land."<sup>577</sup> However, less than a month later a further article suggested that the Government's grant of an allowance to British-born wives of internees was simply evidence of its shockingly lenient stance towards enemy aliens. Rather than supporting German internees "by feeding their hungry", the article asserted: "We would deal with them [British-born women] severely, if they were destitute, for having married Germhuns."<sup>578</sup>

As the war progressed, and particularly after May 1915, British-born women increasingly found themselves targets of popular anti-German sentiment. The following year, the Society of Friends' Emergency Committee published a detailed account written by one such woman recording the prejudice and abuse that she and

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<sup>575</sup> Gullace, 'Friends', p.353.

<sup>576</sup> This was the case until November 1917, when British-born wives could apply for exemption from certain restrictions if they could show themselves to be a "loyal and respectable" and prove that the restrictions were causing them "hardship". Home Office to Chief Constables, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10882/343995/7.

<sup>577</sup> 'British "Aliens."', *John Bull*, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1914, p.3..

<sup>578</sup> 'The Punishment', *John Bull*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915, p. 2.

her family had suffered in the aftermath of the *Lusitania* sinking. This was rather a sentimental narrative, which was essentially published as a piece of propaganda, attempting to highlight the immorality of targeting British-born women and children for abuse. Whether or not the publication was genuinely based on an original account, its real significance lies in the fact that the Emergency Committee felt it necessary to publish literature of this nature in an attempt to combat the hostility directed towards the British-born wives of enemy aliens.<sup>579</sup> As well as creating an image of innocence and vulnerability designed to promote sympathy among its readers, the Committee also called on popular conceptions of national loyalty based on blood ties, expressing hope that the story would “help to create a better understanding, and a deeper sympathy with an especially desolate class of “war sufferers” of our own blood and in our own country.”<sup>580</sup> More specific documentary evidence of the victimization of the British-born wives of German men is evident in Home Office files of July 1917. During that summer, in response to German air raids on certain areas of London, riots broke out against local Germans, many of whom were the British-born wives of internees. A Home Office official recorded that “the mob in the districts which have suffered have turned on these women; maltreated them in some cases and in all cases frightened them very badly”, while another recorded the difficulty of witnessing the “terror and distress” of some of the women.<sup>581</sup> Hostility reached such a pitch in some areas that a number of women applied to the Home Office to be allowed to leave Britain for Germany (something which the authorities were reluctant to permit due to the

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<sup>579</sup> The FEC’s annual report described this text as “the experiences in her own words of an English wife and her children, when the husband, a German baker, was interned after the sinking of the *Lusitania*”: ‘Fourth Report of the Emergency Committee Report for Year Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1916’: Society of Friends Library.

<sup>580</sup> FEC pamphlet, ‘The Log-Boys, by Mrs “W”’, (London: Headley Brothers, n.d. [c. 1916])

<sup>581</sup> Home Office minutes, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> July 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/270402/77.

likelihood of bad publicity).<sup>582</sup> The popular antipathy towards British-born wives of enemy aliens, despite their national origins, reinforces the extreme negativity attached to any association with the enemy. The violence towards British-born women and children in 1915 and 1917 again indicates the extent to which wartime Germanophobia could at times be powerful enough to challenge traditional gendered notions of care and chivalry.

By 1917, the majority of German men had been interned and so their families, as well as others regarded as being of German origin, represented the most convenient focus for popular 'retaliation' to German methods of warfare.<sup>583</sup> However, the targeting of the wives and children of German men may also have been connected to the broader ideas of race, national identity and gender which pervaded wartime discourses. As Anna Davin has argued, early twentieth century discourses on nationality placed significance on women as the biological reproducers of the nation.<sup>584</sup> Such ideas become particularly significant during the war when both national identity and concerns about population were heightened, and Susan Grayzel has suggested that, despite the new opportunities offered to women during the First World War, dominant discourses continued to stress their significance as mothers and reproducers of the 'race'.<sup>585</sup> The extent of the hostility towards British women married to German men may be explained by the perception that they had not only assumed loyalty to an 'enemy' male, but could be regarded as having implicitly

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<sup>582</sup> Home Office minutes, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/270402/77.

<sup>583</sup> Panayi has shown that a number of victims of the 1917 riots were naturalized Germans as well as individuals who were not of enemy nationality: Panikos Panayi, 'Anti-German Riots in London during the First World War', *German History*, 7,2, 1989, pp.184-203; pp.200-201.

<sup>584</sup> Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', p.13.

<sup>585</sup> Grayzel, *Women's Identities*, p.2.

rejected this maternal relationship with the British nation. During 1915, *John Bull* published a number of articles expressing distaste at intermarriage between German men and British women, and particular indignation over the fact that the families of internees could be supported by the British state.<sup>586</sup> This indicates that ideas were already developing about the illegitimate place of families with German connections within Britain, despite the British origins of the mothers. The violence towards British-born families indicates that, as antipathy towards Germans deepened, so did the tendency to perceive the wives and children as national (and perhaps racial) outsiders.

### **Public opinion and policy-making**

Despite the rapid increase in popular anti-German hostility during the early stages of the First World War, policy-making on internment was initially characterised by a certain degree of tolerance at an official level. On the outbreak of hostilities, the Home Office quickly overruled a War Office attempt to implement general internment, and issued instructions to local police forces that arrests of enemy aliens were permissible only in cases where individuals were “reasonably suspected of being in any way dangerous to the safety of the realm”. Enemy aliens known to be of “good character”, or who could be vouched for by prominent British citizens, were to be left alone.<sup>587</sup> In a statement to the press on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1914, the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, informed the country that internment of enemy aliens would take place only on a small scale, and stressed that most German civilians in Britain were

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<sup>586</sup> ‘Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!’, *Daily Mail*, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914, p.2; ‘The Punishment’, *Daily Mail*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915, p. 2.

<sup>587</sup> ‘Telegram B’, Home Office to Chief Constables, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193/5.

“peaceful and innocent persons from whom there is no danger to be feared.”<sup>588</sup> At the end of August, the government began to extend internment, not on a general scale, but in an attempt to deal with the problem of numbers of unemployed German men who had lost their jobs due to popular anti-German hostility.<sup>589</sup> The Home Office was concerned that unemployed men might generate disorder, predicting that they might “cause fires in the central portions of London and indulge in other proceedings calculated to cause alarm and panic”.<sup>590</sup> Despite this extension, internment continued to represent a relatively small-scale policy when compared with later developments, with approximately 10,500 civilians interned by the end of September 1914.<sup>591</sup> However, since the high levels of unemployment among enemy aliens stemmed from anti-German attitudes among employers, it is significant to note that, even at this stage, the expansion of policy was being indirectly driven by popular attitudes.

Despite sporadic attacks from newspapers and MPs on their ‘lenient’ policy, the government continued to resist the introduction of general internment during the early months of the war.<sup>592</sup> However, in October 1915, a wave of violence broke out against enemy aliens in some areas of London which has been attributed to the German military successes on the continent and the accumulation of atrocity stories

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<sup>588</sup> ‘Prisoners of War: Statement to the Press’: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193/10; ‘Arrests of Aliens. Statement by the Home Secretary’, *The Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1914.

<sup>589</sup> Home Office to War Office, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193255 193/10.

<sup>590</sup> Home Office to War Office, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1914, National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193255 193/10.

<sup>591</sup> Panayi, ‘Intolerant Act’, p.57.

<sup>592</sup> In early September, Lord Kitchener, now the Secretary of State for War, requested that the Home Office implement the internment of all German men of military age who were known to have undertaken military training, but less than a week later the War Office realised that it did not have sufficient accommodation, and the order was rescinded. Home Office to War Office, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45 10729 255193.

over several weeks.<sup>593</sup> The government's reaction to the violence was an early indication of the influence that public opinion could have on official policy. On 20<sup>th</sup> October, a letter from the Home Office to the War Office advised that, due to "the altered military position on the Continent, the increased possibility of a hostile raid and of attacks by aircraft, and the strong feeling against Germans aroused by the atrocities committed by German officers and soldiers in Belgium" it was "no longer safe to leave the great mass of enemy reservists at liberty in this country".<sup>594</sup> As a result, the letter announced, the Home Office was ordering the internment of enemy aliens of military age.<sup>595</sup> However, despite this apparent display of forceful policy-making, the extension of internment was in reality tempered by the inclusion of a number of categories of exemption, and the following month McKenna told the House of Commons that he felt that it would be wrong if, by "endeavouring to avoid risks we are to do injustice."<sup>596</sup> To add to the confusion of internment policy during this early period, accommodation for internees was difficult to find, and, as a result, the policy was subject to a number of halts and reversals, during which internees were permitted to apply for release.<sup>597</sup>

Matters came to a head, however, in May 1915, after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and subsequent outbreaks of serious violence against German civilians in Britain. These events consolidated the government's tendency to defer to public opinion on matters

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<sup>593</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, p.225.

<sup>594</sup> Home Office to War Office, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45 10729 255193.

<sup>595</sup> Home Office circular to Chief Constables, 269,116, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45 10729 255193.

<sup>596</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1914, vol. 68, cols 79-123.

<sup>597</sup> 'Correspondence as to the Internment and Release of Alien Enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915': National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

relating to enemy aliens and prompted a rapid change in the government's stance on internment. When Asquith addressed the House of Commons on the introduction of general male internment, six days after the rioting began, he made direct connections between German military policies, German civilians in Britain, and decision-making on internment.<sup>598</sup> The Prime Minister made it clear that the government believed internment to be unnecessary from a security perspective and that the steps already taken regarding internment and restrictions on aliens had been sufficient to guard against potential threats. Clearly, however, the force of public opinion had now become powerful enough to override such considerations; Asquith stated that the Government were "quite alive to the fact that recent events, and the feeling which they have created, make it necessary to look beyond merely military considerations" in decisions on internment.<sup>599</sup> Ironically, as Colin Holmes has noted, the British Government's own propaganda campaign appears to have played a part in forcing an unwelcome decision on officials; the circulation of atrocity stories, some of which were officially-sanctioned, contributed to the development of the anti-German hostility which was ultimately a decisive force in the implementation of general internment.<sup>600</sup> The expansion of internment policy was closely related to public opinion at every stage and, as Panayi has suggested, without the agitation against enemy aliens from the press and public, it is unlikely that general internment would have been introduced.<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> 'Correspondence to as the Internment and Release of Alien Enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915: Prime Minister's Statements': National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

<sup>599</sup> Correspondence to as the Internment and Release of Alien Enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915: Prime Minister's Statements': National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

<sup>600</sup> Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?*, p.25.

<sup>601</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, p.97.

During the weeks following Asquith's announcement, the government remained committed to developing general internment, but attempted to play down the influence of public opinion in driving the decision. In a speech to the House of Commons in June 1915, giving further details of the tightening of anti-alien policy, the new Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, was very careful to emphasize the measured approach which the government was taking on the issue, which he described as a "grave and serious subject".<sup>602</sup> This was almost certainly an attempt to distance the government's policy-making from the mob violence which had swept the country the previous month, particularly as Simon stressed that he was not afraid to "resist...popular clamour" if it threatened principles of justice. Simon's speech appears to have been an attempt by the government to pre-empt any possible criticism of the tightening of policy, and the Home Secretary broached the subject in terms which emphasised the adherence of the British Government to principles of fairness. While stressing his sincere personal belief in British justice and in the principle of proof in British law, Simon argued that, in such times of danger, national security had to be the government's priority. By accepting the increased restrictions, enemy aliens would merely be sharing in the many inconveniences and sacrifices that the entire British community was bravely facing. By taking this approach, Simon could locate the internment and repatriation schemes within a positive interpretation of 'Britishness', with his allusions to British justice creating the impression that the policy was regrettable, but essentially fair and necessary for the greater good of the

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<sup>602</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, cols 815-91.



nation. In the anti-German atmosphere of the summer of 1915, MPs were quick to support such sentiments.<sup>603</sup>

While in one respect internment was driven by the strong popular desire for tighter restrictions against enemy aliens, another argument for the policy was that it would ensure enemy civilians' protection from future violence. This idea had been evident during the Home Office's decision to extend internment in October 1914, when it had been argued that "strong feeling" against Germans meant that it was "no longer safe" to have so many at liberty.<sup>604</sup> In January 1915, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, E.R. Henry, wrote to the Home Office expressing concern about the large numbers of enemy aliens in the capital and recommending the extension of internment. Henry argued that the large enemy alien presence was a problem not only because the aliens themselves might engage in dangerous acts, but because the popular hostility provoked by German air raids on Britain might lead to "acts of retaliation being committed by the public upon the aliens themselves".<sup>605</sup> The justification of internment with references to the safety of the potential internees themselves was a tactic which had been utilised by the government in defence of the concentration camps of the South African War and would also re-emerge during the Second World War. By stressing the 'protective' nature of the camps the British authorities could maintain an image of internment which was compatible with a liberal and benevolent image of the British state. However, by taking this action, the British

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<sup>603</sup> See responses from Ronald McNeill, Henry Chaplin and James Duncan Millar to Simon's speech, Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, cols 815-91.

<sup>604</sup> Home Office to War Office, 269,116/1, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45 10729 255193.

<sup>605</sup> Commissioner of Police to Home Office, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1915: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

Government chose to bow to hostile public opinion rather than challenge it. This approach was to become a repeated government tactic to deal with racial violence over the following years. During the 'race riots' of 1919, for example, black populations were frequently taken into custody for their own protection, and Jacqueline Jenkinson has shown that the government's principal solution to the violence was to attempt to pacify white populations by encouraging the repatriation of black merchant sailors.<sup>606</sup> Although a number of arrests were made during the 1915 riots, the principal solution to the event was the segregation and dispersal of the German community as the target of the violence.<sup>607</sup>

Despite the comparatively lenient stance of the authorities on the internment issue during the early months of the war, the wider restrictions which were introduced against enemy aliens are likely to have contributed to perceptions of their outsider status. These included compulsory registration and exclusion from specific 'prohibited areas' of the country and restriction from travelling more than five miles from a place of residence and from owning a car, motorbike, telephone or camera without express permission from the local Chief Police Officer.<sup>608</sup> Foreign nationals from Allied or neutral states were also subject to restrictions, including the requirement to register with the police, a regulation which initially only applied to those living in prohibited areas, but which was expanded by July 1916 to affect a

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<sup>606</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919. Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), p.74; p.136; pp.157-9. At the height of the violence government officials also considered implementing internment of black merchant sailors prior to their repatriation (pp.159-60).

<sup>607</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, pp.236-238.

<sup>608</sup> 'Restrictions as to Aliens', February 1916: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/66/ 866/44.

large proportion of aliens in Britain.<sup>609</sup> From October 1916, aliens could only be employed in businesses other than munitions with permission from the Board of Trade,<sup>610</sup> and from August 1918, restrictions came to affect people of alien parentage (even if they themselves were British), when new guidelines specified that only individuals whose parents were of British or Allied nationality should be employed in any Government department, unless for a “definite national reason”.<sup>611</sup> While it is important to note that all residents in Britain faced certain restrictions under the Defence of the Realm Act, the targeting of foreign nationals for specific restrictions not only implied that they could not be trusted, but drew an official line between British and ‘others’. It is likely therefore that, despite a relative leniency in early official attitudes, government actions towards aliens reinforced the increasingly anti-alien wartime atmosphere by creating a further sense of difference. The introduction of general internment in May 1915 therefore not only provided an official reinforcement of the image of the ‘dangerous’ German, but created a far more tangible difference in status between British subjects and enemy nationals than had previously existed. Historians of the pre-war years have identified a certain fluidity of opinion towards aliens in Britain, depending on shifting economic, social and political factors, and particularly on the extent to which foreigners were able to assimilate and embrace ‘British’ culture.<sup>612</sup> However, the legislation introduced during the First World War formalised the division between Britons and non-Britons and made it far less negotiable.

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<sup>609</sup> Press release, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1916: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/66/1012/146.

<sup>610</sup> Press Notice, c. October 1916: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/66/1019 362.

<sup>611</sup> ‘Alien Employees in Government Offices’, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1918: National Archives, Kew, MEPO 2 1754.

<sup>612</sup> Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?*, pp.14-19; Kushner, ‘Beyond the Pale?’, p.145.

## Internment policy and women

The very earliest step towards internment, the War Office order, on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1914 (promulgated without the knowledge of the Home Office) for the arrests of all German and Austrian men of military age, set the pattern for what was to be a highly gendered policy.<sup>613</sup> On learning of the Circular, the Home Office immediately convened an inter-departmental meeting and insisted on the instructions being cancelled; new orders were issued instructing police to “arrest and hand over to military authorities enemy subjects who are reasonably suspected of being in any way dangerous to the safety of the realm.”<sup>614</sup> Although the telegram did not specify that this order should only apply to male enemy aliens, this appears to have been taken for granted, as there were no recorded arrests of women. The possibility of interning female enemy aliens was not discussed, and the initial emphasis by the War Office on aliens’ roles as reservists indicates that it was their male military status which constituted a threat. During an inter-departmental meeting on the ‘Disposal of male subjects of Enemy States’, officers from the Adjutant General’s office recommended that the administration of the South African War “concentration camps” should be used as an administrative precedent for internment, but there was no mention of the prospect of female internment being reintroduced.<sup>615</sup> The focus on enemy alien men as a source of danger was so entrenched that official discussions of policy towards aliens (even regarding issues which were relevant to aliens of both

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<sup>613</sup> ‘Telegram A’, War Office to Commandeth London, 7 August 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193/5.

<sup>614</sup> ‘Home Office Memo: Prisoners of War’, 8 August 1914; ‘Telegram B’, Home Office to Chief Constables, 8 August 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193/5. The Home Office also pointed out the arrest of Austrians under such terms was illegal, since Britain was not yet at war with Austria-Hungary.

<sup>615</sup> ‘412/64. Disposal of male subjects of Enemy States’, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1914, *Control of Aliens in the United Kingdom, Volume II. 1914 to 1915*: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/65.

sexes) almost always assumed the 'enemy alien' to be male; issues affecting women were generally discussed separately.<sup>616</sup> Later in the war, MI5 officials reflected that the British government's tendency to overlook enemy women and pin suspicions on men was so prominent that the German intelligence service made active attempts to recruit more female agents to take advantage of this oversight.<sup>617</sup>

Although female enemy aliens were not affected by internment policy at this stage, they were subject to the Aliens Restriction Act of August 1914. In addition, while women were not liable for internment, they were potentially eligible for repatriation to their country of origin. Initially, repatriation was voluntary and during the autumn of 1914 the British and German governments negotiated reciprocal civilian exchange schemes through the neutral USA. These arrangements were particularly useful for women who had been on temporary visits or holidays to Britain in August 1914 which had been interrupted by the outbreak of war. By January 1915, between 6,000 and 7,000 enemy alien women had left Britain under the scheme.<sup>618</sup> A significant number of German and Austrian women, however, had been settled in the country for several years and did not apply for repatriation, meaning that by early 1915, a considerable population of female enemy aliens remained in Britain. As has been seen, certain contemporaries regarded such women as potentially dangerous, and the government received occasional demands for female internment.<sup>619</sup> However, despite the gradual

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<sup>616</sup> See various Home Office files in series HO 45 relating to the treatment of enemy aliens.

<sup>617</sup> 'Vol. VI. M.I.5. "G" Branch Report. The Investigation of Espionage', Parts IV and V. Chapters XIV – XVII. Paragraphs 1144 – 1975, p.102: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/44. This appears to have been speculation on the part of MI5 and the reality of German recruitment of female spies is not clear. However, the statement does seem to suggest that MI5 believed there was a culture of suspicion towards men, rather than women, in Britain.

<sup>618</sup> Panayi, *Enemy*, p.75.

<sup>619</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915, vol. 70 col. 849; col. 860.

extension of internment for male enemy civilians during the early months of the war, the government consistently and staunchly resisted introducing a similar policy for women. In response to the suggestion in March 1915, the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, replied:

On what grounds would you intern women – apart from suspicion? Would it be on the ground that they were aliens? If they were interned, the general ground upon which it would be done would be that they are dangerous or likely to be, or possibly might be dangerous. That has been the general ground in regard to men. But in regard to women, it would have to be on the general ground that the woman was of German nationality...It is impossible, in view of the existing state of the law, and of our practice, to treat mere nationality as an offence. It cannot be done.<sup>620</sup>

While McKenna's conclusion offers some revealing insights into the Home Office's views on internment according to nationality, his statement also reinforced the predominant understanding that women simply could not be considered dangerous in the same way as men. Other sources indicate that resistance to female internment was also located in a belief that it was unethical for the state to intern women. The ideology behind this assumption was rarely explicitly articulated by the Home Office, but in discussions of policies towards enemy aliens its representatives repeatedly drew a line at female internment. Sir John Simon, for example, who was appointed Home Secretary at the end of May 1915, at the height of the anti-German hysteria provoked by the sinking of the *Lusitania*, oversaw the tightening of anti-alien policies, including the introduction of general internment and provisions under DORA for the detention of British subjects of "hostile origin or association".<sup>621</sup> However, despite his much sterner stance towards enemy aliens Simon also insisted: "We do not intern

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<sup>620</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915, vol. 70, col. 859.

<sup>621</sup> 'Vol. IV. M.I.5. "G" Branch Report. The Investigation of Espionage. Part II', Chapters VII, VIII, IX. Paragraphs 1151-1392, p.50: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/42.

and never should propose to intern women.”<sup>622</sup> As Conservative MP Ronald McNeill remarked disapprovingly, “it was almost a maxim that women should not be interned, and that there would be something absolutely un-chivalrous and wrong in pursuing that policy.”<sup>623</sup>

The *Lusitania* incident did, however, have ramifications for enemy alien women. As the British government stepped up its policy of male internment in May 1915, it was also announced that German women (other than British-born wives of enemy aliens) would now be liable for compulsory repatriation to their country of origin.<sup>624</sup> The introduction of this policy by the British government as an alternative to internment, which had been dismissed as inappropriate for women, indicates that repatriation was a process considered more lenient and civilized than internment, although a lack of surviving evidence relating to the decision-making process behind repatriation makes it difficult to fully assess. There is certainly evidence, however, that British officials believed that the implementation of policy towards enemy alien women and children should be undertaken with care. In his announcement of the policy in May 1915, Asquith predicted that for reasons of “justice and humanity” it was likely that a number of women and children would be exempted from repatriation (considerations which were absent from his references to male internment policy).<sup>625</sup> This different approach to male and female enemy aliens was still in evidence as late as July 1918, when a parliamentary report on enemy aliens again stressed the significance of

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<sup>622</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, col. 850.

<sup>623</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, col. 852.

<sup>624</sup> ‘Correspondence to as the Internment and Release of Alien Enemies in the United Kingdom, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915: Prime Minister’s Statements’: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10729/255193.

<sup>625</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, vol 71, col.1842.

“justice and humanity” in the cases of women only.<sup>626</sup> Such sentiments were put into practice in the implementation of repatriation. By July 1915, around 82% of ‘enemy aliens’ who had applied for exemption from repatriation had had their applications approved; in contrast, only around 37% of applications for exemption from internment had been granted by the summer of 1916.<sup>627</sup>

This relatively lenient implementation of repatriation policy allowed the Home Office to strike a balance between the pacification of aggressive public prejudice against all enemy aliens and a desire to be seen to act considerately towards women and children. However, wartime repatriation should also be regarded as a policy which facilitated the removal of an unwanted ‘racial’ group from within the national community. While repatriation was not discussed in overtly racial tones by officials in 1915, it must be remembered that the introduction of both internment and repatriation took place within the context of high levels of popular racial hostility towards enemy aliens. As the war progressed, the language of ‘race’ became increasingly prominent in official discussions of the enemy alien question and by the end of the war, as will be seen, concerns about the ‘racial’ wellbeing of the British nation had an increasingly significant impact on policy-making. The introduction of both internment and repatriation in 1915 was directly related to the extensive, racialized popular hostility directed at Germans, and can therefore be regarded as paving the way for such developments. Despite the fact that traditional gender ideologies may have

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<sup>626</sup> ‘Report to the Prime Minister of Sir H. Dalziel’s Committee. Extract from the “Times”, 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1918’, p.180: National Archives, CAB/24/57. The difference in the Committee’s recommended treatment of male and female enemy aliens was remarked upon in a memo by Sir George Cave in ‘Enemy Aliens. Memorandum by the Home Secretary’, 9 July 1918: National Archives, Kew, CAB/24/57.

<sup>627</sup> Taken from figures in Bird, *Control*, pp.173-4 and Panayi, *Enemy*, p.81.



limited the extent to which repatriation was applied in practice, its development in direct response to popular, racialized Germanophobia supports Panayi's analysis of the First World War as a period of "ethnic cleansing".<sup>628</sup>

### **Propaganda and policy-making**

The development of contrasting policies towards male and female enemy aliens can in many ways be connected with developments in wartime propaganda. As has been seen, popular conceptions of the 'enemy' during this period were extensively grounded in gendered imagery, shaped by a propaganda campaign which attacked Germany for its barbaric and dishonourable behaviour towards women and children. While one element of this development was the association of the German male with violence and aggression, the focus on women and children as victims also gave a particularly significant status to these groups. The execution by the German military authorities of British nurse Edith Cavell in October 1915 is an example of the way in which British propaganda, and the government's sensitivity over Britain's self image, could impact on policy-making towards 'enemy' women. Cavell was a British nurse based in Belgium, who was arrested by the German military for helping British and French soldiers to escape from behind German lines. 'Assisting the enemy' was a capital offence under German military law, and Cavell was executed on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1915.<sup>629</sup> In Britain, the case was utilised extensively as a piece of anti-German atrocity propaganda, with Cavell held up as a martyr who was cruelly murdered by the German authorities. Anne-Marie Claire Hughes has shown that two prominent

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<sup>628</sup> Panayi, *Immigration History*, p.214.

<sup>629</sup> Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, p.102; Anne-Marie Claire Hughes, 'War, Gender and National Mourning: The Significance of the Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell in Britain', *European Review of History*, 12/3, (2005): pp.425-444; p.443.

strands of discourse existed on the issue, depicting her as either “the girlish, innocent victim of a ruthless enemy with no sense of honour in its dealings with frail women” or as “mature, patriotic, dignified and incredibly brave”.<sup>630</sup> As well as providing a further opportunity for British propagandists to undermine German credibility, the case was particularly significant because it allowed the British Government to provide practical examples of the humane nature of its own policies towards ‘enemy’ women, and their contrast with the behaviour of the German authorities. On 23<sup>rd</sup> October, Sir John Simon addressed the American press on the Cavell case to highlight the differences between the “brutality” of Cavell’s execution and the chivalrous policy upheld in Britain towards ‘enemy’ women, where such an event “had, and could have, no parallel”.<sup>631</sup> To emphasize this, Simon highlighted the case of the recent conviction in Britain of a German woman on charges of espionage, an offence which was held to be far graver than Cavell’s crime of ‘war treason’, but which had been punished by the British authorities with a ten year prison sentence.<sup>632</sup> Ironically, this publicity was sought at the very time that, behind the scenes, MI5 officials were advocating sterner penalties for female spies – including the death penalty – due to concerns that the current lenient sentencing trends were leading to a fresh influx of female German spies into Britain.<sup>633</sup> That such advice was ignored by the Home Office emphasizes the significance attached at this time to perceptions of a nation’s treatment of women, and the extent to which such treatment was seen as essential to maintaining a

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<sup>630</sup> Hughes, ‘War, Gender and National Mourning’, p.428-9.

<sup>631</sup> ‘British and German Methods’, *The Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1915, p.6.

<sup>632</sup> The woman’s name was not mentioned in press reports, but Simon was referring to Mrs Louise Emily Wertheim, who was the German-born wife of a naturalized British subject. The descriptions of her as being of German nationality were therefore, in fact, inaccurate: ‘Vol VIII. M.I.5. “G” Branch Report. The Investigation of Espionage. Appendices and Annexures’ p.45: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/46.

<sup>633</sup> Minute by Kell, M.O.5., 17 Oct. 1915: National Archives, Kew, KV 2/822.

positive wartime image. In November 1915, less than a month after Cavell's execution, Swedish national Eva de Bournonville was arrested in Britain for providing information to the enemy. Although de Bournonville was convicted of espionage and sentenced to death by hanging, her sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life.<sup>634</sup> Simpson has suggested that the leniency shown in this case, both by commuting the sentence and allowing the trial to take place in a Civil Court, was also likely to have been influenced by the huge publicity given to the Cavell case, and should be seen as an attempt on the part of the British authorities to emphasize their humane approach towards women in contrast with German brutality.<sup>635</sup>

The huge significance attached to the 'correct' form of treatment of enemy women, even when convicted of serious crimes against the state, is essential to understanding the government's reluctance to introducing general female internment. While the internment of a small number of 'dangerous' women under the DORA could be justified in terms of national security<sup>636</sup>, any more extensive internment policy would have been extremely difficult to reconcile with the image of civilized 'Britishness' which was articulated through wartime propaganda. However, the British government's resistance to female internment was almost certainly also shaped by

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<sup>634</sup> 'Vol. V. M.I.5. "G" Branch Report. The Investigation of Espionage. Part III', Chapters XI to XIII, Paragraphs 1393 - 1743, p.86: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/43.

<sup>635</sup> A. W. Brian Simpson, 'The invention of trials *in camera* in security cases', in R.A. Melikan (ed.), *Domestic and international trials, 1700-2000*, (Manchester, 2003), pp.76-106; p.87. De Bournonville was released in 1922 and deported to Sweden. See also Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, p.104.

<sup>636</sup> Regulation 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). This regulation was introduced in June 1915, amid the general tightening of restrictions against aliens at that time, and gave the Home Office the power to intern individuals who were considered to be of "hostile origin or association": 'M.I.5. "G" Branch Report. The Investigation of Espionage. Vol. IV, Part II', p.50: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/42. For discussion of the small number of women detained under this regulation, see Proctor, *Female Intelligence*, Chapter 2.

the recent history of the internment of women in South Africa. This is revealed most clearly in the reaction of the Home Office to the suggestion of the 'voluntary' internment of the British-born wives of alien enemies who were suffering abuse from their neighbours during a wave of anti-German hostility in July 1917. Although officials went as far as identifying facilities to accommodate the women, the scheme was ultimately reconsidered, due to the fear that it might be depicted by Germany "as another instance of the love of Gr. Britain for shutting up women in Concentration Camps".<sup>637</sup> The use of this latter term strongly suggests that, in addition to specific wartime discourses on gender, the memory of the public outcry surrounding the internment of women and children during the South African War was significant in influencing British policy towards enemy alien women. Indeed, this was a theme seized on by the German media as part of the propaganda battle between the two nations when, as part of its defence of the Cavell case, a German telegram published in Brussels reminded the world of the "cruelties committed by Lord Kitchener during the Boer War on women and children".<sup>638</sup> The centrality to British propaganda campaigns of gendered themes of civilization and barbarism ensured that female internment was untenable from an official perspective, and this was compounded by the negative memories of Britain's earlier attempts to place women and children at the heart of wartime internment policy.

### **Regulation 14B**

Despite the British Government's consistent rejection of general female internment during the First World War, a small number of women were interned under

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<sup>637</sup> Home Office minute, 26 July 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402.

<sup>638</sup> 'The Enemy's Defence', *The Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1915, p.6.

Regulation 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). This regulation was introduced in June 1915, amid the general tightening of restrictions against aliens at that time, and gave the Home Office the power to intern individuals who were considered to be of “hostile origin or association”.<sup>639</sup> By creating this regulation, the government aimed to pacify, in particular, the widespread hostility being expressed towards naturalized British subjects of German birth. The regulation could be implemented against individuals of any nationality, including British subjects, and enabled the Home Office to address public fears about naturalization without actually undermining the rights of naturalized subjects specifically. Sir John Simon made much of the inherent “fairness” of such a step.<sup>640</sup> The regulation was also significant because, unlike the general internment order, it could be applied irrespective of sex, and so, for the first time, women became liable for a form of internment. From this point, internment orders could be made against women of any nationality if suspicions had been raised against them owing to their ‘hostile origins or association’. Targets of this regulation included women of enemy alien birth who had acquired British nationality through marriage but were believed to remain sympathetic to their country of origin. Women of other nationalities, including at least five women of full German nationality, were interned during the course of the war.<sup>641</sup> Only a tiny number of women were imprisoned under the regulation, and as a result there is far less surviving information on their experiences than on those of the 30,000 or more male inmates of British internment camps. However, an examination of the available

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<sup>639</sup> ‘M.I.5. “G” Branch Report. The Investigation of Espionage. Vol. IV, Part II’, p.50: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/42.

<sup>640</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1915, vol. 72, cols 851-2.

<sup>641</sup> Home Office to Prisoners of War Department, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1918: National Archives, Kew, HO 45 10948/291742/24.

records, particularly in comparison with those relating to male 14B internees, reveal further insights into the influence of gender on official attitudes.

Women arrested under Regulation 14B were housed at Aylesbury Inebriate Reformatory, which was formally designated a Place of Internment on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1916, while male '14Bs' were housed at Reading Prison.<sup>642</sup> The belief evident in much of the government's policy towards enemy civilians, that women should be afforded special treatment, was also discernible in the administration of these separate male and female internment facilities. This was particularly evident in terms of the freedoms that '14Bs' were permitted, with men generally being subject to far tighter restrictions than women. In September 1917, the governor of Reading Prison noted that both "mental...and physical deterioration" was visible among the male inmates, which he attributed to the "cells, barred windows, exercise to bell scale...constant supervision".<sup>643</sup> In contrast, the governor of Aylesbury reported that female inmates had the freedom of the institution gardens throughout the day, including access to tennis courts.<sup>644</sup> While this factor alone could be attributed to the availability of accommodation, it seems unlikely when considered alongside the other opportunities permitted to female internees. Women were given more freedom than men in terms of communication, being able to send and receive two letters a week and have a visitor each month, while men were restricted to only one letter every

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<sup>642</sup> Declaration signed by Sir John Simon, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1916: National Archives, Kew, HO 45 10948/291742/2. Female internees were referred to sardonically within official circles as 'Aylesbury Ducks': Foreign Office minute, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1918: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/432 No.15132.

<sup>643</sup> Memo by C.M. Morgan, Governor of Reading Prison, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10948/267603/28.

<sup>644</sup> S.F. Fox, Governor, Aylesbury, 'H.M. Place of Internment, AYLESBURY', 11<sup>th</sup> June 1917; Dryhurst, Prison Commissioners to Under-Sec of State, HO, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10785/291742/19.

month and a visit every three months.<sup>645</sup> Women were also, unlike men, permitted to buy and cook their own food, and at least one woman was allowed to have her child accommodated in the local town in order to facilitate frequent visits.<sup>646</sup> The reasons behind these different forms of treatment were not made explicit in official records, but the pattern of female internment – extremely small in scale and allowing greater freedoms for the internees – appears to have reflected the wider official sentiment that women deserved more considerate treatment than men.

In November 1917, male 14B internees at Reading who were classed as being of enemy nationality or “strong enemy association” threatened to initiate work and hunger strikes unless the British authorities applied ‘Prisoner of War’ rules to their position.<sup>647</sup> Since these men had been arrested due to suspicions about their loyalty to the ‘enemy’, which were generally based on their national origins, they argued that they should be placed under proper internment conditions, rather than being held under prison regulations. After consultation, the Prison Commissioners and the Home Office agreed that all 14B inmates of ‘enemy alien’ nationality at Reading were indeed technically ‘prisoners of war’ and arranged for all such men to be transferred

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<sup>645</sup> Home Office minutes 4<sup>th</sup> February 1916: National Archives, Kew, HO 45 10785/291742/2.

<sup>646</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1916, vol. 86, cols 705-6. This pattern also contrasts significantly with policies towards ordinary prisoners in British institutions. Robert Dobash, R. Emerson Dobash and Sue Gutteridge have noted that, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, female convicts were generally “more closely observed and controlled” than male convicts and were held to be particularly disgraced since, through their crimes, they had deviated from traditional ideals of femininity: Dobash et al, *The Imprisonment of Women*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.207-8. The more lenient treatment of female ‘14Bs’ emphasizes the fact that these women were not viewed as conventional criminals.

<sup>647</sup> C.W. Morgan to Prison Commissioners, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10948/267603/31.

to a special camp at Knockaloe, the principal internment camp on the Isle of Man.<sup>648</sup> However, when it came to female prisoners interned under 14B there was no such clear-cut consensus. In February 1918, and again in November of the same year, the German Government raised concerns about the conditions under which female internees were imprisoned at Aylesbury and demanded that representatives of the Swiss Legation should be allowed to inspect the institution.<sup>649</sup> The discussion this provoked among officials of the Home and Foreign Office indicates that there was significant uncertainty and ambiguity about the status of these women, which hinged on the question of whether they should be considered 'prisoners of war'. If this was the case, then the German authorities had the right to request visits by neutral observers. The Foreign Office consensus was that female internees should not be classed as belonging to this category, although one official wondered if they should be regarded as "civilian prisoners".<sup>650</sup> Home Office officials reached similar conclusions.<sup>651</sup> However, despite rejecting the idea that the female prisoners should be given military status, the Home Office immediately made arrangements to concede to one of the German demands, namely that inmates should have the right to receive parcels of food from their own, or a neutral, country. This was one of the rights generally afforded to internees, and although the Home Office's agreement to the request was ostensibly due to concerns about reprisals being exacted against male internees in Germany if they failed to act, it also suggests that, at least on some

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<sup>648</sup> Prison Commission to Home Office, 7<sup>th</sup> Nov 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10948/267603/31.

<sup>649</sup> Translation of a Note Verbale from the German Government, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1918; Foreign Office minutes 24<sup>th</sup> October 1918: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/431, No.20398; FO383/432, Nos. 34262 and 15132.

<sup>650</sup> Foreign Office minutes 24<sup>th</sup>- 26<sup>th</sup> October 1918: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/432, No.15132.

<sup>651</sup> Home Office to Prisoners of War Department, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1918: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10785/291742/24,.



level, there was recognition that female internees did have a similarity in status to men interned under the general regulations.<sup>652</sup> The fact that the male enemy aliens interned at Reading, who had been imprisoned under the same regulation as the women at Aylesbury, were transferred to Knockaloe as civilian prisoners of war, suggests that the small number of German women who were interned at Aylesbury at this time should technically have been placed in the same category. Resistance to this move can only be accounted for by the continuing adherence of the British Government to the gendered separation of the civilian and military spheres, and is further evidence that general internment of women could not have been contemplated during this period.

### **The wives and families of internees**

Since only a handful of women were interned under the 14B regulations, the most significant impact of internment policy on women related to their positions as wives or relatives of internees. Of the more than 30,000 men who were interned in Britain during the course of the war, a significant number had wives and families, many of whom were now left without a breadwinner.<sup>653</sup> The German government quickly made arrangements for the families of German military and civilian internees (whether the wives were of German or British origin) to receive an allowance administered through the American Embassy. However, within weeks it was made clear that these funds would not continue to be made available for the support of British-born wives, and as a result the British government took the decision to grant

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<sup>652</sup> Home Office minute, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1918: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10785/291742/24.

<sup>653</sup> Internment figures fluctuated, due to repatriation of certain groups of internees, but Panayi has noted that by November 1915, 32,440 enemy aliens were interned: Panayi, 'Intolerant Act', p.59.

allowances to British-born families of internees.<sup>654</sup> These allowances were introduced despite the fact that Poor Law support was available to all destitute individuals, and the decision suggests that, although these women were no longer technically British subjects, a sense of official responsibility towards them continued to exist.<sup>655</sup> Indeed, Home Office notes of November 1914 confirmed that the decision to use the funds of central government to finance the grants was due to recognition that the “destitution” of such families was “created by Govt action in taking away the breadwinner”.<sup>656</sup> This precedent would be followed three years later, when grants were awarded to the families of Russian men whom the British authorities had forcibly returned to Russia under the Anglo-Russian Convention.<sup>657</sup> While such financial support was therefore connected to an acknowledgement of responsibility towards individuals who had been detrimentally affected by policy-making, the allowances to the wives of interned aliens also appear to have also been linked to a sense that these British-born women continued to have a place in the British community. The Destitute Aliens Committee, on whose recommendations the Government acted in regard to the allowances, reported in November 1914: “the British Government might reasonably be held to have a special responsibility with regard to this particular class in which the wives are aliens in law but not in habits or

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<sup>654</sup> Local Government Board (LGB) Circular to Boards of Guardians, ‘British-born Wives and Children of Interned Aliens’, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/2.

<sup>655</sup> German and Austrian-born wives were supported through grants from the German government: ‘Copy of a memorandum from the Destitute Aliens Committee’, 5 November 1914, p.4: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402.

<sup>656</sup> HO Minutes on a draft circular re ‘British-born wives and children of Interned Aliens’, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402.

<sup>657</sup> ‘Dependents of Russians’, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1919: National Archives, Kew, MH 57/203 99027/20.

sympathies and the children are British subjects in every respect.”<sup>658</sup> The recognition of responsibility in these cases has parallels with the payment of separation allowances for the families of British soldiers during the war, whereby Pederson has argued that the state established itself as a “surrogate husband” in the absence of the breadwinner.<sup>659</sup>

The introduction of allowances to the wives of enemy aliens in Britain is significant to this study because it suggests that internment policy had far wider implications than merely its effects on the male internees. While historians have generally addressed the history of First World War internment in terms of the male experience, there is much evidence to suggest that the policy should also be considered in terms of its impact on internees’ families, and that its effects on women and children should be regarded as being as much part of the ‘internment’ experience as was the day-to-day life of the imprisoned men. The centralised approach to supporting internees’ wives is also revealing about perceptions of the place of British women within the national community. The nationality laws which affected married women may have reflected contemporary understandings about the subordinate role of women in the family, but in practice, British-born women were still regarded as part of the nation. This is reflected in official assumptions about the personal responsibilities of these women to the national community, particularly regarding their contribution to the war effort which, as the conflict progressed, became increasingly significant. From November 1915, the Government began to restrict the issuing of allowances to internees’ wives

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<sup>658</sup> Destitute Aliens Committee, ‘Wives and Children of Alien Enemies’, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1914, p.7: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402.

<sup>659</sup> Susan Pederson, ‘Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War’, *The American Historical Review*, 95, 4, 1990, pp.983-1006; p.985.

if they were capable of earning a wage.<sup>660</sup> A Home Office report suggested that the allowances discouraged women from finding employment and thus helping the war effort, and attempts were made to assist them in finding work. The report concluded: “It is sheer national waste to have these women existing with diminished health and strength as a mere burden upon the resources of the community instead of giving to it the active help which they are quite capable of rendering”.<sup>661</sup>

The sense that a woman’s national origin was more significant than her legal nationality was reinforced by the British Government’s policy towards families of British men interned in Germany. The nationality laws which deprived British women of their nationality on marriage to an alien had the same effect on foreign women who married British men, and a number of the men interned in enemy states had German- or Austrian-born wives who had become British subjects by marriage. When it came to providing financial support, however, the British Government made every attempt to avoid responsibility for such women, despite the fact that the internment of male breadwinners had resulted in destitution for many families. Wives of British internees in Germany who were themselves of British origin were expected to return home if reasonably possible; those who were unable to were given a small allowance administered through the American, and later the Dutch, Embassies.<sup>662</sup> However,

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<sup>660</sup> LGB Circular, ‘Allowances to British-born Wives and Children of Interned Aliens’, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1915: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762.

<sup>661</sup> Home Office to Harmsworth, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1916: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/60

<sup>662</sup> In addition, the severe anti-British atmosphere in wartime Germany meant that few such women were able to obtain employment due to their British connections. Stibbe has found evidence that the financial situation of some such women became so dire that they were forced to smuggle food *out* of internment camps in their petticoats after visits to their interned husbands. Matthew Stibbe, *British civilian internees in Germany: The Ruhleben camp, 1914-18*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p.118.

German-born wives, despite being legally British subjects, were refused support by the British Government, a state of affairs which continued until August 1915, when it was made apparent that many German-born wives would soon have no choice but to move to Britain to seek assistance.<sup>663</sup> The Home Office, alarmed at the prospect of the arrival of substantial numbers of women who, while technically British subjects “would not be recognised as such in the United Kingdom”, stepped in to prevent this measure and it was agreed that support could be provided in certain cases.<sup>664</sup> However, even when allowances to German-born wives were grudgingly allowed, the women received significantly less support than their British-born counterparts, and strict limitations were placed on the categories of German-born women who could receive assistance.<sup>665</sup> In the summer of 1917, Chevalier van Rappard, of the Netherlands Legation, expressed his distress at having to turn away wives of internees whose families were starving, because neither the German nor the British authorities would acknowledge responsibility for their support.<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> Telegram forwarded from US Embassy, London, to British Foreign Office, from American Ambassador in Berlin, 24 August 1915: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/39, No. 102009.

<sup>664</sup> Home Office to Foreign Office, 7 September 1916: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/39, No. 127491. This was to come from charitable, rather than official funds, however. The Goschen Fund was a charitable fund established in 1915 under the patronage of Lord Edward Goschen, the former British Ambassador to Berlin, which was designed to provide “supplementary” assistance to British internees in Germany when needs arose which were not covered by official funds; this was to be used to provide assistance to German-born wives where necessary.

<sup>665</sup> While British-born wives of internees could apply for a maximum of 15 Marks a week from the British Relief Fund, which was an official, rather than a charitable, source of funding, German-born women could only be awarded a maximum of 10 Marks a week from the Goschen Fund at the discretion of the US Embassy. British-born wives could also receive extra assistance from the Goschen Fund: Foreign Office to US Ambassador, 22 Oct 1915; Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to US Ambassador, 8 November 1915: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/39, No. 147964 and No. 151842.

<sup>666</sup> The Dutch authorities took over responsibility for the administration of support for British subjects in Germany after the USA entered the war. See correspondence in: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/317.

The British Government's unwillingness to support this category of British subject, and the Home Office's horror at the prospect of German-born wives arriving in Britain, is further evidence of the significance which was placed not only on nationality but on 'race'. Perceptions of a person's 'British' or 'German' biological inheritance, rather than their legal national status, had a considerable impact on a person's acceptance or exclusion from the national community. Here, again, wartime tensions heightened the contemporary tendency to conflate the ideas of 'race' and nation. The "ties of blood"<sup>667</sup> of British-born wives of enemy aliens in Britain made them eligible for state support, despite their technical 'enemy' status; whereas women in Germany, who had been forced to take on full British nationality on their marriage to British men, were denied assistance as British subjects due to their German origins, and in many cases were abandoned to destitution.

While the introduction of financial support for British-born wives of internees within Britain may be interpreted as recognition of their continued membership of the national community, closer scrutiny of the administration of the allowances indicates that the enemy nationality of their husbands placed some limitations of status on these women within British society. A comparison of the grants with the support given to soldiers' dependents makes this particularly evident. From November 1914, wives of interned enemy aliens could apply for grants of up to 10s per week for themselves and 1s 6d for each child they were supporting.<sup>668</sup> The wife of a soldier, at this point, could claim 12s 6d, plus 2s 6d for their first three children and 2s for each additional

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<sup>667</sup> Foreign Office minute, 19 January 1917: National Archives, Kew, FO 383/317, No. 12445.

<sup>668</sup> This level applied to women living in London. Women living outside the capital could initially apply for up to 8s for themselves and 1s 6d for each child: Local Government Board circular to Boards of Guardians, 'British-born Wives and Children of Interned Aliens', 19<sup>th</sup> November 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762.

child. A soldier's wife with three children could therefore receive around 27.5% more than the wife of an internee with the same number of dependents. By the end of the war, separation allowances were around 39% higher than the grants for internees' families.<sup>669</sup> In addition, the grants for wives of internees were, unlike the separation allowances, administered through the Board of Guardians which, some internees complained, meant that "the stigma of pauperism was attached to the grant."<sup>670</sup> That this difference in treatment was by no means accidental was indicated in Home Office discussions of the support for British-born wives, which often stressed the importance of ensuring that they were not treated more favourably than women of full British nationality. For example, the introduction of the allowances was initially questioned by certain Home Office officials, who expressed concern that such a policy would result in the wives of aliens receiving higher rates of financial support than other British women who applied for Poor Law relief or whose British husbands had been made unemployed by the war.<sup>671</sup> Reluctance, however, to consequently place the British-born wives of aliens in a worse financial position than German- or Austrian-born women, who received financial help from their respective governments, ultimately overruled this objection.<sup>672</sup> The administration of the allowances was therefore shaped both by notions of responsibility towards women and children and the prevailing wartime Germanophobia and anti-alienism.

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<sup>669</sup> By October 1918, the wife of a soldier with three children could claim 35s 6d a week, while the wife of an interned alien could claim 21s 5d. Based on figures in Pederson, 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship', p.90 and LGB Circular to Boards of Guardians, 'Allowances to British-born Wives of Interned Aliens', 19<sup>th</sup> February 1917: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/70.

<sup>670</sup> Prisoners of War Department, Alexandra Palace, to Local Government Board, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1918: National Archives, Kew, FO 383 411, No. 115816.

<sup>671</sup> Home Office minutes, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402.

<sup>672</sup> Home Office minutes, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1914: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/2.

Despite an increase in the allowances for families of internees in May 1915, the rates of payment were not enough to provide families with sufficient income to meet high wartime prices. In a report for the Friends Emergency Committee in February 1915, Seebohm Rowntree estimated that a woman with three children, who received all clothing on a charitable basis, would require an income of 19s a week as an 'Absolute minimum to prevent serious physical deterioration'.<sup>673</sup> Even after the allowance rates were increased in May of that year, the maximum weekly allowance for a such a family on the higher London rate was only 16s 9d.<sup>674</sup> Indeed, the allowance was so scant that even the Home Office admitted that such an income was "only enough to keep body and soul together."<sup>675</sup> As a result, those women who were unable to work had to rely on support from family or charitable institutions, most notably the FEC, which provided money and food for needy families.<sup>676</sup> These factors indicate the ambiguous position of British-born wives of internees. On the surface, the decision to award them allowances, and the stress on their potential contribution to the war effort, suggested that they achieved some official recognition as members of the national community. However, the low levels of the allowances suggests that their enemy connections meant they were considered to be far less worthy of support than the wives of British servicemen, and indicates the limitations of their official acceptance.

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<sup>673</sup> Seebohm Rowntree to Mrs. Thomas, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1915: Executive Committee of the Emergency Committee Minutes 1914-1916. Vol 1, Library of the Religious Society of Friends. In March 1915, the wife of a British serviceman with three children could apply for a grant of up to 21s 6d. Pederson, 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship', p.90.

<sup>674</sup> From 19<sup>th</sup> May 1915 women could apply for up to 11s 6d plus 1s 9d for each child: Local Government Board circular, 'British-born Wives and Children of Interned Aliens', 19<sup>th</sup> May 1915: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/27.

<sup>675</sup> Home Office to Harmsworth , 8<sup>th</sup> December 1916: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402.

<sup>676</sup> Friends Emergency Committee Minutes, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1915; 13<sup>th</sup> April 1915: Library of the Religious Society of Friends, FEWVRC/EME/EXEC M1.



Gillian Thomas has argued that the administration of separation allowances for families of British servicemen involved a significant element of surveillance of the women involved, as well as attempts to monitor and control their behaviour. Separation allowances could be withdrawn from women who were “guilty of serious misconduct”, which included child neglect and ‘immoral’ behaviour.<sup>677</sup> Although such clauses did not appear in official circulars relating to the allowances of wives of internees, there is evidence that, on a local level, a similar policy was applied. The FEC, which supported women in appeals against curtailed allowances, recorded at least one case of an appeal being refused on the grounds that the woman in question was “reported intemperate, immoral and untruthful”.<sup>678</sup> In fact, the experiences of individual women appear to have owed more to the sympathies of local Boards of Guardians officials than to central guidelines and attitudes. In East Sussex, for example, the Eastbourne Board of Guardians had little sympathy towards the British-born wives of enemy aliens, going as far as to write to the Home Office recommending that all such women should be deported in order to halt the drain they were placing on national resources.<sup>679</sup> The Eastbourne Guardians resisted giving allowances to childless women or women with only one child, and when official instructions were circulated in November 1915 that allowances should be reduced wherever possible to save money, they quickly slashed the majority of grants by more than half.<sup>680</sup> In 1918, internees at the Alexandra Palace camp wrote to the

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<sup>677</sup> Gillian Thomas, ‘State Maintenance for Women during the First World War: The Case of Separation Allowances and Pensions’, D.Phil Thesis, University of Sussex, 1989, p.201.

<sup>678</sup> Friends Emergency Committee minutes, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1916: FEWVRC/EME/EXEC M2, Library of the Religious Society of Friends.

<sup>679</sup> Guardians of the Eastbourne Union Minute Book, Vol. XXXIX. No.26., 31<sup>st</sup> March 1916, p.539: East Sussex Record Office.

<sup>680</sup> Guardians of the Eastbourne Union Minute Book, Vol. XXXIX; No.11. 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1915, p.246; ‘Report of the Relief Committee, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1916’, Guardians of the Eastbourne

Local Government Board to complain about the administration of allowances, arguing that unsympathetic treatment by local Boards of Guardians left many women reluctant to make further applications, resulting in cases of extreme poverty.<sup>681</sup> In contrast, Uckfield Union, which neighboured Eastbourne, appears to have been generally favourable in its reception of applications for support from local wives of internees and largely ignored the Local Government Board request for reductions in spending.<sup>682</sup> These cases are indicative of the differences which could exist between official and local attitudes towards the enemy alien situation and the status of British-born women, and suggest that that regional disparities could have a significant influence on the experiences of individual women.<sup>683</sup> Such evidence supports the findings of Catriona MacDonald, who has argued that the examination of local differences in attitudes towards enemy aliens can provide a deeper dimension to studies of wartime prejudice.<sup>684</sup>

While attitudes towards British-born wives of internees remained ambiguous, official interest in the welfare of internees' British-born children increased as the war progressed. Just as British-born wives could be regarded, when convenient, as

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Union Minute Book, Vol. XXXIX. No. 21, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1916, p.446: East Sussex Record Office.

<sup>681</sup> Prisoners of War Department, Alexandra Palace, to LGB, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1918: National Archives, Kew, FO 383 411, No. 115816.

<sup>682</sup> Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Board of Guardians of the Uckfield Union, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1914, pp.113-114; 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1915, p.152; 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1915, pp.202-3; 29 December 1915, p.368. 10<sup>th</sup> January 1916, pp.371-372: East Sussex Record Office.

<sup>683</sup> Pat Thane has shown that levels and types of relief by Poor Law Unions were dictated by the Boards' perceptions of the moral standards of individuals, and their classification as members of the 'deserving' or the 'undeserving' poor. Evidence that British-born women could be refused the allowance in certain districts due to concerns about their behaviour indicates that the administration of the grants were probably influenced by the wider culture of the Poor Law system. Pat Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop Journal*, 6, 1978, pp.29-51; p.41.

<sup>684</sup> MacDonald, 'May 1915', p.166.

useful contributors to the nation's war effort, there is evidence that their children, despite having German fathers, were increasingly considered in terms of their potential value as future British citizens. The general significance placed on children as the future of the nation during the First World War has been stressed by Deborah Dwork, who has argued that the high mortality rates among British soldiers led to a greater preoccupation with the health and well-being of the younger generation.<sup>685</sup> The impact of such ideas on the experiences of British-born families of internees is indicated in the development of the allowance system, and in particular the significance which was attached to the section of the grant which was applicable for children. During the course of the war, the element of the allowance payable for each child in a family was increased by 50%. In contrast, the basic allocation which a wife received regardless of whether she had children was increased much more gradually, and in total by only 20%.<sup>686</sup> In addition, while the grant for women living outside London was considerably lower than those living in the metropolis, there was no difference in the section of the grant intended for children. The 1915 restrictions on the grant meant that it became particularly difficult for childless women to access: the allowance could be stopped or reduced for women who were capable of working and were "not hindered from doing so by the needs of their children".<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>685</sup> Deborah Dwork, *War is good for babies and other young children. A history of the infant and child welfare movement in England 1898–1918*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987), p.209.

<sup>686</sup> This has parallels with the development of the military separation allowance which increased considerably for children during the war, but not for their mothers. Pederson, 'Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship', p.990.

<sup>687</sup> Circular from LGB to Boards of Guardians, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1915: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/ 31a.

The idea that it was in the national interest to maintain the children of British-born wives of enemy aliens was stressed in the advice given to the Government by William Cable, an influential member of the Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress. As early as April 1915, before general internment had been introduced, Cable was already considering the potential significance of such British-born children as members of the post-war nation. He pushed for higher allowances for the families of British-born wives than those of German-born women, arguing that otherwise “the children of the British-born, who will probably or possibly remain British citizens, suffer in health, while those of the German-born, who will probably go to Germany, are immune”.<sup>688</sup> It seems likely that the Home Office agreed with the principle of Cable’s argument since by 1916 the department was pursuing a policy “of putting as many difficulties as possible in the way of a British born woman who tries to go back while her husband is interned in this country.”<sup>689</sup> At this stage, there is evidence that one reason for such an approach was the attempt to avoid the bad international publicity which might ensue if British-born women moved to Germany with tales of mistreatment by their neighbours.<sup>690</sup> However, by the end of the war, concern about population numbers seems to have become central to official attitudes towards the British-born children of Germans. During 1918, when plans were being developed for large-scale, post-war repatriation of former internees, one of the key drawbacks to such a policy was held to be the possibility that numbers of British-born families

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<sup>688</sup> Home Office minutes, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1915: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/41a. It is unclear how far this was an significant matter of personal principle to Cable, or whether, as a representative of a voluntary body seeking to assist aliens in Britain, he felt that this argument might be the most effective in securing higher levels of allowance.

<sup>689</sup> Home Office minutes, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 1916: National Archives, Kew, HO 45/10762/270402/61.

<sup>690</sup> Home Office minutes, November 1916: National Archives, Kew, 45/10762/270402/61.

would emigrate to be with their fathers. In January 1918, the Aliens Advisory Committee, stated:

...after the war there will in all countries be a crying need for population to replace the losses of men, and...it is undesirable, unless in exceptional circumstances, that British-born children should be compelled or induced to leave the country by the repatriation of one or both of their parents.”<sup>691</sup>

In order to restrict the numbers of British-born children leaving the country due to the repatriation of their fathers, the Home Office decreed that children over eight were not permitted to leave the country “until it is ascertained that they really wish to accompany their mother”, and British-born boys over the age of fifteen were forbidden from leaving.<sup>692</sup> A statement by H. Brodrick, the secretary to the Aliens Advisory Committee, published in the *Daily Mirror* in 1919 as the repatriation of enemy alien men was underway, underlines the extent to which children of British mothers could be regarded as a national commodity. Brodrick is recorded as stating: “No doubt the German Government would be pleased to have them [British-born children] because the children born here would be very useful to Germany later on, as their British nationality would give them right of access to the British Empire.” As an example of the cases he had come across in his role, Brodrick referred to the child of a British-born mother who had never met its German father due to the latter’s internment and imminent repatriation. Brodrick used the case to stress the importance of keeping such children in Britain, stating: “It would be absurd to let Germany have that baby, and I am very glad to believe that it will stay here.”<sup>693</sup> The official attitude to the families of ‘enemy alien’ fathers and British-born mothers

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<sup>691</sup> Report of the Aliens Committee. 25<sup>th</sup> January 1918, pp.3-4: National Archives, Kew, KV 167/1308.

<sup>692</sup> ‘Germans’ British Wives’, *Daily Mirror*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1918, p.2.

<sup>693</sup> ‘Sending the Huns home’, *Daily Mirror*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1919, p.14.

therefore differed significantly from popular attitudes, which, as has been seen, involved ostracism and sometimes violence.

Although on one level such attitudes appear to have been related to general concerns about future levels of population and manpower, some government departments, particularly MI5, had more specific ideas about the types of people who should be encouraged to stay in Britain, and put pressure on the Home Office to take more restrictive measures towards children with full German parentage.<sup>694</sup> MI5 believed that women of full German nationality should be encouraged to return to Germany, even if that meant taking their British-born children with them. Although many such children had been born and brought up in Britain, their full German parentage was held to have diminished their perceived value as British subjects. This issue was addressed in a MI5 memo of July 1917, with strong racial overtones:

The problem most difficult to solve is the extent to which the enemy born wife of the enemy male can shelter behind any one of their children which happens to have been born on British soil. It would be well to remember that a sow can only produce pigs. The only military suggestion possible, therefore, is that enemy foreign-born wives or widows, with or without children born on British soil, should receive the indulgence of being permitted to leave the prohibited areas for their own land forthwith.<sup>695</sup>

Such an example of racialized attitudes has connections with the widespread popular discourse which stressed the danger of naturalized Germans. As has been seen, the Home Office came under considerable pressure throughout the war from the press and certain MPs to introduce restrictive measures, including internment, against

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<sup>694</sup> During this period a child born in Britain was considered a British subject, even if born of non-British parents. This discussion therefore relates to children who were British subjects due to their place of birth, but whose parents both had full 'enemy' nationality.

<sup>695</sup> 'Disposal of Alien Enemies in Prohibited Areas', 21<sup>st</sup> July 1916: National Archives, Kew, KV166/1017.

naturalized people of German origin. MI5 included both naturalized Germans and British-born children of full German parentage as members of what they termed the “Enemy tainted Colony” within Britain.<sup>696</sup> Use of such language, evocative of ideas about bad blood, strongly indicates the extent to which even official discussions of Germans, and particularly those relating to the repatriation of women and children, could become racialized as the war progressed. Although the British-born children of German parents perhaps received less negative attention than naturalized Germans, the two categories were often grouped together. The MI5 report referred to above may indicate that gender had some role to play in understandings of the way race was determined, with maternal inheritance playing a part in the way individuals of German origin were perceived.<sup>697</sup> While policy-making towards children born of British mothers often gave recognition to their potential as future subjects, those born of German mothers seem to have been more likely to have been regarded as potential future threats. This was a profound shift from the discourses of racial affinity that had been evident during the pre-war years and indicates the power of ‘total’ war experiences to encourage the development of an exclusive national identity rooted in racial thinking. The First World War was notable for the extremes to which this trend developed and to the extent to which popular racial stereotypes came to permeate official decision-making on internees and their families.

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<sup>696</sup> Control of Aliens in the United Kingdom Volume IV. 1918 to 1927, Statistical table, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1918: National Archives, Kew, KV 1/67.

<sup>697</sup> This has parallels with contemporary discussions in France regarding the right of abortion for women who had become pregnant as a result of rape by German soldiers. Grayzel has noted that opponents of abortion argued that their maternal inheritance, despite their German paternity, ensured the French nationalities of these unborn children. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities*, pp.51-52.

## **Conclusion**

The First World War internment episode was the most prominent of a number of policies which contributed towards a stark wartime demarcation between Britons and foreign nationals. A heightened sense of national identity, often marked by an exclusion of minority groups perceived as antipathetic to dominant national virtues or values, has been regarded as a common feature of 'total' warfare; however, the First World War was significant for the extreme levels of hostility which developed towards the 'enemy' in Britain, leaving little space for debate or dissent. Atrocity stories were particularly significant in generating this hostility, stimulating a demonization of the enemy and reinforcing the significance of race and gender in shaping perceptions of the conflict. The association of internment policy with racialized and gendered stereotypes of the enemy continued the pattern which had been established during the South African War, although it differed in significant ways. The image of the German, which remained the dominant 'enemy' stereotype, was based on ideas of aggressive masculinity and, unlike during the earlier conflict, representations of enemy women were quite rare. The tendency to imagine the conflict in gendered terms had a significant impact on enemy aliens, because it made the British 'home front', essentially perceived as a feminine sphere, appear particularly vulnerable to danger from the 'enemy within'. In this way, gendered atrocity discourses fed into and reinforced public calls for male, rather than female, internment. However, while the masculine image of the enemy may have ensured that internment policy was restricted to men, the increasingly racial edge that characterized atrocity propaganda meant that it became more difficult for enemy alien women to avoid hostility as the war progressed. Propaganda depicting German soldiers as callous, brutal and



aggressive was so extensive that such qualities became widely accepted as specifically 'German' traits. As a result, while traditional notions of 'British' chivalry may have offered female enemy aliens protection from hostile public opinion in the early months of the war, imagery of Germans based on 'racial' characteristics meant that negative 'German' attributes logically came to be applied to women as well as men. This trend is strongly indicated by the simultaneous increase in racialized language in the press and the significant rise in popular aggression towards enemy aliens of both sexes. Although such racial thinking was less significant in official circles, at least during the early years of the war, the government's repeated capitulations to public pressure on the matter of internment meant that popular discourses on the enemy became a vital element of policy-making.

The tendency for atrocity propaganda to define or reinforce 'British' values also had a significant, although less direct, impact on the development of internment policy. Repeated allusions to the German disregard for the protection of women and children, the sanctity of the home, and principles of justice and fair play not only shaped the image of the 'brutal' enemy, but reinforced the significance of such themes in British culture. The centrality to British discourses of this particular code of ethics meant that the British Government had to take care to ensure that its own policies were above reproach. As official responses to the Edith Cavell case demonstrated, the gendered anti-German propaganda campaign had to be reinforced by positive behaviour by the British authorities in order to maintain their own credibility. Also significant to domestic policy-making was the memory of the South African War and the acute embarrassment caused to the British Government

by accusations of the mistreatment of women and children. These factors ensured that the authorities trod carefully when making women targets of policy, and they explain why general female internment was consistently rejected by the government. They also explain why the small number of women who were interned under DORA Regulation 14B were treated with more consideration than men, given more freedom and, most significantly, were firmly disassociated from military rhetoric by both Home and Foreign Office officials.

As Rose has argued, the heightened sense of national identity engendered by the experience of 'total war' is likely to be reinforced by the identification of 'outgroups' within society. Internment policy can be understood as a one of the most prominent examples of the delineation of outsiders within British society, and is part of a pattern which saw individuals who did not conform to dominant discourses of Britishness excluded from the national community. The First World War is also notable for the extent to which such exclusionary discourses became rooted in race. The development of both internment and repatriation within an atmosphere of racialized hostility towards the 'enemy' indicates that these policies should be regarded as a process of racial exclusion.

This chapter has also highlighted one set of people who were situated uncomfortably between these two spheres during the war: the small but significant group of women who were British by birth but who were legally enemy aliens on account of their marriages to foreign men. The ambiguous position of these women is highlighted by the different experiences they endured at the hands of the public and officials at both

local and national levels. The increasingly violent Germanophobia exhibited by members of the public meant that their British roots were often overshadowed by their German connections. However, in official circles the introduction of allowances to British-born wives of internees, and resistance to any suggestion of their removal from the country, indicated a continuing acceptance of the British racial 'membership' of these women. The significance of 'race' in definitions of national identity is highlighted further by the British Government's avoidance of responsibility for the wives of interned British men in Germany, who, despite their legal British status, were in many cases abandoned to destitution and even starvation. The rejection of German-born families by the British authorities contrasted sharply with the concern expressed that children of German fathers and British-born mothers should receive support and remain in Britain. The positive policy towards children of British-born mothers indicates that, in a climate of concern over population figures, British maternal inheritance was regarded as sufficient to ensure a child's acceptance into the national community.

Although the policy took place in a vastly different context than it had during the South African War, First World War internment again demonstrated the significance of the development of 'enemy' stereotypes in forcing restrictions against civilians. As during the earlier conflict, such imaginings were underpinned by racial thought and gender assumptions, and during both conflicts, prominent discourses existed which stressed the rejection by the enemy of 'civilized' standards of behaviour, particularly in terms of the gender roles and relations idealized in British society. The highly gendered nature of internment during the First World War was also to have long term

significance, since it would later be used by officials as a blueprint for the administration of internment during the Second World War. However, while this internment episode shared similarities with the internment policies both preceding and succeeding it, the sheer force of public opinion in driving the policy during the First World War was more extreme and extensive than it was during either of those cases. The introduction of internment policy between 1914 and 1918 demonstrated the potential power of popular prejudice, and provided an extreme example of the extent to which wartime tensions could strongly enhance concepts of inclusion and exclusion within British society.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE SECOND WORLD WAR

### Introduction

When the Second World War broke out in September 1939, the British Government was again faced with the question of how to deal with enemy civilians in Britain. By this point, the memory of internment during the First World War had become tarnished in the popular imagination, tending to be associated with an irrational xenophobia which many contemporaries were determined to avoid in this new conflict. Recalling the “discreditable” examples of Germanophobia during the First World War, for example, *The Times* expressed the belief that the issue of enemy aliens would this time be handled effectively but tolerantly.<sup>698</sup> This more liberal attitude was influenced by the fact that the situation regarding enemy aliens in 1939 differed to that of 1914 in a number of ways. Since Britain was now embroiled in a conflict against a regime defined by its aggressive racism, internment policies based on race or nationality were far more difficult to justify. The sense that this was an ideological, rather than a national conflict, permeated early discussions of enemy aliens. As the Conservative peer, Lord Newton, told the House of Lords in October 1939: “We know perfectly well that a large proportion of the German people are bitterly opposed to the Nazi régime, just as much as we are ourselves...Let us make it plain once and for all that we have no quarrel with anti-Nazi Germany.”<sup>699</sup> The question of enemy aliens was also influenced by the interwar changes to Britain’s German population. The expulsion of several thousand enemy aliens in 1918 and 1919, amidst the continuing post-war Germanophobia, had broken up the established

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<sup>698</sup> ‘The Treatment of Aliens’, *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1939, p.9. See also ‘Enemy Aliens’, *Manchester Guardian*, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1939, p.6.

<sup>699</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1939, vol. 114, col. 1594.

German community in Britain.<sup>700</sup> Since the First World War, the pattern of German and Austrian immigration into Britain had also altered considerably. German settlement in Britain, which prior to 1914 had generally been economically-motivated, had undergone a significant change in the 1930s, when the Nazi racial and political persecution had resulted in significant numbers of Germans and Austrians arriving in Britain as refugees. Although restrictions on immigration were strictly enforced in Britain during the 1930s, it has been estimated that between 1933 and 1939 around 90,000 refugees were allowed to enter Britain, about 85-90% of whom were Jewish.<sup>701</sup> On the outbreak of the war in 1939, therefore, the majority of 'enemy aliens' strongly supported Britain's stance against the Nazi regime.

The possibility of the general internment of male enemy aliens had been discussed extensively during the summer of 1939. Until the end of August it seemed likely that full male internment would be implemented, with plans devised for the separate accommodation of refugees and Nazi sympathisers.<sup>702</sup> The general internment of refugees, however, sat uneasily with many government officials; Treasury official, S. D. Waley called the idea "monstrous", while the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, was recorded as being particularly opposed to such a scheme.<sup>703</sup> On 29<sup>th</sup> August, only days before the outbreak of the war, Hoare decided to abandon the plans for

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<sup>700</sup> James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, 'London's German Community in the Early 1930s', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Germans in Britain Since 1500* (London: Hambleton Press, 1996), pp.131-146; p.131.

<sup>701</sup> Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British immigration policy, Jewish refugees and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.11.

<sup>702</sup> Police War Instructions; August, 1939, issue. Amendment List No.8, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144/21258/700463/33.

<sup>703</sup> S.D. Waley, Treasury Chambers, to Sir Ernest Holderness, Home Office, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1939; Sir A. Maxwell to Sir Vernon Kell, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144/21258/700463/33; HO 144/21258/700463/41.

general internment and to implement a system of tribunals which would consider the cases of individual enemy aliens and decide whether internment was appropriate.<sup>704</sup> This policy, it was agreed, would save a “great deal of useless time, trouble and expense”, but the underlying reason for the change of heart appears to have been Home Office concerns about the ethics of interning refugees from Nazi oppression.<sup>705</sup> When the new Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson, announced details of the tribunal system on 4<sup>th</sup> September, he alluded to what he felt was a “general desire to avoid treating as enemies those who are friendly to the country which has offered them asylum.”<sup>706</sup> Accordingly, while around 300 Germans who had been identified prior to the war as having pro-Nazi sympathies were immediately interned, the vast majority of enemy aliens – 73,353 – appeared before tribunals.<sup>707</sup> Under this system, enemy aliens were classified into one of three categories. Those in Category A were regarded as a security risk and were immediately interned, while Category B incorporated those whose loyalty was open to some doubt. Those in the latter category were not interned, but were subject to a number of restrictions to their movement and residence. The majority of enemy aliens, however, were placed in Category C, classified as loyal to the British cause, and exempted from all restrictions.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Sir A. Maxwell to Sir Vernon Kell, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144/21258/700463/41.

<sup>705</sup> ‘Internment: Memoranda concerning change in policy with regard to internment, registration etc.’, August 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144/21258/700463/43.

<sup>706</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939, vol. 351, cols 366-70. Sir John Anderson had replaced Sir Samuel Hoare as Home Secretary in a Cabinet re-shuffle that day.

<sup>707</sup> Sir John Anderson, ‘Control of Aliens’, April 1940, p.4; p.6: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/615.

<sup>708</sup> Sir John Anderson, ‘Control of Aliens’, April 1940, p.6: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/615. As a result of the tribunals, 569 people were interned, 6,782 were placed in Category B and 64,244 were placed in Category C.

This comparatively liberal approach towards enemy aliens was interrupted, however, in early 1940 as Hitler's rapid invasions of Western European countries hastened a change in the atmosphere of British opinion towards enemy aliens. As Britain became increasingly vulnerable to the Nazi threat, positive attitudes towards refugees began to erode, and a new public discourse focused increasingly on the potential danger of enemy civilians in Britain. Anti-enemy alien rhetoric, which contemporaries had relegated to the mists of the First World War, began to re-emerge. In May, amid a storm of press hostility towards enemy aliens, the Cabinet, newly reshuffled and now under the leadership of Winston Churchill, widened its internment policy to include men and women who had been placed in Category B, followed a few days later by aliens in Category C where there were "grounds for doubting the reliability of an individual".<sup>709</sup> On the outbreak of war with Italy on 10<sup>th</sup> June, Britain's Italian residents also became enemy aliens, and police were immediately instructed to round up Italian men between the ages of 16 and 70, who had become residents of Britain since 31<sup>st</sup> December 1919.<sup>710</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> June 1940, the Government implemented the first of three stages of the internment of German and Austrian men in Category C.<sup>711</sup> By the summer of 1940, therefore, the British internment policy had reverted to a model very similar to that of the First World War, with the implementation of substantial male enemy alien internment. As Peter and Leni Gilman have noted, the total number of 27,200 internees was now

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<sup>709</sup> Under-Secretary of State, War Office to General Headquarters, Home Forces, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940; Government Telegram. HO to Chief Officers in England and Wales (Except Tyne) and certain Chief Constables in Scotland, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1940; Home Office to Chief Constables, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1720.

<sup>710</sup> Home Office Circular to Chief Constables, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1719. This use of this specific date was designed to avoid the internment of Italian men who had fought for Britain in the First World War and then settled in the country shortly afterwards.

<sup>711</sup> Home Office to Chief Constables, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1715.



uncomfortably close to the 29,000 individuals interned between 1914 and 1918.<sup>712</sup> Unlike the earlier conflict, however, internment in 1940 also involved a small but significant number of female internees (around 4,000).<sup>713</sup> As will be explored in this chapter, the internment of women was introduced with significant reluctance by the Home Office and with the pacification of public opinion in mind. However, it was the reversal of the original internment policy as a whole, involving the incarceration of thousands of anti-Nazi refugees, which has provided the main point of criticism among both contemporaries and historians.

The suggestion that the introduction of internment policy undermined British liberal traditions of asylum for refugees and tolerance of minorities is one that was raised in the very earliest contemporary debates on internment in 1940. These disputes were prompted, in part, by the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, a ship carrying both German and Italian internees to Canada, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, resulting in considerable loss of life. The British Government had negotiated agreements with the Canadian and Australian Governments that 'dangerous' internees in Category A would be transferred to internment camps in the Dominions. The sinking of the *Arandora Star* was particularly controversial because it brought to light the fact that, in practice, internees from the other categories were also being deported. The event had a particularly traumatic effect on Britain's Italian community, since Italian men (who had not had the opportunity of appearing before tribunals) consisted of a large proportion of

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<sup>712</sup> Peter and Leni Gillman, *'Collar the Lot!' How Britain Interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees*, (London: Quartet Books, 1980), p.173.

<sup>713</sup> Herbert Morrison, 'War Cabinet. Internment of aliens of enemy nationality', 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/8/109.

fatalities.<sup>714</sup> As well as the injustice of the policy, and the tragic consequences of deportation, criticism also focused on the poor administration of the camps, which, it was argued, resulted in Nazis and anti-Nazis sharing accommodation and internees experiencing extreme isolation due to the prohibition of newspapers and excessive delays on post in and out of the camps.<sup>715</sup> Chief among the contemporary opponents of the scheme was Francois Lafitte, a researcher for Political and Economic Planning (PEP) who published a scathing critique of internment in late 1940, attacking the policy as a symptom of the weakness and panic of the Government, and describing conditions in the camps as an “unsavoury scandal”.<sup>716</sup> Parliamentary opposition to the policy was led by Independent MP Eleanor Rathbone and Conservative Victor Cazalet, who maintained that the policy was not only unjust but un-British, and exerted consistent pressure on the government to reverse its policy.<sup>717</sup> As a result of the mounting criticism, the government gradually began to relax the internment policy, and at the end of July 1940 published a list of eighteen categories under which individual internees could apply for release, including “the invalid and infirm”, individuals who, prior to internment had “occupied key positions in industries engaged in work of national importance” and those who were able to successfully

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<sup>714</sup> Wendy Ugolini, ‘The Internal Enemy ‘Other’: Recovering the World War Two Narratives of Italian Scottish Women’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 24, 2, 2004, pp.137-158; pp.140-141. Ugolini has argued that the incident has become an important focal point for Italian remembrance of the Second World War.

<sup>715</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, cols 1208-1306.

<sup>716</sup> F. Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens*, (London: Penguin, 1940), p.26; p.94.

<sup>717</sup> See, in particular: Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, cols 1208-1306. For a discussion of Rathbone’s role in the campaign against internment, see Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.314-322 and Susan Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing: Eleanor Rathbone and the Refugees*, (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2010), Chapter 6.

apply for enlistment in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps.<sup>718</sup> These categories were further expanded over the course of the year.<sup>719</sup> By January 1941 a total of 9,816 people had been released from British internment camps. By the following April around 1,380 were still interned on the Isle of Man and 4,652 men remained interned overseas.<sup>720</sup>

Despite the high profile of the debate on enemy alien internment during 1940, the subject disappeared from public discussion in the years following the war. After 1945, despite the rapid development of an extensive historiography on the Second World War in general, and the publication of one or two volumes of internee reminiscences, the experiences of enemy aliens received little academic attention.<sup>721</sup> As Dove and Gullace have argued, the absence of studies of British wartime internment policies in general can be associated with their potential to undermine positive British narratives

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<sup>718</sup> 'German and Austrian civilian internees: Categories of persons eligible for release from internment and procedure to be followed in applying for release', July 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6217), Vol. X. For discussion of the policy of inclusion of enemy aliens in the British Forces see John P. Fox, 'German and Austrian Jews in Britain's Armed Forces and British and German Citizenship Policies 1939-1945', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, Vol. XXXVII, 1992, pp.415-59.

<sup>719</sup> 'Civilian Internees of Enemy Nationality: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release from Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release', August 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6223), Vol. X; 'Civilian Internees of Enemy Nationality: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release from Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release', August 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6233), Vol. X.

<sup>720</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1941, vol. 368, cols 179-81; Internment figures, 2 April 1942, in '116/107: Meeting with Provincial Committees, 23rd April 1942', Central Department for Interned Refugees: Minutes of meetings: London Metropolitan Archive, ACC/2793/03/05/02.

<sup>721</sup> Internee reminiscences include: Livia Laurent, *A Tale of Internment*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942) and V. Rev. Mgr. Gaetano Rossi, *Memories of 1940: Impressions of Life in an Internment Camp*, (Rome: Associazione Culturale Scoglio di Frisio Foundation, n.d.)

of liberalism and tolerance.<sup>722</sup> This has been particularly significant in relation to the Second World War, an event which continues to be fundamental to the nation's collective memory and is perceived as exemplifying British national traditions of social solidarity and tolerance.<sup>723</sup> Dove has suggested that the dearth of academic studies of internment prior to the late 1980s can be attributed to the fact that the policy was incongruous with the highly idealized perception of Britain's role in the conflict.<sup>724</sup> Indeed, Gavin Schaffer and Wendy Ugolini have argued that this positive image of Britain's role in the war was such a significant part of post-war culture that it restricted the way that former internees were able to articulate their memories of the experience, as they sought to assimilate into British society during the post-war period.<sup>725</sup> Significant studies of internment did not begin to appear until the early 1980s, when books on the subject were produced by Peter and Leni Gillman, Ronald Stent (a former internee) and Connery Chappell. All three books were aimed at a popular audience, but while the former authors took a critical stance towards internment, Chappell actively resisted the analytical approach and offered a narrative of life under internment on the Isle Man.<sup>726</sup> Although historians such as Angus Calder gave some attention to the experiences of enemy aliens within general surveys of civilian life during the Second World War, it was not until 1990 that a major

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<sup>722</sup> Gullace, 'Friends, Aliens and Enemies', p.361; Richard Dove, 'A matter which touches the good name of this country', p.11.

<sup>723</sup> Rose, *Which People's War*, pp.1-2.

<sup>724</sup> Richard Dove, 'A matter which touches the good name of this country', p.11.

<sup>725</sup> Schaffer and Ugolini, 'Victims or Enemies', p.218.

<sup>726</sup> Gillman and Gilman, *Collar the Lot!*, Ronald Stent, *A Bespattered Page? The Internment of His Majesty's 'most loyal enemy aliens'*, (London: André Deutsch, 1980); Connery Chappell, *Island of Barbed Wire: The remarkable story of World War Two internment on the Isle of Man*, (London: Robert Hale, 1984), p.20. Calder reference.

conference on internment cemented the subject as a significant area of academic research in its own right.<sup>727</sup>

Since the vast majority of internees in the summer of 1940 were Jewish refugees, much consideration of internment policy has taken place within the context of wider debates on Britain's policy towards refugees from Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945. This theme has emerged in recent decades as a major point of controversy among historians, and the sensitivity surrounding remembrance of both the Holocaust and Britain's largely positive wartime image has contributed to the contentious nature of the issue. Tony Kushner, Bernard Wasserstein and Louise London have all criticized Britain's policies towards refugees, both before and during the war, and particularly the government's continued insistence on maintaining immigration restrictions despite its knowledge of the scale of Nazi persecution of European Jews.<sup>728</sup> From this perspective, the introduction of internment in 1940 has been regarded as one aspect of Britain's "unimpressive" record towards Jewish refugees.<sup>729</sup> London has argued that "self-interest" was always the driving force in British policy towards refugees and that, during the 1930s, humanitarian policy towards exiles from Nazi territory was repeatedly curbed by official concerns about the impact of immigration on British unemployment levels and the belief that excessive Jewish immigration might stimulate domestic antisemitism.<sup>730</sup> Martin

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<sup>727</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45*, (London: Pantheon, 1969), pp.130-133; Kushner and Cesarani, 'Alien Internment', p.9. This article is the introduction to the volume published as a result of the 1990 conference.

<sup>728</sup> Kushner, *Holocaust*, p.273; Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, (London: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1979), p.349; p.352; p.356; London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, pp.1-2.

<sup>729</sup> Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, p.349.

<sup>730</sup> London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, pp.1-2.

Gilbert has shown that this latter consideration continued to be wielded by British politicians throughout the war, despite an increasing awareness in Britain of the extreme violence of the Nazi regime's policy towards Europe's Jews.<sup>731</sup> From this perspective, therefore, the British government's internment of Jewish enemy aliens, despite their status as refugees, and their wider failure to provide assistance for refugee Jews from Europe, raises questions about Britain's image as a 'liberal' and tolerant nation. However, these historians have also noted that more generous impulses also existed, both among the British public and MPs, many of whom pressured the government to amend its policy towards Jewish refugees.<sup>732</sup> Indeed, as will be seen, the development of internment policy itself would be shaped by examples of both prejudice and tolerance, found among various government departments and individual officials. Kushner has stressed that "elements of xenophobic restrictionism and liberal hospitality" have always "existed simultaneously" within British policymaking on immigration, albeit to varying degrees. This may explain the inconsistencies and dramatic changes which, as will be seen, characterised Second World War internment and immigration policy.<sup>733</sup>

In the intense public debate on the question of internment which emerged during the summer of 1940, references to the subject frequently hinged on ideas about British traditions and historical responses to outsiders. Louise Burleston has noted the extensive use of the idea of 'Britishness' within contemporary criticism of internment, occurring at a time when a positive British self-image, based on ideas of "democracy,

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<sup>731</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, (London: Mandarin, 1991 [first edition 1981]), pp.76-77; p.133.

<sup>732</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, p.136; London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, pp.14-15.

<sup>733</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of prejudice*, p.142.

justice and liberality” had particular significance in the face of the extremes of Nazi ideology.<sup>734</sup> The potential of internment to disrupt this image offers some explanation of the fierceness of the debates surrounding the policy. In contrast, Sonya Rose has suggested that the internment and deportation policies may have reinforced an insular sense of British national identity by highlighting the outsider status of Jewish immigrants “within a Britain portrayed in public culture as increasingly unified.”<sup>735</sup> Rose’s theories regarding war and nationality have been highly relevant to all three case studies within this thesis, but were specifically developed with reference to the Second World War. She has argued that perceptions of a cohesive British national identity were essential to the ideological underpinnings of the conflict, and were reinforced by discourses of difference, highlighting the ‘otherness’ of minority groups such as Jews and “good time girls”, which were perceived as failing to conform to British national values.<sup>736</sup> Despite the contrasting perspectives of Burleston and Rose’s interpretations, both emphasize the continuing centrality of national identity to contemporary reactions to internment. As has been seen, particular understandings of ‘Britishness’, often underpinned by gender ideologies, had formed the foundation of internment debates during the South African War forty years earlier, and were reshaped during the First World War in support of internment. This chapter will explore the extent to which references to British national identity during the internment controversy of 1940 represented a continuity of these ideas.

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<sup>734</sup> Louise Burleston, ‘The State, Internment and Public Criticism in the Second World War’, in David Cesarani and Tony Kushner (eds.), *Internment of Aliens* pp.102-124.

<sup>735</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p.94.

<sup>736</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, Chapter 3.

The role of anti-alien hostility in modern warfare has also been addressed by Panikos Panayi, who, like Rose, has argued that xenophobia tends to become accentuated during times of national crisis. He has suggested that the rejection of groups which are perceived as different is “inevitable” during national conflicts, as national cohesion against an external enemy becomes the key focus of society. As a result, hostility towards friendly or neutral foreign nationals is just as likely as antipathy towards enemy aliens.<sup>737</sup> This is evident in the persistence of antisemitism during the Second World War, despite its association with Nazi ideology. Kushner has outlined a variety of ways in which antisemitism continued to be a potent force in British wartime society, and has suggested that established Jewish stereotypes were reshaped by wartime experiences, so that old images of the Jew as disloyal and “unscrupulous” could be connected with concerns about their threat to national security and their involvement in the black market.<sup>738</sup> Both Kushner and Schaffer have argued that the former image, in particular, was significant enough to feed into policy-making and provide a justification for internment; Schaffer has asserted that anti-semitic stereotypes, which centred on the idea that Jewish refugees were intrinsically unreliable and disloyal, “permeated decision making at the highest level during the war”.<sup>739</sup>

The introduction of internment policy in June 1940 should also be considered within the wider historical context of host-minority relations in Britain. As Chapter Two has explored, anti-immigrant hostility was common during the early years of the twentieth century, particularly when minority groups were perceived as being resistant to

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<sup>737</sup> Panayi, ‘Dominant Societies’, p.14; p.19.

<sup>738</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of prejudice*, p.118-120.

<sup>739</sup> Schaffer, *Racial Science*, pp.82-3.



assimilation and could thereby be regarded as noticeably 'different'. Colin Holmes has argued that the British Government was able to introduce internment during the Second World War because "strong strains of anti-alienism and anti-Semitism" were already well-established in British society.<sup>740</sup> He has suggested that wartime policies towards enemy aliens were intrinsically linked to an underlying intolerance towards minorities which was a significant characteristic of British society during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>741</sup> The existence of such attitudes is reinforced by the findings of Wendy Ugolini, whose analysis of the oral testimony of the Scottish-Italian community has uncovered evidence of extensive pre-war prejudice against Italians. Similarly, Tony Kushner has outlined a variety of ways in which antisemitism was a continually potent force in 1930s Britain.<sup>742</sup> The previous chapters have argued that pre-existing attitudes were highly significant in shaping enemy imagery during the South African War and the First World War, which, in turn, influenced the way internment developed. This chapter will explore the ways in which attitudes towards enemy aliens reflected both short and long-term trends and will explore the extent to which such competing forces shaped the ways in which enemy aliens were imagined.

In contrast to this focus on British attitudes towards enemy aliens, another strand of historiography on internment has placed significance on the internee experience and the extent to which the policy shaped the identities of minority groups. For example, Charmian Brinson's research into internees in Rushen Camp has offered a rare focus on the significant number of Nazi internees, and has shown that, for some of these

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<sup>740</sup> Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p.192.

<sup>741</sup> Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p.316.

<sup>742</sup> Ugolini, *Experiencing War*; Kushner, *The persistence of prejudice*, Chapter 4; see particularly pp.119-122.

individuals, the internment experience reinforced their political and national loyalties.<sup>743</sup> In contrast, Maxine Schwartz-Seller has highlighted the plurality of experiences for refugee internees. While she has suggested that, for many internees, the educational opportunities in the camps facilitated a “transition from a German or Austrian to a British identity”,<sup>744</sup> this varied considerably between individuals, with some finding that the experience reinforced a specifically Jewish, or Anglo-Jewish, identity and others feeling that internment cemented a feeling of rejection from the mainstream of British society, which persisted in the years after the war.<sup>745</sup> The conflicting identities experienced by Britain’s Italian community have also been highlighted in recent years. Lucio Sponza, for example, has discussed the difficulties faced by Italian immigrants in reconciling their positive feelings towards Britain as a country which had offered them settlement and employment, and their loyalties towards Italy, which tended to be associated with their families and an emotional sense of “home”.<sup>746</sup> Terri Colpi has argued that the trauma of the Second World War, which included not only the internment of most of the male Italian community, but the experience of anti-Italian rioting and the extensive loss of life caused by the sinking of the *Arandora Star*, was dealt with differently by the older and younger generations of Italians in Britain. She has suggested that these experiences led to a strengthening of communal identity among the older generation of Italians in Britain, which “turned in on itself” in the post-war years. In contrast, the younger generation, who had been

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<sup>743</sup> Charmian Brinson, ‘ ‘Loyal to the Reich’: National Socialists and Others in the Rushen Women’s Internment Camp’, in Dove (ed.), *Totally Un-English?*, pp.101-119; pp.107-109.

<sup>744</sup> Maxine Schwartz Seller, ‘Filling the Space: Education, Community, and Identity in British Internment Camps during World War II’, *Paedagogica Historica*, 32, 3, 1996, pp.685-707; p.704.

<sup>745</sup> Schwartz Seller, ‘Filling the Space’, p.705.

<sup>746</sup> Lucio Sponza, *Divided Loyalties: Italians in Britain during the Second World War*, (New York: Wien, 2000), p.323.

children or young adults during the war, tended to reject their Italian heritage and make attempts to assimilate more closely into British society.<sup>747</sup> In her recent analysis of the personal testimonies of second-generation members of the Scottish-Italian community, however, Ugolini has argued that the historiographical focus on interned Italian men has meant that the large variety of responses and experiences within the Italian community have been overlooked; she has highlighted the impact of the war on previously under-researched elements of the Italian community, including women and Italians in the British forces. Her examination of the female Italian experience, particularly in the absence of interned husbands and fathers, has also underlined the wider impact of internment.<sup>748</sup> Ugolini's work reveals how internment could have profound effect on the communities involved, particularly in terms of long-term cohesion and identity. This trend has also been highlighted in her investigation with Schaffer of the different ways in which Jewish and Italian internees remembered their internment, and the extent to which such memories involved a balance between their identities as members of a minority group and an acknowledgement of the dominant British interpretation of the war as a positive experience.<sup>749</sup> While this chapter will primarily focus on dominant British attitudes towards internment, it will also explore the relationship between these attitudes and the ways in which internees themselves interpreted their experiences.

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<sup>747</sup> Terri Colpi, 'The Impact of the Second World War on the British Italian Community' in Cesarani and Kushner, *Internment of Aliens*, pp.167-187; p.185.

<sup>748</sup> Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, p.4.

<sup>749</sup> Ugolini and Schaffer, 'Victims or Enemies?'. pp.213-214. See also, Colin Holmes, 'British Justice at Work': Internment in the Second World War', in Panikos Panayi (ed.), *Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars*, (Oxford: Berg, 1933), p.60, who argues that the powerful image of Britain as a tolerant nation, and the close identification of the Anglo-Jewish community with this image, shaped the recollections of many internees who later presented their internment experiences in a positive light and expressed gratitude for British asylum.

The segregation of male and female internees has meant that women's experiences of internment have been the subject of a number of distinct case studies by historians, often underpinned by oral testimony. We therefore have a fairly comprehensive outline of the lives of women within internment camps, including both Jewish refugees and Nazi sympathisers.<sup>750</sup> The development of education in the women's camp has been the subject of careful research by Schwartz-Seller, while Rinella Cere has revisited the subject of female internment by challenging some of the gender assumptions which she has argued have limited more general work on the topic.<sup>751</sup> Kushner has argued that significance of gender in the fifth column panic during the early months of 1940 deserves further attention than it has so far received from historians.<sup>752</sup> His research into refugee domestics has gone a long way towards addressing this, and has provided valuable insight into a previously forgotten group of refugee immigrants.<sup>753</sup> This study endeavours to complement the work of these historians by approaching the subject more broadly and offering an examination of the role of gender ideologies in the creation of internment policy and in the shaping of

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<sup>750</sup> Rinella Cere. 'Women, internment and World War Two', in Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (eds.), *War culture: social change and changing experience in World War Two Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp.219-30; Kochan, 'Women's Experience'; Brinson, 'Loyal to the Reich'.

<sup>751</sup> Schwartz Seller, 'Filling the Space'. Cere, 'Women'. One of the gaps in research on the internment of women is a study on the experiences of Italian women, since only 17 have been recorded as being interned: Hansard, HC Deb, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1944, vol. 400, col.1064W. Both Sponza and Ugolini have attempted to uncover information about this group of internees, but the tiny number of individuals, a lack of surviving records, and the sense of stigma attached to the experience by female members of the Italian experience have made it very difficult for conclusions to be reached. See Sponza, *Divided Loyalties*, pp.146-148; Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, pp.107-109.

<sup>752</sup> Tony Kushner, 'An Alien Occupation – Jewish Refugees and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933-1948', in Werner E. Mosse (ed.), *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991), pp.553-578; p.573.

<sup>753</sup> In addition to 'An Alien Occupation', see Tony Kushner, 'Asylum or Servitude? Refugee domestics in Britain, 1933-1945', *Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin*, 53, 3, 1988, pp.19-27 and Tony Kushner, 'Politics and race, gender and class: Refugees, fascists and domestic service in Britain, 1933–1940', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 8, Issue 1 & 2, 1989, pp.49-58.

internment experiences generally. As this chapter will detail, fifth column rhetoric was vital to the development of an atmosphere of hostility towards enemy aliens in which internment became a popular option, and the image of the enemy civilian, though far more vague than those which developed during the South African War and the First World War, involved highly gendered elements.

This thesis has argued that public opinion was highly significant in shaping internment policies during the South African War and the First World War. This chapter will explore the relationship between government and public opinion during the internment crisis of 1940 and assess the extent to which similar conclusions may be drawn in relation to the Second World War. It will also consider the development of the 1940 internment policy within the context of both general wartime attitudes towards outsiders and long-term traditions of anti-alienism in Britain. Most significantly, it will address the issue of female internment and suggest that the pattern of internment in 1940 was influenced by traditional gender assumptions within official circles, which encouraged the (inaccurate) re-imagining of internment as a historically male experience. Consequently, the chapter will consider whether the gendered nature of the internment experience, rather than being a symptom of the general “irrationality” of the wider policy<sup>754</sup>, can in fact be explained as a consequence of the clash between increasingly negative public opinion towards female enemy aliens and the continuing official belief in a traditional gender order. It will also explore the different practical impacts that such traditional gender assumptions had on the experiences of male and female internees.

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<sup>754</sup> Kochan, ‘Women’s Experience’, p.147.

## **A war of ideologies**

The development of internment policies during the South African War and the First World War had been, in each case, closely connected with British imaginings of the enemy they were facing. As has been seen, this enemy imagery developed along rather different lines during each conflict, with the Boers' 'backwardness' and the Germans' 'aggressiveness' being used as justification for internment. However, both cases shared two key themes: firstly, the negative traits of the enemy were ultimately underpinned by their apparent lack of 'civilised' values; secondly, the stereotyping of the enemy involved a strong racial element, with the negative characteristics associated with the Boers and the Germans widely regarded as being biologically determined. In both cases the distinction between 'nation' and 'race' became blurred, as discourses on the national natures of the wars became fused with wider racial thinking which attributed biological characteristics to individual nations. During the Second World War, the development of imagery of both internees and the enemy differed considerably due to both the social make-up of the enemy aliens and the nature of the war itself. Perceptions of the war as a conflict rooted in ideological difference rather than national competition meant that stereotypes of the enemy as a nation were less significant. In addition, by 1939, biological theories of 'race' were growing increasingly discredited.<sup>755</sup> Combined with widespread abhorrence at Nazi racial policies, this meant that 'race' was less credible in shaping enemy imagery.<sup>756</sup> However, as this chapter will argue, while racial prejudice was less socially acceptable than it had been during the earlier conflicts, it remained a significant

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<sup>755</sup> Elazar Barkan, *The retreat of scientific racism: Changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States between the world wars*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.3-4.

<sup>756</sup> Malik, *The Meaning of Race*, pp.14-15.

undercurrent in British society. Although these trends prevented a coherent, racialized image of the enemy from developing, such ideas remained highly significant in shaping attitudes towards enemy aliens.

At the beginning of September 1939, during his announcement regarding the introduction of the tribunal system, Anderson highlighted the fact that most enemy aliens were not supporters of Nazism and agreed that the Government's aim was to "draw a sharp distinction between those who are the victims of the system we are now fighting, and those who may be properly under suspicion."<sup>757</sup> Internment at this early stage of the war was therefore subject not merely to a person's nationality, as had been the case during the First World War, but primarily their loyalties and political affiliations. The ideological, rather than national, nature of this conflict was summed up by Francois Lafitte, who argued: "There are "Nazis of the soul" and there are bold, freedom-loving spirits in every country engaged in the present conflict. Wherever they meet they are on opposite sides. The division cuts right across all frontiers, all accepted divisions of nationality."<sup>758</sup> The significance of ideology over nationality in regard to the definition of the enemy was further underlined by the introduction of clause 18B of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939, which allowed the Government to detain non-enemy subjects (including those of British nationality), who constituted a potential security threat.<sup>759</sup> Of the 62 people detained

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<sup>757</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939, vol. 351, col. 368.

<sup>758</sup> Lafitte, *Internment of Aliens*, p.15.

<sup>759</sup> Enemy aliens were detained under the Royal Prerogative. For a discussion of the 18B Regulations see Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious*; Aaron Goldman, 'Defence Regulation 18B: Emergency Internment of Aliens and Political Dissenters in Great Britain during World War II, *The Journal of British Studies*, 12, 2, 1973, pp.120-136; Richard Thurlow, 'Internment in the second world war', *Intelligence and National Security*, 9, 1, 1994, pp.123-127.

under this legislation by the end of 1939, 57 were British subjects, of whom around half were of “enemy origin”.<sup>760</sup> Although a similar power had existed during the First World War, under Section 14B of the Defence of the Realm Act, the focus of this earlier regulation had been limited to persons of “hostile origin or association”. The 18B regulation expanded this category to include anyone who might be considered a threat to the safety of the realm, or had connections with organisations which could be defined as having a “foreign” influence.<sup>761</sup> The introduction of this regulation raised criticism from certain MPs who were concerned about its potential to suppress civil liberties; however, the internment of individuals with Nazi sympathies was generally accepted as a sensible and necessary precaution. The tone of an article in *The Times* in September 1939 is typical of the general acceptance of the Government’s policy towards enemy aliens at this stage:

The job of detecting and of suppressing the real enemy alien has been done officially and effectively, and the chance of any dangerous person slipping through the net is small indeed...The proper attitude of the public towards German-speaking aliens should therefore be to watch them but not to worry themselves too much about them. If these aliens are free it can only be because they have incontestably proved their right to be so.<sup>762</sup>

During the early weeks of the war, in fact, the fairly lenient policy towards enemy aliens attracted little criticism, and the government made much of the fact that its policy decision balanced the needs of national security with humanity and

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<sup>760</sup> ‘Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1939 (2 & 3 Geo.6. Ch. 62): Report by the Secretary of State as to the action taken under Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations, 1939, during the period 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1939, to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1939’, January 1940, *20<sup>th</sup> Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session, Vol. IV.

<sup>761</sup> Goldman, ‘Defence Regulation 18B’, p.122.

<sup>762</sup> ‘The Treatment of Aliens’, *The Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1939, p.9.



understanding towards refugees.<sup>763</sup> During the initial stages of the ‘phoney war’ period, a degree of self-congratulation was evident, particularly in Parliament, regarding the belief that British policy towards enemy aliens was characterised by an “absence of hate” and the fact that the British people had not succumbed to the hysterical excesses which had forced the Government to introduce extensive civilian internment during the First World War.<sup>764</sup> In retrospect, the *Manchester Guardian* would refer to the early months of the war as a “period of reason and common sense” in regard to enemy aliens.<sup>765</sup> Britain could congratulate itself on the “reputation” it was maintaining in regard to its treatment of enemy civilians, while the decision, in January 1940, to provide grants of assistance to the voluntary organisations which supported refugees provided “a satisfactory contrast in this home of civilisation” to “the brutal, cruel and uncivilised conduct” of Nazi Germany.<sup>766</sup> The lack of contention over the issue of enemy aliens at this stage meant that, unlike during the First World War, the image of the enemy spy did not develop to a significant extent; a general acceptance seems to have existed that the ‘dangerous’ aliens had been interned, while those remaining at large were refugees who were beneficiaries of Britain’s tolerant and level-headed response. It was not until the military situation began to shift, and Britain’s vulnerability became more evident, that tolerance towards enemy aliens started to seriously erode. This too, was the point at which an image of the ‘dangerous’ enemy spy began to emerge. However, the established understanding of the conflict as a war of ideologies meant that the development of the image of the

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<sup>763</sup> See, for example, Anderson’s statement on internment: Hansard, HC Deb, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939, vol. 351, cols 366-367.

<sup>764</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1939, vol. 114, col. 1590.

<sup>765</sup> ‘Enemy Aliens’, *Manchester Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1940, p.6.

<sup>766</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1939, vol. 114, col. 1590; Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1940, vol. 357, col. 1639.

enemy civilian was not as clear-cut as it had been during either the South African War or the First World War, since the discourses developed during 1939 had already established the 'enemy' as something defined by belief or ideology rather than by nationality.

### **The 'fifth column' and campaign against enemy aliens, 1940**

The major change in attitudes towards enemy aliens coincided with the deterioration of the military situation for the Allies. The 'phoney war' dramatically ended in the spring of 1940 with Hitler's invasions and rapid defeats of his European neighbours, and was characterised by a corresponding period of extreme anxiety within Britain. Not only was Britain becoming rapidly isolated due to the capitulation of its allies, but the country had to face the very real possibility of a Nazi invasion. According to the rhetoric which developed in the press during this period, Hitler had established a network of agents in countries across Europe, primed to assist the Nazi invasions and to assist in bringing down these states from within.<sup>767</sup> This belief was given validity by the rapid and successful Nazi invasions of Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and France between April and June 1940. The idea that the capitulation of these countries had been accelerated, if not caused, by the existence of a fifth column of enemy agents was widely publicised in the press, particularly in popular titles such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express*.<sup>768</sup> After the defeat of Holland, Nevile Bland, the British Minister to the Dutch Government at the Hague, broadcast his belief that the country's downfall had been caused by

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<sup>767</sup> C. A. Lyon, 'Hitler's Fifth Column Prepared Invaders' War', *Sunday Express*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.4; 'The Enemy Within', *Daily Mail*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.6.

<sup>768</sup> See, for example, C.A. Lyon, 'Hitler's Fifth Column Prepared Invaders' Way', *Sunday Express*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1940; 'The Enemy Within', *Daily Mail*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.6.

aliens working from within, an announcement which Lafitte later suggested was hugely significant in fuelling the fifth column scare.<sup>769</sup> At the end of June, George Slocombe, a journalist who had been based in France during the crisis, argued that the vital factors in the French defeat were “treachery, espionage, the Fifth Column”.<sup>770</sup> The key message within the publicity regarding the role of the fifth column in Europe was the warning that such a betrayal from within was just as likely to take place in Britain. The British public were reminded of the ‘reality’ of this danger by newspapers such as the *Sunday Express*, which, on 19<sup>th</sup> May, published a prominent article stating that the security services had uncovered a plan by fifth columnists to “paralyse Britain” through the sabotage of its communications systems.<sup>771</sup>

The nature of the fifth column scare meant that a clear-cut image of the enemy spy did not emerge in the way that had been seen during the First World War. In fact, the fifth columnist was potentially far more frightening due to its anonymity and potential to conceal itself within British society. Like the naturalized Germans during the First World War, fifth columnists were regarded as a threat situated right at the heart of British communities; unlike their predecessors, however, they would be difficult to identify since they could take any guise. As a Home Intelligence report noted: “Fifth Column write-ups made fear personal rather than general. A Fifth Columnist might be your next-door neighbour. Parachutists might land in your garden.”<sup>772</sup> The Gilmans have argued that it was this feature which allowed belief in the fifth column to

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<sup>769</sup> Lafitte, *Internment of Aliens*, p.173.

<sup>770</sup> George Slocombe, ‘It can happen here’, *Sunday Express*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1940, p.9.

<sup>771</sup> ‘Fifth Column plan to paralyse Britain’, *Sunday Express*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.7.

<sup>772</sup> Home Intelligence Report, ‘Civilian Morale’, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1940.

become so widespread: “like the psychologist’s ink-blot, it was susceptible to widely differing interpretations.”<sup>773</sup> As a result, the definition of the fifth column could vary. Some contemporaries, recalling the repeated stress on the ideological nature of the war, argued that “the unknown, unregistered renegades of our own blood” were the most likely source of fifth column recruits and therefore the chief threat to British security.<sup>774</sup> Home Intelligence reported that the arrests of Fascists in May 1940, a group perceived to be the chief British candidates for a fifth column, were extremely well received by the public, and stated that the organisation’s observers had “seldom found such a high degree of approval for any Government action.”<sup>775</sup> In the *Jewish Chronicle*, an article on the ‘World-Wide Fifth Column Menace’ also made it clear that British Fascists should be regarded as the key threat to British security, an analysis which also betrayed an anxiety among British Jews about who next might fall under suspicion.<sup>776</sup> Other contemporaries regarded the recently-arrived refugees as the most likely source of fifth columnist activity. How better, they reasoned, for an enemy agent to enter the country than in the guise of an innocent victim of the Nazi regime. Slocombe argued that spies had “poured into France in thousands among the hordes of Dutch, Belgian, and other refugees” and that “Among the hundred thousand German and Austrian exiles in France a large proportion were known or suspected agents.” The title of his article “It could happen here”, encouraged *Sunday Express* readers to consider the potential risk involved in the Government’s hitherto friendly attitude towards refugees.<sup>777</sup> Similarly, former MI6 agent, Sir Paul Dukes, told the

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<sup>773</sup> Gillman and Gilman, *Collar The Lot*, p.74.

<sup>774</sup> G.W. Radford, *The Times*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1940, p.4.

<sup>775</sup> Home Intelligence Report, ‘Public Opinion on the Present Crisis’, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1940.

<sup>776</sup> ‘Defending the Home Fronts: World-Wide Fifth-Column Menace’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1940.

<sup>777</sup> George Slocombe, ‘It can happen here’, *Sunday Express*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1940, p.9.

*Manchester Guardian* that fifth columnists in Britain would “have jobs to cover their underground activities and would pose as “more refugee than the refugees”.”<sup>778</sup>

The association between fifth columnists and refugees of enemy nationality led to a concerted campaign for the internment of enemy aliens in some areas of the press during 1940. Since the beginning of the year, anti-alien attitudes had been developing among more right-leaning publications, particularly the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Sketch* and *Sunday Express*, and, by April and May these publications were at the forefront of calls for internment.<sup>779</sup> In the words of MP Rhys Davies, at this point the newspapers “howled from one end of the country to the other “Intern the lot.”<sup>780</sup> The suggestion that refugees were the most likely source of fifth column activity, and that internment was necessary to eliminate the threat, became so prominent during this period that even newspapers which had previously been supportive of refugees began to waver in their opinion. On 13<sup>th</sup> May, for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, stated:

The refugees are welcome here because they long for Hitler’s downfall, they feel as we feel and are only anxious to assist us, but it would be folly not to assume that he will have tried hard to provide some helpers for his parachutists and troop-carriers should he send them.<sup>781</sup>

The press campaign against fifth columnists, and its connection between fifth columnists and refugees, appears to have gained significant public support. At the end of April, a Mass-Observation report noted that, although the fifth column

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<sup>778</sup> ‘“Fifth Column” Activities’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.10.

<sup>779</sup> Lafitte, *Internment of Aliens*, pp.67-8; Mass-Observation File Report 332, ‘Public Opinion & the Refugees’, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1940.

<sup>780</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1940, vol. 364, col. 1528.

<sup>781</sup> ‘Special Precautions’, *Manchester Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.4.

campaign in the press had not yet had a universal impact, its effects were rapidly increasing, and concluded “that IT IS BECOMING THE SOCIALLY DONE THING TO BE ANTI-REFUGEE”.<sup>782</sup> By 12<sup>th</sup> April, the Council of Austrians in Great Britain felt that popular hostility towards refugees had reached such a pitch that they issued an appeal which was sent directly to “hundreds of public personalities”, highlighting the absurdity of the campaign against refugees and urging their recipients to use their influence to stem the “campaign of hatred and suspicion”.<sup>783</sup> Hostility towards refugees persisted, however, and throughout April and May a number of town and district councils passed resolutions stating that the continued freedom of enemy aliens constituted a threat to national security, and calling for their general internment.<sup>784</sup> Home Intelligence reports suggest that public concerns about fifth columnists really gained momentum during May, and by the beginning of June the organisation was reporting that there were “signs that Fifth Column hysteria is reaching dangerous proportions in some towns and villages.”<sup>785</sup> Simultaneously, the reports noted increasing examples of hostility towards enemy aliens and public support for internment.<sup>786</sup>

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<sup>782</sup> Mass-Observation File Report 79, ‘Public Feeling About Aliens’, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1940, pp.10-11. Mass-Observation was a social research organisation founded by Tom Harrisson in 1937 with the aim of providing an anthropological style survey of British society. Material in the archive includes diaries written by a ‘national panel’ of volunteers, responses to surveys, reports of full-time ‘observers’ who were employed by the organisation, and file reports relating to the organisation’s findings on a variety of themes. See Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan (eds.), *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-49*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p.5.

<sup>783</sup> ‘The Refugees’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.11.

<sup>784</sup> ‘Interning All Enemy Aliens’, *Manchester Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.7; ‘“Intern Women” is East Coast Cry’, *Daily Express*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.3.

<sup>785</sup> Home Intelligence, ‘No.17. Public Opinion on the Present Crisis’, Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 1940. For evidence of the growing fixation on fifth columnists prior to this point see, in particular, Home Intelligence reports for Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May, Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May, Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May, Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May 1940.

<sup>786</sup> See, in particular, Home Intelligence reports for Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May, Monday 27<sup>th</sup> May, Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June 1940.

In May 1940, at the height of the invasion panic and fifth column scare, the British Government took the decision to extend internment. On 11<sup>th</sup> May, it was decided that all male enemy aliens, regardless of their level of categorisation, who were resident in a designated coastal strip regarded as vulnerable to invasion, were to be interned.<sup>787</sup> Four days later internment was extended to all Category B male aliens aged between 16 and 60, wherever their place of residence.<sup>788</sup> The order was given for the internment of women in Category B from 25<sup>th</sup> May, and on 27<sup>th</sup> May police received instructions for the internment of all other enemy alien men, subject to some restrictions.<sup>789</sup> Simultaneously, plans were being put into place for the internment of Italian men between the ages of 16 and 60, and of less than twenty years' residence, should Italy become involved in the conflict. On Italy's declaration of war on 10<sup>th</sup> June, these plans were put into effect.<sup>790</sup> Finally, on 21<sup>st</sup> June, orders were given to local police forces for the round-up of all other male enemy aliens of military age.<sup>791</sup> Perceptions of public opinion appear to have been significant in driving these decisions. A Cabinet discussion of the extension of internment on 15<sup>th</sup> May seems to have been prompted by Bland's report on the fifth column role in the capitulation of the Netherlands, and the participants noted the increasing sense of public nervousness regarding the idea of enemy agents in Britain. The Prime Minister

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<sup>787</sup> Conclusions of a Meeting of Ministers held in the Admiralty, S.W.1, on Saturday May 11 1940 at 12.30 pm': National Archives, Kew, CAB 65/7/12.

<sup>788</sup> Under-Secretary of State, War Office to General Headquarters, Home Forces, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1720.

<sup>789</sup> Home Office to Chief Constables, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1715; Government Telegram. HO to Chief Officers in England and Wales (Except Tyne) and certain Chief Constables in Scotland, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1720.

<sup>790</sup> 'Treatment of Italians in event of war with Italy', May to June 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1719; War Cabinet 161 (40): National Archives, Kew, CAB 65/7/56.

<sup>791</sup> Home Office to Chief Constables, 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1715. This final instruction was to be carried out in stages and involved a number of categories of exemption, including the ill or infirm, those employed in work of national importance, and those who had been released from internment since 15<sup>th</sup> May.

suggested that internment would be the safest option for German and Austrian nationals since, “when air attacks developed, public temper in this country would be such that such persons would be in great danger if at liberty.”<sup>792</sup> The depiction of internment as being in the best interests of the potential internees themselves had strong echoes of government justifications of the policy during both the South African War and the First World War. Although such an approach highlighted the violence of popular opinion, it also allowed the government to maintain a liberal self-image. As during the South African War, in particular, internment as a ‘protective’ measure was less likely to undermine the ‘British ideals’ for which the war was being fought.

In a personal letter two months earlier, Anderson had stated: “The newspapers are working up feeling against aliens. I shall have to do something about it or we may be stampeded into an unnecessarily offensive policy. It is very easy in wartime to start a scare.”<sup>793</sup> However, rather than attempting to counter the fifth column agitation in the press, the British Government appears to have simply capitulated in the face of it, and to have been anxious to pacify public opinion. Severe criticism would later be directed at the Government for its reticence in responding to anti-alien propaganda. During a debate on internment which took place two months later, after the clamour had receded, MPs rounded on the Home Secretary. Wilfred Roberts demanded to know “What has the Government done to try to correct the impression created by the stories which have appeared in the Press?”, while G. Strauss asserted that “the Home Office should [not] have listened to public opinion in this matter without putting up a case against the clamour which was being waged, particularly in some of the

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<sup>792</sup> ‘Conclusions of a meeting of the War Cabinet’, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940: National Archives, Kew, CAB/65/7/18.

<sup>793</sup> Anderson to his father, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1940, cited in Kochan, *Britain’s Internees*, p.19.



more irresponsible newspapers.”<sup>794</sup> Louise Burleston has argued that, throughout the internment experience, the British government was extremely sensitive to public opinion and tended to be guided by perceptions of popular attitudes at every stage of the process.<sup>795</sup> As during the First World War, official perceptions of popular hostility towards enemy aliens, and, in particular, the tone of the press, appear to have had direct bearings on internment decisions.

### **Antisemitism, xenophobia, and internment policy**

Richard Thurlow has suggested that one of the most illogical elements of the fifth column scare was its focus on domestic servants, despite the fact that the majority of them were Jewish refugees; in fact, Thurlow has argued, their Jewishness “seems to have escaped attention.”<sup>796</sup> In contrast, however, other historians and contemporaries have speculated on the role of antisemitism and Jewish stereotyping in the development of internment policy. On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1940, Rhys Davies referred in the House of Commons to speculation that internments of that summer had been influenced by antisemitic feeling within Government, and the “Fascist tendencies” of those in power. Davies ultimately dismissed the validity of this idea, but the significance of antisemitism in decisions on internment has remained a theme of the historiography, albeit with less of a conspiratorial emphasis. As a number of historians have noted, the British Government went to great pains to consider Jewish

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<sup>794</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, cols 1259-1260; col. 1264.

<sup>795</sup> Burleston, ‘The State’, p.121. She also suggests that the transportation of internees to the Dominions was kept secret due to uncertainty over the public reaction to such a policy; p. 112.

<sup>796</sup> Richard Thurlow, ‘The Evolution of the Mythical British Fifth Column, 1939-46’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 10, 4, 1999, pp.477-498; p.485.

refugees in terms of their nationality rather than their status as Jews.<sup>797</sup> However, in contrast to Thurlow's assumptions, Schaffer has argued that the Jewish origins of the refugees were integral to the development of government policy. He has suggested that deeply-engrained beliefs about the "unreliability" of Jews as a 'race' facilitated their association with the fifth column scare, and had a profound effect on policy development.<sup>798</sup> The belief that Jewish refugees posed a security threat both through a tendency to panic and an inherent disloyalty, can be discerned within a number of contemporary sources. At the beginning of July, for instance, Sir John Hope Simpson was so impressed by the "sound common sense" of a letter from a constituent relating to the 'panicky' nature of Jewish refugees that he forwarded it to a colleague. The writer of the letter had stated that she believed that the area where civilian morale was likely to "crack" was "in Refugee and of necessity in Jewish circles. Refugee terror can be very catching..."<sup>799</sup> In the *Daily Mirror*, the journalist Mrs Cecil Chesterton related the story of a refugee breaking down in tears over the fate of Germany, and argued that this was evidence that refugees were incapable of wholehearted loyalty to Britain.<sup>800</sup> Kushner has argued that the British security services, who applied particular pressure in support of general internment, "were not convinced of...Jewish disloyalty to Nazi Germany – partly as a result of a long-held distrust of Jews as a whole."<sup>801</sup>

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<sup>797</sup> Schaffer, *Racial Science*, pp.80-81.

<sup>798</sup> Schaffer, *Racial Science*, p.82.

<sup>799</sup> Lorna Phipps to J. Hope Simpson, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1940: Graham White Papers, Parliamentary Archives, EW 13/3/6.

<sup>800</sup> Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, 'Stop and Think', *Daily Mirror*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.13.

<sup>801</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of prejudice*, p.147.

Kushner has concluded that the prevailing atmosphere of antisemitism during the Second World War meant that “although the aliens were not interned because they were Jewish, neither was their Jewishness irrelevant.”<sup>802</sup> The significance of Jewish stereotypes in the formulation of internment decisions is reinforced by his demonstration of the existence of antisemitism generally in British wartime society. Kushner has shown that traditional antisemitic stereotypes, particularly based on beliefs about Jewish tendencies towards cowardice and selfishness, quietly permeated British life during the war, with popular perceptions of Jews often resting on belief in their association with the black market, shirking of military service, and panic during air raids.<sup>803</sup> This trend is particularly evident in Home Intelligence reports of June 1940 which highlighted a popular belief that wealthy Jews were fleeing the country in order to avoid the dangers of invasion and bombing.<sup>804</sup> Rose has argued that the continuing association of Jews with such ideas was particularly significant in the context of “a wartime discourse that denigrated selfishness and the elevation of self-interest over the interests of the larger community”.<sup>805</sup> During the very period in which the myth of British wartime unity was being developed, the association of a minority group with disloyalty or self-interest could accelerate alienation. To Rose, therefore, the internment experience reinforced the ‘otherness’ of refugee Jews and underlined their status as “inherently and intractably different”.<sup>806</sup>

While antisemitism was clearly a fundamental element of the atmosphere of May and June 1941, the antipathy towards enemy aliens which developed during this period

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<sup>802</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of prejudice*, p.135; p.147.

<sup>803</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of prejudice*, pp.119-122.

<sup>804</sup> Home Intelligence Report No.33, Monday 24<sup>th</sup> June 1940.

<sup>805</sup> Rose, *Which People's War?*, p.94.

<sup>806</sup> Rose, *Which People's War?*, p.94

should also be considered in the light of a more general xenophobia. In fact, one of the reasons that antisemitism continued to be such a significant force in British wartime society may have been due to the persistent association of Jewishness with 'foreignness'. Home Intelligence reports from this period suggest that hostility was developing not only towards enemy aliens but towards groups and individuals of other nationalities.<sup>807</sup> The pattern of the reports suggest that antipathy towards specific national groups was based closely on military developments; as relations with Italy deteriorated, for example, Home Intelligence recorded an increase in anti-Italian sentiment. However, more notable still is the fact that the reports indicated a significant amount of hostility was developing towards recent refugees from Europe. As Belgium capitulated in the face of Nazi forces, for example, negative feeling towards Belgian refugees was recorded as being exhibited in many different areas of the country. On 29<sup>th</sup> May, for example, the day after Belgium surrendered, Home Intelligence recorded public feeling against Belgium refugees in Manchester, Leeds and London.<sup>808</sup> Such sentiments were still in evidence the following week, when Belgian children were refused access to a play centre in Richmond on the grounds of their nationality.<sup>809</sup> Such evidence of hostility towards individual national groups was recorded alongside frequent references to general anti-alien sentiment.

The fact that popular anti-alien sentiment was not merely anti-semitic in nature is indicated by the outbreaks of violence against Italians in certain British cities in the wake of Italy's declaration of war. On the night of 10<sup>th</sup> June 1940, rioting against

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<sup>807</sup> The repeated references to anti-alien feeling in Home Intelligence reports for this period, relating to a number of different regions, is indicative that this was a trend which should be taken seriously.

<sup>808</sup> Home Intelligence, 'Public Opinion on the Present Crisis', Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May 1940.

<sup>809</sup> Home Intelligence, 'Public Opinion on the Present Crisis', Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1940.

Italian properties and businesses broke out in Edinburgh, London, Leeds and Belfast.<sup>810</sup> Although the riots drew some criticism from the popular press, there was little soul-searching over the roots of the violence. An article in the *Daily Express* stated that the “hooligans were not high-minded patriots stirred by ideological convictions, but, in most cases, mere gangsters working off old jealousies”.<sup>811</sup> Although the reference to “old jealousies” may have been an allusion to long-standing xenophobic hostilities, and elsewhere in the article the violence towards “innocent” civilians was deplored, the tone of this statement played down the wider significance of the violence. Simultaneously, it left open the possibility that patriotic motivation might be a justifiable reason for attacks on foreign nationals. Wendy Ugolini has argued that the tendency of the press to portray the riots as acts of mindless mob violence has become absorbed in the historiography of the subject, and that, subsequently, the xenophobic character of the riots has been frequently underplayed.<sup>812</sup> This assertion seems particularly pertinent in the light of the general anti-alien trend which can be identified in the press and public debates in this period, during which developments on the continent appear to have fostered a deep distrust of anyone with a foreign background. An article in the *Daily Mirror*, in response to Italy’s entrance into the war, condoned the violent public reaction towards Italian civilians and encouraged readers to be on their guard against foreign subjects whose loyalty might be in doubt: “if there are any other “pre-belligerent” doubters, hoverers, and stabbers about,” it warned, “watch them closely, be ready for them.”<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> ‘Anti-Italian Riots in Four Cities’, *Manchester Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1940, p.9.

<sup>811</sup> ‘Brutish and proud of it’, *Daily Express*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1940, p.4.

<sup>812</sup> Ugolini, *Experiencing War*, pp.125-126.

<sup>813</sup> ‘Never Again!’, *Daily Mirror*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1940, p.7.

Problematic as evidence, but ultimately very revealing, are the surveys on anti-alienism in British society conducted by Mass-Observation. As Kushner has noted, 'race' was a highly significant focus for Mass-Observation from its conception, perhaps due to the background of its founder, Tom Harrisson, in anthropology, and his interest in social categorisation.<sup>814</sup> During 1939, the organisation had conducted an investigation into antisemitism in Britain which, while criticized for its unscientific approach, has been seen as significant in providing insight into the irrational roots of antisemitism and the widespread ambivalence towards Jews which existed in the non-Jewish community.<sup>815</sup> During the war the organisation conducted a number of investigations into attitudes towards aliens and was commissioned by the Home Intelligence department of the Ministry of Information to provide regular reports on public morale.<sup>816</sup> While the wartime 'file reports' on popular attitudes towards aliens provide a useful contribution to an assessment of wartime feeling on the issues, they can be problematic as a source due to the language utilised within them. The frequent interchanging in their reports between the term 'alien' and 'enemy alien' can make it difficult to distinguish between general anti-alienism and hostility towards enemy aliens specifically. For example, a report of 16<sup>th</sup> July which purported to investigate "public opinion on aliens" actually focused on attitudes towards the internment policy, while a survey on internment in August used the terms 'alien' and 'enemy alien' interchangeably.<sup>817</sup> While this can cause difficulties of interpretation, Kushner has argued that by using the terms in this way, Mass-Observation were

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<sup>814</sup> Tony Kushner, 'Observing the 'Other'. Mass-Observation and 'Race'', Mass-Observation Archive Occasional Paper No. 2, University of Sussex Library, 1995, p.2.

<sup>815</sup> Kushner, 'Observing the 'Other'', pp.5-7.

<sup>816</sup> Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'The blitz, civilian morale and the city: mass-observation and working-class culture in Britain, 1940-41', *Urban History*, 26, 1, 1999, pp.71-88; p.75.

<sup>817</sup> M-O File Report 276, 'Public Opinion About Aliens', 16<sup>th</sup> July 1940; M-O File Report 324, 'Attitudes to Aliens', 5<sup>th</sup> August 1940.

“mirroring the complexity of attitudes amongst ordinary people when dealing with difference”.<sup>818</sup> A belief in general anti-alienism underpinned all the surveys conducted by Mass-Observation during this period. In April 1940, a report on an investigation into popular attitudes towards refugees explained that careful thought had been given to the terminology employed in the survey. The investigators noted that the use of the word ‘foreigner’ had been deliberately avoided when conducting the survey, since: “If you ask people what they think about “foreigners” you establish an immediately unfavourable attitude.”<sup>819</sup> A study undertaken the following month argued that the emerging hostility towards enemy aliens was due to “always latent antagonism to the alien and foreigner” being stimulated by news of events on the continent.<sup>820</sup>

The image of the foreigner, generally, rather than the enemy alien or Jewish refugee specifically, appears to have been extremely significant in forming the ideological context in which internment became acceptable. It seems likely that prejudice towards different national groups was exacerbated by their association with the behaviour of their government of origin, but, as the increasing antipathy towards Belgian and Dutch refugees demonstrates, this was not restricted to enemy aliens. A sense of distrust towards anyone considered to be an outsider appears to have been an increasingly prominent theme of attitudes during the first half of 1940. The rapid capitulation of European states to the Nazis between April and June left Britain not only with an increasing feeling of vulnerability, but a sense of betrayal and isolation which heightened popular antipathy towards all outsiders. The fact that the majority

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<sup>818</sup> Tony Kushner, *We Europeans?: mass-observation, 'race' and British identity in the twentieth century*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.105-106.

<sup>819</sup> M-O File Report 79, ‘Public Feeling About Aliens’, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1940.

<sup>820</sup> M-O File Report 107, ‘Feeling About Aliens’, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1940.

of enemy aliens in Britain were opponents of the Nazi regime therefore became almost irrelevant during this period, since the underlying distrust of foreigners had been reinforced by the discourses of weakness and betrayal which much of the press now associated with foreign nations.<sup>821</sup> In addition, some contemporaries argued that even those refugees who most vehemently opposed the Nazi regime could still “retain...their fundamental loyalty to Germany, the land of their birth.”<sup>822</sup> By the middle of May, even the *Manchester Guardian*, which maintained a positive attitude towards refugees, regretfully admitted that internment of enemy aliens had become a “necessity in this crisis”.<sup>823</sup>

### **The female enemy alien**

While popular xenophobia appears to have gradually increased during the early months of 1940, reaching a peak in May and June of that year, a particular bias against foreign *women* can be identified strongly throughout this period. The idea that alien women were particularly suited to espionage due to the manipulative tendencies of their sex became the theme of a number of articles in the press. In February, for example, the *Daily Mirror* published a report that claimed that foreign women were seeking marriages with British subjects in order to gain British nationality and enable themselves to engage in espionage undetected. The article claimed that such women were likely to take advantage of “lonely men serving in the Forces” in order to manipulate them into marriages of convenience.<sup>824</sup> In April, as the fifth column scare gained momentum, the *Daily Mail* also highlighted the danger

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<sup>821</sup> See, for example, ‘Hitler’s Fifth Column Prepared Invaders’ Way’, *Sunday Express*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.4.

<sup>822</sup> ‘Stop and Think’, *Daily Mirror*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.13.

<sup>823</sup> ‘Internment of Enemy Aliens’, *Manchester Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.4.

<sup>824</sup> ‘Alien Women Wedding Check’, *Daily Mirror*, 12<sup>th</sup> February 1940, p.7.



posed by “pro-Nazi” women, who had married members of the British forces and thus positioned themselves within close proximity of important military bases.<sup>825</sup> This theme was still being expounded in July, this time by the *Sunday Express*, and embellished with detail about German girls being groomed from early adolescence to be prepared “to hand themselves over body and soul” for the Nazi cause by marrying British men and forming the core of Hitler’s fifth columns. According to the article, these women were attractive, educated and bilingual, and were trained to charm influential men into betrayal. Although the fantasy of these high-class German spies - “lovely, educated girls waiting to pounce on the unwary” – was not the only way in which the dangerous foreign woman was imagined, the combination of fears of foreignness, sexual manipulation and betrayal was a significant element in the development of a negative image of the female enemy alien.<sup>826</sup>

In February 1940, both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* reported the arrest of Czech national, Herta Weinfelona. Weinfelona had been charged for failing to notify the police of her change of address and subsequently imprisoned for six months.<sup>827</sup> Both newspapers focused on the fact that she had “been in the company” of R.A.F. officers and that the addresses of German and Belgian contacts had been found in her belongings. The *Mirror* reported a Scotland Yard representative as stating: “This woman has something of a strange personality. She has told me that moods come over her when she must have the company of a man and she

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<sup>825</sup> ‘Pro-Nazi Wives’, *Daily Mail*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.5.

<sup>826</sup> ‘German girls set “holiday traps” to get British husbands’, *Sunday Express*, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1940, p.5.

<sup>827</sup> ‘Girl alien met R.A.F officers’, *Daily Express*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1940, p.1; Alien Girl Met R.A.F. Officers – Gaol’, *Daily Mirror*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1940, p.7.

immediately goes off with one”.<sup>828</sup> Thus the report of a fairly straightforward offence under the Aliens Order, became a story of espionage with sinister sexual undertones. Although such quotes were probably seized on by newspapers in order to titillate their readership, the tone of such reports helped establish an association between espionage and the image of the manipulative, sexually threatening foreign female. As the capitulation of European states to the Nazis began, the association of women with espionage was reinforced by stories of their involvement in Fifth Column activities on the Continent. The *Daily Express* made a particular point of highlighting espionage and Fifth Column activities featuring female protagonists. On 9<sup>th</sup> May it reported incidents of female espionage in Rotterdam, Geneva and Brussels. Although all these stories, on closer inspection, concerned men as well as women, the headlines focused on the female involvement. In two of the three cases, the physical appearances of the women were favourably commented upon: the culprits included a “young and attractive Swiss woman” and a “handsome German girl”.<sup>829</sup> Again, the hint here is that espionage was linked with femininity and with female sexual attractiveness, and the idea that the involvement of women enemy agents in the betrayal of nation states was a particularly potent threat. The belief that women were particularly well-suited to espionage roles also found its way into parliamentary debates, with Viscount Elwood stridently demanding in a House of Lords debate on the fifth column: “Is it not well known that some of the greatest and most famous spies in the world were of the female sex? Is it not also well known that very often one female spy is better than ten men, or at least equal to ten men?”<sup>830</sup> Julie

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<sup>828</sup> Alien Girl Met R.A.F. Officers – Gaol’, *Daily Mirror*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1940, p.7.

<sup>829</sup> ‘Dutch raid spy suspects: woman jailed’; ‘Woman accused of spying on troops’; ‘German girl and father, spies’, *Daily Express*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.2.

<sup>830</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1940, vol. 116, col. 412.

Wheelwright has argued that popular conceptions of the female spy during the 1930s had centred on “the beautiful siren who muddles the minds of innocent men through her exotic, hothouse sexuality”.<sup>831</sup> She has suggested that, although female spies in popular culture began to be credited with intelligence and educated status during this period, these qualities were overshadowed by a continuing emphasis on their sexual charms.<sup>832</sup> This ‘femme fatale’ stereotype clearly appears to have played a part in shaping wartime conceptions of female foreign nationals. The danger of the seductive female was continuing to be expressed in 1942, when the government’s ‘Careless talk costs lives’ poster campaign featured the well-known image of a provocatively posed blonde woman surrounded by representatives from the three armed services, with the caption “Keep mum, she’s not so dumb.”<sup>833</sup>

Although such discourses were clearly significant in 1940, and appear to have been particularly important in underlining the female propensity for espionage, the figure which attracted an even greater amount of suspicion from contemporaries was not the glamorous socialite, but an individual from the other end of the social scale: the female domestic servant. In the context of the unemployment of the 1930s, the British Government had anxiously tried to balance what was perceived as a British tradition of asylum for refugees with a desire to restrict immigration in order to protect British jobs. Domestic service was an employment sector which was increasingly shunned by British employees during this period and as a result this was one area in

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<sup>831</sup> Julie Wheelwright, *The Fatal Lover: Mata Hari and the Myth of Women in Espionage*, (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), p.147.

<sup>832</sup> Wheelwright, *The fatal lover*, pp.146-7.

<sup>833</sup> ‘Keep mum – she’s not so dumb’, 1942, National Archives, catalogue ref INF 3/229, [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/prop/home\\_front/INF3\\_0229.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/prop/home_front/INF3_0229.htm), retrieved 17/11/11.

which the employment of recent immigrants was permitted.<sup>834</sup> A large number of German and Austrian Jewish women were therefore able to take advantage of this opportunity to escape the Nazi regime. By September 1939, there were over 20,000 German and Austrian refugee women employed as domestic servants in Britain.<sup>835</sup> On the immediate outbreak of the war, however, around 8,000 Jewish domestics were sacked. As Kushner has noted, reasons for these dismissals were varied, and included the break-up of households due to evacuation; however, he has argued that the sackings also “reflected fears that the Jewish refugees were really pro-German in their sympathies”.<sup>836</sup> Statistics relating to the aliens tribunals indicate that a sense of unease towards domestic servants continued to exist after the September dismissals; under the tribunal system for enemy aliens only around 64% of domestics were placed in Category C, in comparison with 90% of Germans overall.<sup>837</sup> This underlying suspicion of domestic servants was to become more significant as the war progressed.

In response to the dismissal of refugee domestics in the autumn of 1939, resulting in high levels of unemployment among female foreign nationals, the Government lifted restrictions on these women and allowed them to move into areas of employment

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<sup>834</sup> As Kushner has noted, restrictions were put in place even on this area of employment in 1931. From this point, male aliens and couples were not eligible to apply for domestic work since it was hoped that this area of employment might provide opportunities for unemployed British men. A minimum wage of £36 per annum was stipulated, and only two foreign domestic servants per household were permitted: Kushner, ‘Alien Occupation’, p.557.

<sup>835</sup> Kushner, ‘Alien Occupation’, p.569.

<sup>836</sup> Kushner, ‘Alien Occupation’, p.572. A considerable number of refugees had been employed in Jewish households, and immediately prior to the war the Domestic Bureau of Bloomsbury House appealed to these families to avoid dismissing their staff if at all possible: Letter from Miss M. Waley Joseph, Chairman, Domestic Bureau, ‘Refugee Domestic Servants’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, p.10.

<sup>837</sup> Kushner, ‘Alien Occupation’, pp.572-573. The former statistics were based on a sample of 9,624 domestics.

outside the domestic sector. By the beginning of the following year, domestic service was no longer such a significant area of employment for refugees.<sup>838</sup> Ironically, however, it was at this moment that the image of the female domestic became the focus of hostile public discourse; as the fifth column 'menace' became a feature of public concern during 1940, the potential danger of female domestic servants erupted into a major theme. Parliamentary discussions of the 'fifth column' during 1940 were peppered with references to the risks posed by the employment of female domestics across Britain, and particularly those employed near military areas or by military personnel. On 1<sup>st</sup> March, Anderson responded to a MP's concern about "German servant girls" employed in Aldershot by stating that he felt that "it is a mistake to assume that every German domestic servant is a menace to the security of this country".<sup>839</sup> Anderson's calming words did not stem the alarm, however, and the following month the *Daily Mail* criticized him for failing to "Move those servant girls".<sup>840</sup> In May, both Houses of Parliament saw politicians raising the issue in heated terms. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May, in the House of Lords, Lord Marchwood expressed concern about German maids being employed "near aerodromes and near the sea coast" and argued that "women acting as spies against the interests of our country can be far more dangerous than men". Lord Ellwood agreed that the country was "ridden by domestic servants of alien origin", many of whom were "not trustworthy".<sup>841</sup> The female domestic worker was again identified as specific source of danger in the House of Commons a week later.<sup>842</sup> Perhaps the most significant development in the campaign against female domestics, however, was the report by Neville Bland on the

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<sup>838</sup> Kushner, 'Alien Occupation', pp.472-3.

<sup>839</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1940, vol. 357, col. 2410.

<sup>840</sup> Ferdinand Tuohy, 'I would lock up all doubtful aliens', *Daily Mail*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1940, p.6.

<sup>841</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1940, vol. 116, col. 421; col. 411.

<sup>842</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1940, vol. 361, cols 533-534.

capitulation of Holland in the middle of May. Bland's report, which was discussed in a Cabinet meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> May, gave specific examples of female German servants helping Nazi parachutists, and asserted that the "patriot kitchen maid not only can be, but generally is, a menace to the safety of the country".<sup>843</sup> Churchill's conclusion, after discussion of both Bland's report and the nervous state of the public regarding a Nazi invasion of Britain led by parachutists, was that it was "important that there should be a very large round-up of enemy aliens and suspect persons in this country."<sup>844</sup> Two weeks later, Bland reinforced his argument with a public broadcast on the BBC.<sup>845</sup> Kushner has noted that his talk received "wide popular support", and resulted in many British employers reporting their 'enemy alien' domestics to the police.<sup>846</sup>

Popular concerns about the potential danger of female domestic servants and the more general threat to the nation of foreign female sexuality shaped the way in which the 'enemy within' was imagined during the Second World War. The targeting of female domestic servants also raises the issue of class in the development of this enemy imagery. Although in reality refugee domestics were often educated women from middle-class backgrounds, Jillian Davidson and Tony Kushner have suggested that, once employed as domestics in Britain, their employers tended to disregard their backgrounds and perceive them as members of the servant class.<sup>847</sup> Parallels

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<sup>843</sup> 'Conclusions of a meeting of the War Cabinet', 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940': National Archives, Kew, CAB/65/7/18.

<sup>844</sup> 'Conclusions of a meeting of the War Cabinet', 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940': National Archives, Kew, CAB/65/7/18.

<sup>845</sup> Gilman and Gilman, *Collar the Lot*, p.110.

<sup>846</sup> Kushner, 'Alien Occupation', p.574.

<sup>847</sup> Jillian Davidson, 'German-Jewish Women in England', in Mosse, *Second Chance*, pp.534-551; p.540. Kushner, 'Alien Occupation', p.566.

can be clearly discerned between the persistent focus on the disloyalty of domestic servants in 1940 and the repeated allusions during the First World War to German waiters as potential spies. Both groups of 'enemy aliens' tended to be recent immigrants who were defined as working-class but whose service roles placed them in intimate contact with the lives of their social 'superiors'. In both cases, these employees could be seen as giving particular significance to the term 'enemy within', having not only gained positions of employment within British borders, but at the heart of the British middle- and upper-class private lives. Kushner has argued, therefore, that when Bland identified female domestics as the core of the fifth column, he was "articulating the fears of privileged society".<sup>848</sup> The essential problems of trust and privacy which lay at the heart of the domestic service system were exacerbated during the war by the significance placed on national as well as private loyalty. The focus on refugee domestics as a potential threat was therefore underpinned both by gendered assumptions about foreigners and deep-rooted class insecurities.

It is also important to note that the negative image of foreign domestic servants had its limitations. Even at the height of the campaign against female domestics, some individuals spoke out in their defence. As has been seen, Anderson took a lead in Parliament in attempting to counter the prejudice against female servants, albeit with little success. The decision, in June, to expand the number of protected areas which aliens were forbidden from entering without special permission, meant that aliens resident in these districts, including those women employed as domestic servants, were given only a few days' notice to leave. This decision caused dismay among

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<sup>848</sup> Kushner, 'Asylum or Servitude?', p.24.

several servant-employing readers of *The Times*, who wrote to the newspaper to express their indignation. Although the people who addressed the newspaper on the subject may have been motivated in part by the personal inconvenience caused by this ruling, their letters almost all placed their focus on a genuine compassion for their employees' situations and conviction as to their loyalty, stressing the positive relationships that had been forged between employer and servant. One such correspondent wrote:

Respectable girls and women, who escaped from horrors we can hardly believe in, found refuge in England. Here they have earned respect and confidence, many of them in domestic service, where their employers have had ample opportunity to judge their honesty and real feeling about Germany. They have done good and helpful work and are known to the local police as being above suspicion of any love for or desire to help the enemy.<sup>849</sup>

Despite such evidence that prejudice against refugee domestics was not universal, the decision to intern Category B women suggests that the government perceived it to be significant. This step seems to have been a generally popular one due to the negative attitudes towards alien women which had developed during the preceding months. The decision was not challenged in the press, even by the generally pro-refugee *Manchester Guardian*, which merely provided its readers with a dispassionate narrative of the round-up of women, noting that several of the older women were in tears, but not making any judgement on the proceedings.<sup>850</sup> The more belligerent sections of the press actively supported the internment of Category B women and called for the policy to be extended. On 28<sup>th</sup> May, for example, Mrs Cecil Chesterton appealed in the *Daily Mirror* for harsher measures, arguing:

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<sup>849</sup> Mabel S. Gill, *The Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1940, p.4. See also letter on this page from Leonard J. Carter and letters on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1940, p.4 and 26<sup>th</sup> June 1940, p.3.

<sup>850</sup> 'German and Austrian Women', *Manchester Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.6.



There are 30,000 women enemy aliens at liberty in this country – 30,000 points of danger to our soldiers at the Front and to our lives at home.

During the past few days something has been done about interning SOME of them. But not enough. I want to see them all interned.<sup>851</sup>

Unlike the image of the German enemy which rapidly developed during the First World War and influenced official policy on enemy aliens, the Second World War internment campaign featured an understanding of the enemy which was far less focused and which was based on interlacing discourses of gender, xenophobia, race and class. The nature of the fifth column scare meant that rather than the development of a specific, racialized stereotype, as had been seen during both the South African War and the First World War, there was much uncertainty about who or what constituted the principal threat to national security. The sense that Nazi agents could be found in any guise both fuelled and was fuelled by the rising sense of insecurity relating to the alarming events on the continent during this period. The British response to the fifth column threat was characterised most clearly by an increased distrust of anyone perceived as an outsider, hence the marked increase in xenophobia. Although antisemitism was certainly significant in fostering a distrust of internees, it cannot be said that the concept of the enemy alien was shaped by the same aggressive, racial stereotyping as it had been during the First World War. The concept of the enemy within Britain during the Second World War was far more vague, and, because of this, perhaps even more frightening. The closest that popular discourses came to creating a specific stereotype of the enemy was in the targeting of female domestic servants as potential enemy agents. However, even in this case,

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<sup>851</sup> Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, 'Stop and think', *Daily Mirror*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.13.

the female domestic seems to have been a rather vague and faceless entity, and it may be argued that this figure gained significance as a potential enemy because it represented the main elements of the wider fifth column scare, the idea that threats to national security could take root anywhere, even within the home, that area of British life considered the safest and most sacred.

### **The internment of women**

During the spring and summer of 1939, with the war imminent, British civil servants had undertaken detailed discussions and plans of potential internment policy for enemy aliens. While these plans had undergone significant changes and variations by the beginning of September, one constant feature was the exclusion of women from any general implementation of internment.<sup>852</sup> The internment of those women who had been identified as being particularly dangerous was, however, considered necessary, and, accordingly, during the first weeks of the war, a small number of such women were interned at Holloway Prison. By the end of October 1939, the total number of women interned was 96.<sup>853</sup> This followed the precedent set during the First World War when a handful of women who were considered to constitute a security threat were interned under the Defence of the Realm Act.<sup>854</sup> A shift towards a more clearly gendered policy began in the summer of 1940, when the internment of enemy aliens was introduced on a large scale. As has been seen, at this point the decision was made to intern women in Category B, but to extend the internment of

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<sup>852</sup> Draft letter from Home Office to War Office, c. April 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144/21258/700463/18.

<sup>853</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1939, vol. 352, cols 1210-1W; Hansard, HL Deb, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1939, vol. 114, col. 1590.

<sup>854</sup> Home Office officials made a point of investigating the procedure that had been followed regarding the internment of 'dangerous' women during the First World War: Home Office minutes, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> April 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144/21258/ 700463/18.

Category C aliens only to men. Government records indicate official uncertainty on the issue of female internment even immediately prior to the decision being made, with Home Office officials displaying particular reservations on the issue. On 16<sup>th</sup> May, Assistant Under-Secretary of State Frank Newsam stressed that he hoped that female internment would not be implemented, although the department was coming under “some pressure in that direction.”<sup>855</sup> Even as late as 24<sup>th</sup> May, confidential Home Office instructions to Chief Constables regarding the arrest of Category B women stressed that the decision had not been made as to whether this scheme would actually go ahead.<sup>856</sup> In a memorandum of 17<sup>th</sup> May, Anderson had conceded that the internment of Category B women was a possibility, but stressed his opposition to general female internment, arguing: “If thousands of women, including pregnant women and women with young children, were subjected to the conditions of barrack-room life in some sort of internment camp, there would soon be a public outcry against this treatment...”<sup>857</sup> This comment is a particularly significant indication of the continuing belief within official circles that internment was not a policy which was appropriate for women, and the reference to public opinion may have been influenced by an awareness of the controversy raised by female internment in the past. Anderson’s words contain echoes of discourses going back to the South African War, which had suggested that the internment of civilian women by the predominantly male state, was something which violated an accepted gender order governed by ideals of male protection and respect towards women. Looking back on the internment experience in 1947, C.T. Cuthbert, the Superintendent of the women’s

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<sup>855</sup> Foreign Office Memo, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1940: National Archives, Kew, FO 916 2580: KW3 56/14.

<sup>856</sup> Home Office to Chief Constables, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1720.

<sup>857</sup> Sir John Anderson, ‘War Cabinet. Invasion of Great Britain: Possible Co-operation by a “Fifth Column”’, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.3: National Archives, Kew, CAB/67/6/31.

camp on the Isle of Man, expressed the hope that “never again will it be necessary to intern women and children”.<sup>858</sup> This uneasiness over female internment, and the sense that the imprisonment of women and children was essentially wrong, is evident in the Home Office’s reluctance to implement the policy. Anderson’s reference to the unsuitability of “barrack-room life” for women also indicates the continuing association of internment with the military sphere, which was still defined as essentially masculine. Such attitudes were strong enough to prevent general female internment. Similarly, when Italy entered the war on 10<sup>th</sup> June, only male Italians became subject to internment. A Home Office note immediately prior to Italy’s declaration of war indicates that a limitation on accommodation was one element which influenced this decision, but the almost complete lack of concern about Italian women as a threat is evident in the fact that fewer than twenty were interned or detained throughout the war.<sup>859</sup> Cere has argued that this disproportionately low number of female Italian internees was due to assumptions about the subordinate role of women within Italian communities, which minimised their perceived threat.<sup>860</sup> By the beginning of August 1940, therefore, the internment had taken place of around 22,900 male enemy aliens (including 4,000 Italians), as well as around 4,000 German and Austrian women. This meant that 53% of male enemy aliens of German,

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<sup>858</sup> ‘Inspector C.R. Cuthbert’s report on the internment of women, children and married couple in the Isle of Man 1940-1945’, June 1947: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1053.

<sup>859</sup> Home Office minute, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1719. Herbert Morrison put the number of female Italian internees at 17 in November 1940: ‘Internment of Aliens of Enemy Nationality’, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940, National Archives, CAB/67/8/109; Lucio Sponza has put the figure at 19: Sponza, *Divided Loyalties*, p.146.

<sup>860</sup> Cere, ‘Women’, p.223.

Austrian or Italian nationality had been interned, in contrast with only 8% of enemy alien women.<sup>861</sup>

Miriam Kochan explains the disparity of treatment between male and female enemy aliens as evidence of the illogical nature of British internment policy. Although acknowledging that the “myth of the weaker sex” had a place in wartime society, she has concluded that this in itself could not explain the gendering of the policy, since a healthy image existed in the public sphere of the dangerous female spy.<sup>862</sup> However, it is important to consider Second World War internment in terms of the longer history of the policy. Discussions of internment policy frequently referred back to the First World War, and it is clear that both the administrative practices and the memory of this earlier internment episode had an impact on decisions made in 1939 and 1940. That the experience of the First World War influenced the continuing perception of internment as a predominantly male restriction is indicated in a Home Office memorandum issued during pre-war discussions of internment policy, which stated: “Women, unless individually dangerous, were not interned during the last war, and there is no suggestion that they would be interned in a future war.”<sup>863</sup> As has been seen, the image of the dangerous female alien certainly played a significant role in influencing popular attitudes towards internment; however, from the Home Office

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<sup>861</sup> Only 17 Italian women had been interned by November 1940, on the grounds that “special information” existed against them. If the statistics for internees of German and Austrian nationality only are considered, the figures stand at 60% of the male population and 9.4% of the female population. All figures are based on the approximate numbers given in: Herbert Morrison, ‘War Cabinet. Internment of aliens of enemy nationality’, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/8/109.

<sup>862</sup> Miriam Kochan, ‘Women’s Experience’, p.147.

<sup>863</sup> Extract from Memorandum on Refugees and National Service in B Division File Gen. 88/2/26. Approved by Sir Alexander Maxwell 16<sup>th</sup> June 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144 21254.

perspective, traditional concepts of male and female natures appear to have limited the extent to which this image impacted on internment policies. The observation of MP Eleanor Rathbone, that the British Government perceived women as “too stupid to be dangerous” was never articulated by any official, but the contrasting treatment of male and female enemy aliens indicates that perceptions of their varying potential threats was significant.<sup>864</sup> As during the First World War, Government policy, while clearly influenced by the public mood, was also shaped by a continuing adherence to belief in traditional notions of separate gender spheres and the essential differences between men and women. The existence of these two conflicting forces explains why internment policy has appeared so contradictory. By ordering only the internment of Category B women, the government acknowledged the fears stimulated by the gendered fifth column discourse, but by leaving the majority free they avoided being challenged on the ethics of the general detention of women.

The continuation of a belief in the contrasting natures of men and women was also evident in the administration of the male and female internment experiences, particularly on the Isle of Man, where the principal internment camps were sited.<sup>865</sup> Most women were initially detained in mainland women’s prisons before being transferred to the Isle of Man. The first of the Manx internment camps was opened on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1940, with ten eventually being utilized in total, and men and women being confined to separate areas of the island. The men’s camps on the island were formed

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<sup>864</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1213.

<sup>865</sup> The development of the Isle of Man camps was related closely to the second wave of internments during the summer of 1940. The first camp opened on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1940. Prior to this, internees had been held at various prisons and camps on the British mainland. See Yvonne M. Cresswell, *Living with the Wire: Civilian Internment in the Isle of Man during the two World Wars*, (Douglas: Manx National Heritage, 1994)

of groups of boarding houses or hotels within the towns of Ramsey, Peel, and Douglas and its outlying areas.<sup>866</sup> There were separate camps for internees of Italian and German nationality and internees could expect to be housed with anywhere from a dozen to 200 other men, depending on the size and style of accommodation.<sup>867</sup> This was rather different to the extensive, barrack-style accommodation which the majority of internees had experienced during the First World War at the hastily-established Knockaloe camp.<sup>868</sup> However, despite the contrasting accommodation, male internees on the Isle of Man were as strictly detained as the Knockaloe inmates had been, a fact which drew criticism from some observers. In early November 1940, after a four day inspection of the camps, the Chairman of the Advisory Council on Aliens, Sir Herbert Emerson, complained that the security was both excessive and inappropriate. He recorded: "In all the men's Camps the prison-like precautions are very obtrusive, a high double fence of barbed wire and sentries with fixed bayonets. This method of enclosure is quite inconsistent with the conception of friendly aliens, and has a most depressing psychological effect."<sup>869</sup> As well as having strict security in place, male internment camps tended to be fairly limited in terms of space, due to

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<sup>866</sup> Cresswell, *Living with the wire*, pp.64-72. A number of camps also existed on the mainland, including Huyton, a holding camp for male internees before transfer to the Isle of Man or overseas, and which had a reputation for particularly poor conditions during the early months of the general internment.

<sup>867</sup> J. W. Barwick, 'War Prisoners Aid of the World Committee of Young Men's Christian Association: Report on Alien Internment Camps in the United Kingdom', April 1941: Manx National Library, Isle of Man, B115/77q.

<sup>868</sup> An exception to this style of accommodation was 'Camp H' in Scotland for German and Austrian prisoners whom the authorities wished to be separated from the main bulk of internees due to their 'political views': J. W. Barwick, 'War Prisoners Aid of the World Committee of Young Men's Christian Association: Report on Alien Internment Camps in the United Kingdom', YMCA, April 1941, p.43: Manx National Library, Isle of Man, B115/77q .

<sup>869</sup> 'Chairman's Report on the Isle of Man Camps, Council on Aliens Document 51, Oct 28-Nov 2 1940': Graham White Papers, Parliamentary Archives, GW 14/1/7. Sir Herbert Emerson had been appointed Chairman of the Council in 1940, and had also served as the League High Commissioner for Refugees and the Director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees since 1939, and the Director of the Central Council for Refugees since 1940.

their positions within small towns, although internees in all camps had access to exercise areas, either on a camp recreation ground or on a beach. German Camp “F”, which drew special notice from a YMCA inspector in April 1941, appears to have been unusual for its ‘large amount of recreational space’ (the camp covered about 10 acres), which included tennis courts, miniature golf and a bowling green.<sup>870</sup>

The women’s camp differed significantly from the men’s. Known as the Rushen Camp, it incorporated the two villages of Port Erin and Port St Mary on the south-west coast of the Island. The 1941 YMCA report noted that the total area of the camp was over 2,000 acres, including ‘six miles of roads and streets and four acres of open ground where the internees can roam.’<sup>871</sup> Although the perimeter of this area was demarked with barbed wire, the internees had freedom of movement within the camp, and the International Cooperative Women’s Guild reported that “there is not the feeling of being closely penned in a wire enclosure that has been referred to so often in connection with the men’s camps.”<sup>872</sup> The press and some politicians made much of the fact that female internees had access to a golf course, tennis courts, and a swimming pool, amenities and lifestyle which, it was often highlighted, were not available to the average British civilian on the mainland, who was forced to struggle with wartime restrictions and the threat of enemy attack.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>870</sup> Barwick, ‘War Prisoners’, p.36.

<sup>871</sup> Barwick, ‘War Prisoners’, p.50.

<sup>872</sup> International Co-operative Women’s Guild, ‘Report on Visit to the Women’s Internment Camp in the Isle of Man’ Jan 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 215/336.

<sup>873</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1940, vol. 361 cols 1005-6W; ‘Fifth Column News’, *Daily Express*, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.5.



While such a focus on the privileges of female internees allowed certain contemporaries to brush over the indignities and injustices of internment, the freedom afforded female internees is significant when contrasted with the more restrictive style of internment imposed on males. Accounts by female internees show that they were often able to respond positively to the physical environment in which they were billeted, in contrast with the negative psychological response recorded in the men's camps.<sup>874</sup> Joan Johnson, a Manx resident of Port St Mary, later recorded that many former internees would make regular visits to the area "with which they fell in love during their enforced stay".<sup>875</sup> This is reinforced in the words of internees themselves. Renate Scholem, a teenager who had been interned for several months in Rushen Camp, later wrote to Joan's father, the local Methodist minister: "As soon as the war is over I want to see Port St. Mary again. I learnt to love the rocks and the sunsets and storms while I was there,"<sup>876</sup> while former internee, Anna D. M. Bill-Jentsch, reminisced some fifty-five years later about her first impressions of the camp: 'A picturesque path, lined on both sides by a profusion of Fuchsia bushes, in full bloom; what a charming approach! Our spirits lifted sky high...'<sup>877</sup> As accounts produced after the internment experience, these recollections are, of course, highly subjective, and overlook the many complexities and negative elements of the women's internment camps. They may also reflect the tendency of Jewish internees, noted by Ugolini and Schaffer, to minimise the hardships they had experienced and situate

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<sup>874</sup> 'Chairman's Report on the Isle of Man Camps, Council on Aliens Document 51, Oct 28-Nov 2 1940': Graham White Papers, Parliamentary Archives, GW 14/1/7.

<sup>875</sup> Joan Johnson, 'My memoirs of life in Rushen Internment Camp, Isle of Man, May 29<sup>th</sup> to Aug 31<sup>st</sup> 1941: a personal experience', p.6: Manx National Library, Isle of Man, MD 1171 (Acc no MS08866).

<sup>876</sup> Renate Scholem to Harry Johnson. 13<sup>th</sup> September [no year]: Papers of Harry Johnson (Methodist Minister), Manx National Library, Isle of Man, MS 09378.

<sup>877</sup> Anna D. M. Bill-Jentsch, 'Internment of Women on the Isle of Man', Pamphlet, 1998: Manx National Library, Isle of Man, B115/26c.

their memories within the wider, positive wartime narrative.<sup>878</sup> However, on a more practical level, such recollections provide evidence that the more informal physical structure of the women's camp enabled internees to relate positively to the environment and underline the fact that Rushen had much less of a prison-like feel than the camps for men.

While the Manx residents of the areas commandeered for the male camps had been ordered to leave, often at a few days' notice, with their property temporarily requisitioned by the government, such a precaution had not been felt necessary in the women's camp. Here, internees were billeted on boarding house owners, who were paid a government grant to provide food and accommodation for their guests. This policy caused less resentment among Manx residents, many of whom had been outraged at the forced removal of Douglas and Ramsay boarding-house keepers from their homes. The administration of Rushen Camp allowed local people to make an income during a period in which the Isle of Man's economic mainstay, the tourist industry, had inevitably been depressed.<sup>879</sup> However, since Rushen Camp was one of the earlier camps to open on the Island<sup>880</sup>, the different accommodation style can be attributed less to official concerns about local sensibilities than to a belief that women could be safely billeted within the community without posing any real threat to its inhabitants. Female internees could use the local shops and have their children with them; indeed, a sense of normality appears to have been encouraged in Rushen camp, which contrasted with the restrictive male camps, and can only have stemmed

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<sup>878</sup> Schaffer and Ugololini, 'Victims or Enemies?', p.219.

<sup>879</sup> For reaction to the requisitioning of property for the men's camps see: 'Island's Second Detention Camp: Sixty Onchan Houses Requisitioned', *Isle of Man Examiner*, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.1.

<sup>880</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> May 1940. See Cresswell, *Living with the Wire*, p.71.

from assumptions about the potential threat that women posed.<sup>881</sup> The decision to intern women was, in every case, either due to the fact that they had been placed in Category B, meaning that their loyalty to Britain could not be completely assured, or because they had been specifically recommended for internment by a tribunal which had assessed them as posing a potential security threat.<sup>882</sup> In contrast, the inmates of the far more highly secure male camps included a significant number (about 25 per cent) of men who had been placed by tribunals in Category C.<sup>883</sup> On paper, therefore, the women, as a whole, were the more dangerous group. However, the fact that they were imprisoned in far more lenient conditions, and were allowed to live almost normal lives, mixing with local communities, indicates that traditional assumptions about the relative danger of men and women in times of war continued to hold firm.

It is also likely that the different styles of internment were influenced by the fact that the men and women's camps were managed by different government departments: women were the responsibility of the Home Office, while the male camps were run, initially, by the War Office.<sup>884</sup> Indeed, as early as June 1939, during discussions of potential internment policies, the Home Office had decisively noted that it was "out of

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<sup>881</sup> 'The Womens Camp', *Inspector C.R. Cuthbert's report on the internment of women, children and married couple in the Isle of Man 1940-1945*, June 1947, pp.1-4: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1053.

<sup>882</sup> Herbert Morrison, 'War Cabinet. Internment of aliens of enemy nationality'. 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/8/109.

<sup>883</sup> Herbert Morrison, 'War Cabinet. Internment of aliens of enemy nationality', 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/8/109.

<sup>884</sup> The Home Office took over responsibility for the management of all camps in July 1940, while the War Office continued to manage the security: Hansard, HC Deb, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1940, vol. 363, col. 588.

the question to expect War Office to accept responsibility for female internees.”<sup>885</sup> This gendered division of responsibility between the two departments underlined the women’s status as civilians rather than prisoners of war. However, work carried out by the Council on Aliens’ Sub-Committee on Internment on a draft set of regulations for internees, based on the Prisoners of War Convention, offers another indication of the gendered discourse which shaped the internment experience for men and women. The draft regulations stated that, while all internees were entitled to humane treatment and respect, women, specifically, would “be treated with all consideration due to their sex.”<sup>886</sup> Although the Council on Aliens acted in an advisory capacity, it seems likely, given the way in which the women’s internment camps were established, that ideas about respect and consideration to women had some influence on the development of the female camps. While most of the evidence indicates that it was assumptions about the weaker threat of the female which shaped internment policy during this period, these other elements of gender ideology, which had permeated debates on internment since the South African War, seem to also have exerted an influence upon the way internment policy developed during the Second World War.

Although the implementation of internment policy reveals connections with past attitudes and practices, in one significant respect the Second World War saw a departure from the precedent of the previous conflicts. The implementation of stricter internment policy in May 1940 meant that, as in 1914, the Government felt obliged to take responsibility for the dependents of internees. In contrast to the First World War

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<sup>885</sup> Home Office minutes, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 144 21258.

<sup>886</sup> Sir Herbert Emerson, ‘Draft Declaration’ 13<sup>th</sup> February 1941: Graham White Papers, Parliamentary Archives, WH1/13/4/13.

experience, however, this recognition of responsibility did not necessitate a specific policy, nor does it appear to have been driven by a sense of patriarchal duty. Rather than introduce a system of allowances specifically designed for the families of interned aliens, the Government simply conceded that any individual made destitute by the internment of a breadwinner could apply for assistance under the Prevention of Relief and Distress (PRD) Scheme, which had been established to provide support for individuals whose livelihoods had been seriously affected by the war.<sup>887</sup> The incorporation of the dependents of internees into an existing social welfare scheme would have made the administration of assistance more straightforward than a specially tailored scheme. The differing style of the internment policy itself, which, unlike during the First World War, involved a number of female internees, may have also influenced the decision to take this approach. As Brinson and Kushner have noted, in a number of refugee families women were the main breadwinners, since the Government's employment restrictions left female domestic service as the most viable job option.<sup>888</sup> The *Jewish Chronicle* estimated that around 10% of female domestics in Category B had, prior to their internment, been supporting dependents, including male relatives such as husbands, fathers and brothers.<sup>889</sup> As a result, when such women were interned, male dependents could be left destitute.<sup>890</sup> The First

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<sup>887</sup> W.A.H. Hepburn, Assistance Board, to The District Officer, Newport, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1940: National Archives, Kew, AST 11/67. This applied to families where the breadwinner had lost their employment as a result of internment.

<sup>888</sup> Charmian Brinson, 'A Woman's Place...?': German-speaking Women in Exile in Britain, 1933-1945', *German Life and Letters*, 51, 2, 1998, pp.204-224; p.205; Kushner, 'Alien Occupation', p.571.

<sup>889</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1940, p.1.

<sup>890</sup> Problems also arose where a married couple was interned, and the husband, due to age or poor health, was released much earlier than the wife, who had provided care for him prior to internment. See, for example: Harry Johnson to Beatrice M. Wellington, Secretary of the Central Department for Interned Refugees, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1940. of Harry Johnson, Manx National Library, MS 09378.

World War model of the interned male breadwinner was therefore not always relevant in the more complex context of the Second World War. The slight shift in general internment policy meant that gender, as a factor, became less significant in decisions on financial support. However, these decisions also seem to have been compounded by a new belief that the impact of war on any individual in Britain, regardless of gender or nationality, had to be addressed by a responsible government.

### **British-born women**

As had been the case during the First World War, the gendered nature of British nationality laws again meant that British-born wives of aliens faced disadvantages on the outbreak of hostilities. In 1933, it had been decided that British-born women who were married to aliens would be exempt from Article 6 of the Aliens Order of 1920, which stated that all aliens in Britain must register with police. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, this decision was rescinded in relation to women married to men of enemy nationality, who were now regarded as enemy aliens and were thus required to be examined by a tribunal.<sup>891</sup> Although Anderson had vaguely assured the House of Commons in October 1939 that the tribunals would be sensitive to the “special position” of these women, it is apparent that, in practice, the experiences of British-born wives were determined more by perceptions of their husbands’ history and loyalties than their own. Peake, the under-secretary of state for the Home Office, later confirmed that “the Tribunals and Regional Advisory Committees were

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<sup>891</sup> Home Office minutes, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1939: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/221. In practice, this was very difficult to administer. The majority of women did not register, and since the earlier registration records had been destroyed, it was very difficult for police forces, particularly in larger urban areas, to chase them up.

instructed that if the husband was placed in Category B, the wife ought, generally speaking, to be placed in the same category.”<sup>892</sup> The reason for this appears to have been the belief that women were likely to be corrupted by their husbands’ influence: T.F. Turner, of MI5, reported to the Home Office that his department’s experience was that British-born wives of aliens were “by no means universally reliable, and in many instances they take on the colour of their husbands’ political opinions.”<sup>893</sup> As this statement makes clear, a woman married to an enemy alien was doubly disadvantaged by her gender. Not only did her marriage impose enemy nationality on her and enforce her attendance at the tribunal; once there, her fate was determined primarily by her husband’s record of loyalty and performance at the tribunal rather than her own.<sup>894</sup> If the tribunal chose to place her in Category B, then a British-born woman would be subject to the same restrictions as any other enemy alien in this group.

In January 1940, the Home Office decided to adjust its policy towards British-born women and relaxed regulations so that they did not have to register with the police but remained subject to travel and residency restrictions.<sup>895</sup> The outcome of this change, however, was that it was harder for the authorities to keep track of such women since they had no record of their addresses, and the following year the

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<sup>892</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1940, vol. 362, col. 18.

<sup>893</sup> T.F. Turner to A.I. Tudor, Home Office, c. April 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/222.

<sup>894</sup> The same practice seems also to have been the case for other couples. One Polish woman internee complained that she had been assigned to category B with her husband, without ever actually having a tribunal herself, and despite the fact that, as Poles, they should both have been regarded as ‘friendly aliens’: Cyril Rotenbach to Harry Johnson, c. September 1940: Papers of Harry Johnson (Methodist Minister), Manx National Library, MS 09378.

<sup>895</sup> Home Office minutes, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/222.

regulations were altered for a second time. From 13<sup>th</sup> March 1941, British-born women were again required to register, but were exempt from other wartime restrictions on aliens.<sup>896</sup> It seems that by this point in the war, with the Fifth Column scare largely diminished, British-born women were viewed more positively. In a circular to the Chief Constables of the various police districts, the Home Office stated: “It is because these women are known to be generally loyal that the Secretary of State is granting them exemption from the main war-time restrictions.”<sup>897</sup> However, even at this point, concern was expressed by Norman Kendal of the Metropolitan Police that it was risky to allow wives of enemy aliens to live unrestricted, while Home Office official, H.C.C. Prestige, argued that it would be sensible to maintain restrictions on their possession of certain articles, such as cameras and telescopes. Prestige asserted that these items could be dangerous in the wrong hands, and, since he could not see that an ordinary woman could have any need for such things, he felt it would be sensible to keep the restriction in force.<sup>898</sup> Although the Home Office dismissed this suggestion, officials did admit that the influence on a British-born wife of a husband disloyal to the state remained a point of concern. Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Frank Newsam, reassured Kendal that if a British-born woman was married to an alien subject to special restrictions, then this “in itself [would] be a good reason for making careful enquiries into the woman’s own reliability.”<sup>899</sup>

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<sup>896</sup> Newsam to Kendal, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/222.

<sup>897</sup> Home Office to Chief Constables, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/222. The circular also noted that the exemption could be withheld in the case of any “individual woman against whom anything is known or suspected.”

<sup>898</sup> Kendal to Newsam, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1941; Prestige to Clayton, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/222.

<sup>899</sup> Newsam to Kendal, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/222.



In one respect, British-born wives of enemy aliens had an advantage over women married to friendly or neutral aliens, since they potentially had the power to regain their original nationality. In 1918, in recognition of the huge difficulties which British-born wives of Germans and Austrians had experienced during the previous four years, the British Government had made an adjustment to the Nationality and Status of Aliens Act which allowed women married to enemy aliens during a time of war to apply for naturalization in order to regain their original British status. Decisions on such applications would be made at the discretion of the Home Secretary.<sup>900</sup> While, on the surface, this appeared to be a positive development, it did not alter the fundamental regulations regarding nationality, and it created a further disparity, this time between the wives of enemy aliens and the wives of other foreign nationals, the latter of whom continued to have no option of regaining their British nationality while married. It was also an opportunity which was, in reality, only available in a minority of cases. When the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave, gave his support to the amendment in 1918, he stressed that he would only be prepared to authorise naturalisation requests in “rare cases”, giving as examples instances where women had been separated from their husbands for a long period of time.<sup>901</sup> When it came to implementing this law during the Second World War, many women were held to be ineligible, and women’s organisations complained that the Government failed to inform women of their rights.<sup>902</sup> As with the issue of aliens restrictions, a woman’s right to apply for naturalisation was judged according to her husband’s record: a woman could apply to regain her British citizenship only if her husband was in

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<sup>900</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1918, vol. 108, col. 1392; British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1918 (8 & 9 Geo. 5, c. 38), Part III, Section 10 (6)

<sup>901</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1918, vol. 108, col.1393.

<sup>902</sup> ‘Annual Report of the Six Point Group 1938-1939’: Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University, SPG/B/9.

Category C or, in the case of Italians who had not appeared before a tribunal, the authorities were satisfied that he was loyal to the British cause and had exempted him from restrictions. Naturalisation was not an option for a woman “if there were any doubts about her husband’s friendliness towards this country”.<sup>903</sup>

This element of alien policy had a particularly unfair impact on women specifically. Since the status of men was not affected by marriage to foreign nationals, British men married to enemy aliens faced no such restrictions. While the Home Secretary was able, if necessary, to use Defence Regulation 18B to detain German women who had obtained British citizenship by marrying British men, there was no suggestion that the internment of such women should necessitate any implementation of restrictions against their husbands.<sup>904</sup> As has been seen, concerns about the potential security risk of women of enemy nationality were raised periodically in the press, but their danger was seen to lie in their manipulation of their husbands for information or their potential role as spies in their own right; the men they had married do not appear to have been regarded as a security risk in themselves. The fundamental root of this issue lay in the historical implementation of the nationality laws, under which women’s rights organisations had long argued that a woman was regarded as “a chattel and not as a person in her own right”<sup>905</sup>, rather than in wartime developments. However, the Government’s approach to British-born women during the conflict, particularly its decision to judge them on their husbands’ standards, showed that the restrictive gender assumptions which had shaped these

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<sup>903</sup> Peake to Ward, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1940: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/1675.

<sup>904</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1939, vol. 352, col. 1829.

<sup>905</sup> Nationality of Married Women Committee, ‘Memorandum on the Nationality of Married Women’, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1943: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/187.

laws remained influential. The ultimate potential of this immense sexual double standard was realised in June 1940, when those British-born wives of enemy aliens who had been placed in Category B along with their husbands, were rounded up for internment.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of British-born women who were interned as enemy aliens during the summer of 1940. Home Office officials were vague on these statistics, with Peake only admitting that “a number of British-born wives” had been included, but MP Rhys Davies put the figure at over 100.<sup>906</sup> As a result of the low numbers of women who were actually affected (and perhaps also due to the general stigma attached to internment), accounts by British-born female internees themselves are rare, although glimpses of them do appear in other accounts. Joan Johnson, for example, remembered sharing her internment with an elderly, British-born Salvation Army member whose sons were still in Germany, while Anna Bill-Jentzsch, recalled one British-born woman, in “her sixties, snow-white hair with a really thick, cockney accent” who protested vociferously: “I never set foot outside England and I don’t even know one word of their bloody language”.<sup>907</sup> The issue of the internment of women of British birth was occasionally referred to in Parliament; in August 1940, for example, Labour MP Emanuel Shinwell raised the case of Lilian Laumen, who had two brothers fighting in the British Armed Forces, and, he implied,

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<sup>906</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1940, vol. 362, col. 18; Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1940, vol. 365, col. 468. By 1943, according to the nominal roll for the women’s camp, there were eight British-born women still interned. Unfortunately, the nominal roll for the married camp did not include information on places of birth, so it is not possible to determine the additional number of British-born women who continued to be interned with their husbands at that point: Nominal roll for women’s camp, October 1943: National Archives, Kew, HO 215/478; Nominal roll for married camp, October 1943: National Archives, Kew, HO 215/502.

<sup>907</sup> Bill-Jentzsch, ‘Internment of Women on the Isle of Man’, 1998, pp.17-18.

had loyal roots in Britain.<sup>908</sup> The Six Point Group, which had campaigned for a change in the nationality laws for women during the inter-war period, consistently pressured the government to reconsider the internment of British-born women.<sup>909</sup> However, Osbert Peake gave the official response to the issue in October 1940, stating: “These women have not been interned merely because their husbands are of enemy nationality. They have been interned because they failed to satisfy a tribunal or regional advisory committee that they could properly be exempted from the special restrictions.”<sup>910</sup>

As the evidence outlined above demonstrates, this statement was misleading, since not only were the women’s appearances at tribunals determined by a law which forced them to take their husbands’ nationalities, the outcome of their tribunal was highly influenced by perceptions of their husbands’ behaviour rather than their own. These issues, however, were not pressed by MPs, nor did the internment of British-born women draw much attention from the press. In fact, the lack of publicity given to the issue is surprising, especially when compared with attitudes to British-born wives of aliens during the First World War. During that conflict, which saw far more excessive prejudice towards enemy aliens, the issue of British-born wives of aliens was an area where attitudes often softened. As has been seen, while later in the war British-born women frequently became targets of hostility, during the early months of the conflict even the most vociferous elements of the right-wing press occasionally made room for sympathetic consideration of women in this situation. Strangely,

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<sup>908</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1940, vol. 364, cols. 798-9W.

<sup>909</sup> ‘Annual Report for 1940 of the Six Point Group’: Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University, SPG/B/11.

<sup>910</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1940, vol. 365, col. 468.

however, the situation of British-born wives of enemy aliens, regarding either their status as dependents or as internees, was simply not one which emerged with any force during 1940, in either Parliament or the Press. Indeed, one lone contributor to the question in the *Manchester Guardian* noted his surprise at the “lack of interest” in this issue during a time when discussion of the morality of the general internment policy was at its height.<sup>911</sup>

The lack of attention given to the internment of British-born during 1940 may be related to the wider lack of controversy over the internment of women. Since female internees had been placed in either Category A or B, there was a general belief that they had been interned for good reason, unlike the significant number of Category C men who had been interned.<sup>912</sup> The internment of British-born women was therefore not likely to draw much attention from general opponents of internment. For those who campaigned against the nationality laws, the internment of British-born women was one injustice among many, and one which only affected a small minority of women. While the Six Point Group, for example, campaigned against internment of British-born women, the organisation appears to have given more attention to the possibilities for naturalisation of British-born wives of enemy aliens, which presented an opportunity for large numbers of women.<sup>913</sup> The silence in the press suggests that Peake’s assurance that the internment of British-born women was justified by their performance at tribunals was generally accepted. Widespread pressure on this issue did not, in fact, materialise until later in the war, when high profile cases of the effects

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<sup>911</sup> E. Basil Bacon, ‘Enemy Aliens’, *Manchester Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1940, p.10.

<sup>912</sup> This point is discussed in more detail below, under the heading ‘The reaction to internment July-August 1940’

<sup>913</sup> See Annual Reports of the Six Point Group, 1938-1945: Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University, 5SPG/B/9-23.

of restrictions on British-born women drew some publicity to the issue.<sup>914</sup> In 1943, the government put forward a wartime amendment to the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Amendment Bill, widening the scope of British nationality, by allowing, for example, more time for the registration of children born overseas.<sup>915</sup> To the pressure groups that had long-campaigned on the issue of women's nationality, this appeared to be an ideal opportunity to rectify the gender discrepancy within the marriage laws. During early 1943, organizations including the National Union of Women Teachers, the Six Point Group, the National Council of Women of Great Britain and the Nationality of British Women Committee, lobbied the Home Office to address the nationality of married women in the Bill. The government continued to resist, however, with the Home Secretary arguing that "it would not be right to deal with this controversial subject in a Bill which is a wartime measure introduced for the purpose of dealing with certain matters which had specific war-time urgency."<sup>916</sup> It should also be noted that, although the internment of British-born women was wielded as a weapon in the 1943 campaign for new nationality legislation, it appeared as only one point of argument among many.<sup>917</sup> This further reinforces the fact that, since internment affected only small numbers of women, it was overshadowed by the more extensive ways in which nationality laws impacted on British women during the war.

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<sup>914</sup> For example, the case of the Countess de Kerdel, a British-born woman married to a Frenchman, who refused to register as an alien in the hope of drawing attention to the injustice of the nationality laws. 'Annual Report of the Six Point Group for 1942': Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, 5SPG/B/17.

<sup>915</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1942, vol. 125, col.425.

<sup>916</sup> Herbert Morrison to Herbert Williams, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1943: National Archives, Kew, HO 213/187.

<sup>917</sup> Nationality of Married Women Committee, 'Memorandum on the Nationality of Married Women', 17<sup>th</sup> February 1943: National Archives, Kew, HO 213 187.

## **Education in the internment camps**

While the Home Office's preoccupation with its responsibility towards women internees reflected the pattern established during the South African War, there is less evidence of an official desire to use internment as an opportunity to mould the attitudes of 'enemy' communities through education. As has been seen, during the South African War, education for both children and adults became a key element of the government's internment policy, and aimed at anglicising and 'civilising' the Boers. During the Second World War, the Home Office permitted, encouraged, and sometimes facilitated education in the camps, but many of the learning opportunities were instigated by the internees themselves. In contrast to the Boer internees half a century earlier, many of the inmates of Second World War internment camps were highly educated, and included world leaders in several fields of expertise. The internment of fellow Europeans on British soil was regarded differently to the internment of so-called "backward" South African subjects in the colonial context. As a result, the involvement of the British authorities in camp education was not perceived as such an urgent issue as it had been at the turn of the century. Despite this, there is some limited evidence that an anglicised form of education continued to have a place in British internment policy. In January 1941, for example, the Home Office requested the British Council to organise a series of lectures for the internment camps on "British life and institutions".<sup>918</sup> However, in March, the department turned down a suggestion by the Friendly Aliens Protection Society that more emphasis should be placed in Rushen camp education provision on British political ideals.<sup>919</sup>

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<sup>918</sup> Central Department for Interned Refugees: Minutes of meetings: 114/41, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1941: London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/2793/03/05/02.

<sup>919</sup> Correspondence between the Home Office and the Friendly Aliens Protection Society, 10<sup>th</sup> March and 21<sup>st</sup> March 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 215 336.

In contrast to the Home Office's rather inconsistent approach to education in the internment camps, the voluntary organisations involved with internee welfare regarded this as a vital element of their work. While the YMCA, which concerned itself with the welfare of internees from all backgrounds, was the organisation with chief responsibility for the "provision of educational and recreative facilities"<sup>920</sup>, this was a subject which also drew a great deal of attention from the Central Department for Refugees, an organisation representing all the main refugee committees. The Central Department was extremely keen that the most should be made of this "unique opportunity for educational work", particularly in terms of the possibility of increasing "English influence in the educational and cultural life in the camps".<sup>921</sup> Such language contains strong echoes of the discussions which had taken place fifty years earlier in relation to the South African concentration camps. The records of the voluntary organisations give the clear impression that it was not simply education, but a *British* form of education, with a focus on democratic ideals, which was needed in the internment camps. This was felt to be particularly important in the women's camps, due to the mixing of Nazi internees with anti-Nazi or non-political inmates. The Friendly Aliens Protection Society argued that the less fanatical Nazis, who were perhaps not so soaked in Nazi ideology "might very well respond to a wise and sympathetic approach" and suggested that "it would seem most desirable to try to give them an insight into a more healthy political philosophy before they regain their

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<sup>920</sup> 'Information about the Joint Committee on the Welfare of Internees and Prisoners of War. Broadcast to Germany. [no date], Minutes of the Germany Emergency Committee: Library of the Religious Society of Friends, FCRA/15.

<sup>921</sup> Central Department minutes 114/41, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1941; 'Suggestions of Central Department for Interned Refugees based on study of recommendations made by Council on Aliens', January 1941, 116/46: London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/2793/03/05/02.



freedom.”<sup>922</sup> The Society based its argument on a report on Rushen Camp by the International Co-operative Women’s Guild, which asserted that education for internees should provide them with an understanding of the “growth and working of British Free Institutions”, and thus encourage an acceptance of democratic ideals. The Guild felt that this development would be highly beneficial to the international situation after the war, when, they hoped, internees could return home and use their new understanding of British democratic institutions to contribute to international unity.<sup>923</sup>

The concern of the International Women’s Co-operative Guild with the post-war situation of internees provides another clue as to why the focus on British education in the camps was inconsistent. To the Guild, with its underlying focus on international cooperation, the most positive outcome of camp education would be the transferral of British democratic values to the post-war European stage. In contrast, the educational focus of other voluntary organisations is likely to have been linked to thoughts about inmates’ post-internment roles within Britain itself. When the history of the refugee organisations is taken into consideration, it is hardly surprising that an anglicising element dominated their proposals for education scheme in the camps. As Colin Holmes has noted, one of the key aims of Jewish refugee societies throughout the 1930s had been a desire to play down the ‘foreignness’ of the new arrivals they had sponsored and to educate Jewish immigrants in British ways of

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<sup>922</sup> Friendly Aliens Protection Committee to Miss Edwards, Section B III, Home Office, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 215/336.

<sup>923</sup> International Co-operative Women’s Guild, ‘Report on Visit to the Women’s Internment Camp in the Isle of Man’ January 1941: National Archives, Kew, HO 215/336.

life.<sup>924</sup> Accordingly, the Board of Deputies' Public Relations Department was involved in "raising the standards of behaviours amongst Jewish people".<sup>925</sup> On arrival in the country, Jewish refugees were presented with a booklet by the German Jewish Aid Committee entitled *When You Are in England: Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee* which instructed newcomers on correct forms of behaviour when in Britain.<sup>926</sup> The outbreak of war, and the subsequent closer focus on aliens of all nationalities, further fuelled the fears of the Jewish community regarding the dangers of antisemitism. The appearance of refugees at tribunals earlier in the war, with little knowledge of the English language had been strongly condemned by members of the Anglo-Jewish community. Reverend Vivien Simmons, of the West London Synagogue of British Jews, who was liaison officer for his local aliens tribunal, argued that such incidents would inevitably provoke antisemitism and argued that "the only justification for allowing them to enter this country is that they may be trained in English ways, English language and English habits and customs"<sup>927</sup> When considered in this context, the significance placed by voluntary organisations on a British-influenced education for refugees becomes far more understandable.<sup>928</sup>

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<sup>924</sup> Holmes, 'British Justice', p.160.

<sup>925</sup> Mrs. A. Petrie, Public Relations Department, to Mrs. Charles Singer, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1940: Board of Deputies MSS, London Metropolitan Archives, ACC 3121 C9/5/1/1.

<sup>926</sup> Holmes, 'British Justice' p.160.

<sup>927</sup> Vincent Simmons to Neville Laski, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1939: Board of Deputies, London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/3121/E/03/520. The response of the Chief Rabbi, J. H. Hertz, to Simmons' concerns demonstrates that this attitude not accepted by all members of the Jewish community in Britain. Hertz defended his decision to assist the Yeshivah students in question to enter the country, arguing: "...I have yet to learn that ignorance of British geography or of English games on the part of a poor hounded human being is sufficient reason for him being interned.": Hertz to Neville Laski, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1939: Board of Deputies MSS, London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/3121/E/03/520.

<sup>928</sup> It is important to note that, while the attitudes of the voluntary organisations are extremely revealing about the motivations of these institutions, the internees themselves shaped much of the education in the camps. In her oral history of education in the camps, Maxine Schwartz Seller has shown that a number of internees were personally motivated to pursue a British-focused education and develop their British or Anglo-Jewish identities in order to distance

In contrast, the British government, which had initially permitted the immigration of most refugees merely on a temporary basis, prior to their re-emigration to the USA, had less incentive to consider the long-term benefits of education in the camps. The Government's commitment to a continued re-emigration policy is indicated by its ongoing willingness to contribute to funding for this purpose during the war.<sup>929</sup> London has noted that the Home Office placed pressure on refugees to depart for the United States, and refused to give guarantees that refugees in Britain would be allowed to remain at the end of the war.<sup>930</sup> These different approaches to the refugee question explain the varying responses of the official and voluntary worlds to the concept of education for internees. The continued understanding of internees as transmigrants also explains the fact that official attitudes to camp education contrasted with those of 1899-1902. While the British authorities had regarded their Boer internees as new subjects of the Empire, who therefore required some grooming in British 'civilized' standards, the post-war residency status of enemy aliens during the Second World War was far less certain. The significance placed on education of internees during twentieth century conflicts appears to have developed in direct relation to the extent to which internees were imagined as part of the post-war national community. This trend is reinforced by consideration of the experience of the First World War internment episode, when education was left almost

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themselves from their experiences in Nazi Germany: Schwartz Seller, 'Filling the Space', pp.702-705.

<sup>929</sup> E. Hale to Sir Alexander Maxwell, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940: National Archives, Kew, AST 11/68.

<sup>930</sup> London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p.172.

exclusively in the hands of voluntary organisations, and, in turn, the vast majority of internees were forcibly excluded from post-war Britain.<sup>931</sup>

### **The reaction to internment, July-August 1940**

As the military crisis receded and the possibility of invasion began to fade, public attitudes towards aliens began to change. As Kushner has suggested, the tolerant mood which had prevailed during the early months of the war began to emerge again as “liberal public opinion reasserted itself”.<sup>932</sup> Attention to the plight of the internees was roused by news of the sinking of the *Arandora Star* at the beginning of July<sup>933</sup> and public backlash against the general internment policy began in earnest on 4 July during a debate in the House of Commons, initiated by Major Victor Cazalet and Eleanor Rathbone, who had both spent a number of years campaigning for the rights of refugees. The two MPs called for a rapid review of the cases of individual internees who may have been imprisoned unfairly, and for improvements in conditions in the camps. Both MPs placed Britain’s reputation at the heart of their pleas for the reassessment of internment policy: Cazalet described the developments of the

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<sup>931</sup> During the First World War educational activities for internees were provided by the YMCA and the Friends Emergency Committee. For details see: ‘Third Report of the Emergency Committee. Report for the Half-year ending June 30th, 1915, pp.9-10. Fourth Report of the Emergency Committee Report for Year Ending June 30th, 1916,’ p.5: Library of the Religious Society of Friends, Pers/Emergency.

<sup>932</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, p.147.

<sup>933</sup> Miriam Kochan has argued that this was the sinking of the *Arandora Star* on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1940, was “the event which finally tipped the scales of public sympathy towards the enemy aliens”: Kochan, *Britain’s Internees*, p.84. However, it should be noted that criticism of the Government’s deportation programme was not immediate and that the earliest press reports placed an emphasis on negative German and Italian stereotypes in their descriptions of the behaviour of internees during the sinking. Home Intelligence reports indicate that one of the key reactions to the sinking by the general public was concern about and reconsideration of the overseas evacuation scheme for children which was also underway at this point. This is a reminder that popular attitudes towards internment did not transform overnight: Report on *Arandora Star*, *Manchester Guardian*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1940, p.5; ‘Arandora Star Sunk by U-Boat’, *The Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1940, p.4 Home Intelligence Report No. 41, ‘Daily Report on Morale’, Thursday 4th July 1940.

previous two months as “totally un-English”, while Rathbone asserted: “This is a question which affects our prestige as a nation, and we do not want to let it go out that our land is a land of oppression and not a land of the free.”<sup>934</sup> Cazalet launched the debate by reminding the House of “the tradition of this island for many centuries to give a welcome and asylum to all those who were persecuted in other lands.”<sup>935</sup> While their appeal inevitably drew resistance from some MPs on the grounds of national security, the 10<sup>th</sup> July debate has been regarded as a key turning point in the internment process.<sup>936</sup> Although the Government did not reverse its policy as a result of this emerging opposition to internment, the debate drew attention to the conditions of internment and instigated a revision of the cases of certain internees. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July, Anderson announced that certain ‘C’ grade internees would soon be eligible to apply for release if they fell into specific categories, for example if they were considered to be seriously ill or infirm.<sup>937</sup> In a White Paper published later that month, the Government outlined nineteen categories of ‘C’ grade internees who were eligible to apply for release, including students aged under eighteen, and individuals who had been engaged, prior to their internment, on “work of national importance”.<sup>938</sup>

The fact that Rathbone and Cazalet successfully drew on national ideals to support their case is significant when considered within the wider history of civilian internment. Rathbone’s reference to the “prestige of the nation”, and her description of internment policy as a “matter which reflects unfavourably on our country’s

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<sup>934</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1209; col. 1220.

<sup>935</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1208.

<sup>936</sup> Lafitte, *Internment of Aliens*, p.75.

<sup>937</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1940, vol. 363, col. 587.

<sup>938</sup> ‘German and Austrian civilian internees: Categories of persons eligible for release from internment and procedure to be followed in applying for release’, July 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6217), X (pp.2-4).

reputation”<sup>939</sup>, was very similar to the language used by critics of internment policy during the South African War, when the Government was accused of “disgracing and dragging in the mire the good name of this country.”<sup>940</sup> Internment was problematic not simply because it could be regarded as unjust, but because it was a policy implemented by a nation which imagined itself to be admired as a protector of justice. Just as during the South African War, this notion of British “prestige” had a practical as well as an idealistic significance; Britain’s reputation for justice and freedom was particularly relevant during a period when the Government was anxious that relations with the, as yet neutral, USA should not be undermined by any negative imagery.<sup>941</sup> The possible repercussions of the internment policy on US opinion was stressed by MP Wilfred Roberts during the 10<sup>th</sup> July debate when he asserted that “the individual cases of hardship and injustice and mismanagement and stupidity which have been created by the administration of these Regulations” were likely to do the country “great harm in the eyes of some Americans.”<sup>942</sup> This concern was echoed in the letter columns of the nation’s press. A group of readers addressed *The Times* in a letter published the day after the debate, to argue; “If we treat such men as prisoners for a day longer then we must we cloud our national honour; we also risk...alienating powerful sources of support in neutral America.”<sup>943</sup> The imprisonment of large numbers of civilians, many of whom had already experienced detention in Nazi concentration camps, was a policy which did not sit easily with British ‘traditions’, but it also undermined the positive image of Britain that the authorities were attempting to cultivate abroad.

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<sup>939</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1211.

<sup>940</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1901, vol. 89, col. 1165.

<sup>941</sup> Kushner, *Holocaust*, p.159.

<sup>942</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1265.

<sup>943</sup> Beazley et al, *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1940, p.5.

In contrast to critics such as Rathbone and Cazalet, Lafitte was one of a number of contemporaries who argued that national identity was simply not a relevant lens through which to view the issue of the treatment of 'enemy aliens'. He believed that the war should be understood as a clash of ideologies rather than a conflict between nations, arguing that "freedom, tolerance and common decency" should not be viewed merely as British values but as ideals which could be common to Nazi opponents of any "nationality, race or religion".<sup>944</sup> Such ideas were reinforced by some parliamentary critics, such as Josiah Wedgwood MP, who told the House of Commons on 10<sup>th</sup> July: "This war is not a matter of nationality at all. It is a war of religion, the religion of freedom as against the religion of dictatorship. We are no longer divided, as we were in the last war, between English and Germans and Austrians and French."<sup>945</sup> However, the association of these ideals with a specific British national tradition was such a powerful theme that even Lafitte, despite his fervent belief in the war as an ideological, rather than a national conflict, occasionally drew on 'British' characteristics to reinforce the injustice of internment policy. Echoing the approach of Rathbone and Cazalet, Lafitte asserted that the victimization of minority groups by the Nazis was "totally repugnant to the tolerant, free and peace-loving traditions of the British people," and warned his readers not to allow these traditions to be polluted by "doctrines of tyranny".<sup>946</sup>

The significance of British national identity in internment critiques was implicitly recognised by defenders of the policy. This is particularly evident in a *Daily Express* article of August 1940 which offered an interpretation of the internment experience in

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<sup>944</sup> Lafitte, *Internment of Aliens*, pp.14-15.

<sup>945</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1247.

<sup>946</sup> Lafitte, *Internment of Aliens*, pp.34-5.

which British 'traditions' were positively reinstated. The article was principally based on the reactions of enemy aliens recently released from internment, and the responses of the individuals selected for interview created the strong impression that, for the internees, internment was a rational and understandable policy. One internee was reported as stating: "Mistakes have been made, but no chances can be taken." The article used such statements to create the impression that the internment policy may have had some flaws but had been implemented for the highest moral reasons. Interestingly, it also drew on the image of the Nazi concentration camp, but used this to illustrate the essential difference between the British and German experiences of internment. In reference to the experiences of one internee, who had previously spent time in a Nazi concentration camp, the article stated that while one "was hell, the other was a holiday." In contrast to the monstrous Nazi regime, Britain was a place where "mistakes...[could] be corrected." In this way, even the problems associated with internment could be given a place within a positive British image as a nation with the strong traditions which enabled injustices to be rapidly resolved. The release of internees, and the internment experience generally, was depicted in an almost victorious light, with one internee reported as describing himself and his fellow newly-freed internees as "the first of a great release into a great battle". This interpretation of internment represented a humble Britain doing its best in a complex situation, treating its prisoners with compassion and humanity, yet not succumbing to sentimentality.<sup>947</sup>

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<sup>947</sup> Hilde Marchant, 'Wives Greet First Aliens Home From Holiday Isle', *Daily Express*, 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1940, p.6. Similarly, Ugolini and Schaffer have shown how internment narratives, especially among Jewish former internees, often presented the experience in a positive light which often reinforced Britain's "liberal" and "righteous" wartime image. Ugolini and Schaffer, 'Victims or Enemies?', p.218.



In contrast to debates surrounding earlier conflicts, the use of national identity to challenge the morality of internment policy incorporated ideas about justice and fairness, but were less influenced by gender. While debates on female internment during the South African War had revealed significant public uncertainty about the morality of the internment of Boer women and children, this was an issue which was rarely raised in critiques of internment in 1940. This may be attributed to the particular development of internment policy during this period. The internment of women had been carried out, in every case, on the grounds that they had been assessed by tribunals as a threat, or a potential threat, to national security. In contrast, a significant number of male internees had initially been assigned by the tribunals to Category C, and had therefore been cleared of any suspicion of disloyalty. For opponents of internment, therefore, it was far more logical to lead the attack on the policy with a focus on these Category C aliens who had been imprisoned despite having already proven their commitment to the Allied cause. Had wholesale female internment taken place, then debates may have taken on a different tone; as it was, the most pressing injustices were held to have been suffered by German and Austrian men.<sup>948</sup> The role of Eleanor Rathbone in the internment debates underlines this point. Rathbone had, throughout her political life, campaigned for increased social and political rights for women, and, not surprisingly, was particularly interested in the fates of female internees. She worked tirelessly behind the scenes to improve their conditions and prospects of release, and put a great deal of effort into schemes to develop employment opportunities for newly- or

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<sup>948</sup> For the same reason, debates gave very little attention to the situation of Italian men; as non-refugees, who could not be perceived as having the same automatic antagonism towards Fascism, their internment did not raise such significant questions about British systems of justice.

soon-to-be-released female internees.<sup>949</sup> However, her parliamentary campaign against internment, particularly during the key debate of 10<sup>th</sup> July, focused on men as the principal victims of internment and although she alluded to the uncertainty of the situation of female enemy aliens not yet interned, Rathbone did not criticize the government on its decision to intern women.<sup>950</sup> This example typifies the way in which the gendered discourses which had pervaded debates on internment during the South African War, and equated Britishness with chivalry and respect towards women, simply failed to emerge during this period due to the very different circumstances of the Second World War.

The absence of gender from constructions of national identity during the internment debates may also have been related to wider perceptions of the conflict itself and of the nature of the Nazi regime. As has been seen, the British media had fostered highly gendered images of belligerent nations during the First World War, particularly in relation to the principal 'enemy', Germany, which was depicted as aggressive, uncivilized and masculine. During the Second World War, Britain experienced a similar development of national self-definition in contrast with the enemy; however, British understandings of Nazi Germany during this conflict owed less to imagined national characteristics and more to interpretations of the regime's ideological extremism. The focus on the contrast between 'British' democratic traditions and Nazi excesses shaped the way in which internment was discussed. Since the Nazis eschewed justice, civil freedoms, and tolerance towards minorities in the most callous

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<sup>949</sup> Rathbone Papers XIV. 2. 17 (1-30) XIV.2.17 (31-65), University of Liverpool. For a discussion of Rathbone's work for internees see Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing: Eleanor Rathbone and the Refugees*, Chapter 6 (see p.153 for her efforts on behalf of interned women)

<sup>950</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, cols 1208-306.

way possible, it was perceived as especially important that the British should continue to demonstrate their commitment to these ideals. An article in the *Manchester Guardian* comparing the decisions of the summer of 1940 with the more “liberal” policy previously implemented towards refugees, was typical in its comparative nature, asserting that “since Hitler began his persecutions and his suppression of human rights, we have offered, under many safeguards and after much jealous inquiry, asylum to men and women fugitives from Nazidom.”<sup>951</sup> The fact that internment policy could be regarded as a threat to this contrasting self-image made it particularly contentious. Thus, the significance of the comparison made in the Commons by Rhys Davies MP on 22<sup>nd</sup> August:

It is strange how man's mentality works. We remember the horror that sprang up in this country when Hitler put Jews, Socialists and Communists into concentration camps. We were horrified at that, but somehow or other we almost took it for granted when we did the same thing to the same people.<sup>952</sup>

### **The continuation of hostility**

While the growing opposition to internment appears to have had a real impact on the softening of the government’s policy, it is also important to note that the summer of 1940 did not mark the end of anti-alien feeling, nor was criticism of internment universal. For example, in July, Home Intelligence reported:

The internment of aliens is still causing dismay in certain circles, and rumours circulate that all aliens will be evacuated, without notice, to the Dominions. There is distress and bitterness among the friends and relatives of interned aliens. At the same time it should be understood that internment of aliens has popular support.<sup>953</sup>

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<sup>951</sup> ‘Enemy Aliens’, *Manchester Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1940, p.6.

<sup>952</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1940, vol. 364, col. 1529.

<sup>953</sup> Home Intelligence, ‘No. 51. Daily Report on Morale’, Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> July 1940.

Subsequent reports indicated that a softening of attitudes towards aliens was indeed taking place during this period, particularly in cases where arrests of enemy aliens had an impact on local communities.<sup>954</sup> However, as Paul Addison has noted, the sources for Home Intelligence reports tended to be panels of local citizens consisting of affluent and influential individuals who had roles of responsibility in their communities.<sup>955</sup> Since Home Intelligence itself reported that sympathy for enemy aliens tended to be found in “intellectual and professional circles”, presumably those from which the panels were convened, the possibility that Home Intelligence data may have been influenced by the opinions of these individuals must be considered.<sup>956</sup> Hostility towards enemy aliens continued to be recorded from July onwards, but on a far more muted scale than earlier in the year, and now tended to be expressed in terms of resentment of perceived inequalities existing between internees and ordinary British civilians. For example, the inadequacy of soldiers’ allowances were highlighted through comparisons with the money spent on the maintenance of internees, and the safety of aliens interned on the Isle of Man was compared with the danger endured by civilians on the British mainland.<sup>957</sup> A Mass-Observation survey of 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July suggested that public opinion was certainly not as hostile as it had been in April, when 90% of people surveyed had agreed that all enemy aliens should be interned. By this point, only 55% of people still agreed with general internment.<sup>958</sup> Although this figure appears to demonstrate a considerable

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<sup>954</sup> See examples in Home Intelligence reports for Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> July, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> July, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> July and Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> Aug 1940.

<sup>955</sup> Paul Addison, ‘Introduction’, *The British People and World War II: Home Intelligence Reports on Opinion and Morale, 1940-1944*, (Brighton: John Spiers, 1979), p.3.

<sup>956</sup> Home Intelligence Report No. 43, ‘Daily Report on Morale’, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July 1940.

<sup>957</sup> Home Intelligence Report No. 13, ‘Public Opinion on the Present Crisis’, Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May 1940; Home Intelligence Report No.66, Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1940.

<sup>958</sup> M-O File Report 332, ‘Public Opinion & the Refugees’, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1940.

softening of public opinion, it also indicates that a large proportion of the population continued to support the internment policy.

Although from July 1940 it appears to have become less acceptable to express hostility towards refugees, negative feeling towards aliens was still evident. Resentment about the comparative well-being of internees, for example, was still being expressed as late as February 1941, when Conservative MP, Edward Keeling, complained in the House of Commons that internees were receiving more generous rations than the majority of the British public and accused the Government of “absurd favouritism” towards internees.<sup>959</sup> Continuing uneasiness towards enemy aliens was also indicated in the employment sphere. A report on the work of Employment Exchanges in March 1941 suggested that efforts to find work for foreign applicants was hindered by anti-alien prejudice in the workplace.<sup>960</sup> The continuing undercurrent of distrust towards enemy aliens is also indicated by the fact that, although the government gave increased attention to camp conditions from July 1940, and implemented guidelines and apparatus for the release of certain categories of internees, this did not constitute a reversal of the original policy. Kushner has suggested that the reason that the modification of internment policy took place within such a “restrictive framework” was that this approach allowed the government to pacify the more hostile elements of public opinion which continued to exist.<sup>961</sup> All these examples give credence to Mass-Observation’s belief that prejudice against foreigners was an underlying element of British wartime society. Once the crisis of

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<sup>959</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1941, vol. 369, col. 515.

<sup>960</sup> ‘Summary of Miss Frankenstein Report on London Employment Exchanges dealing with Aliens’, October 1941: Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17 (55).

<sup>961</sup> Kushner, ‘Persistence of prejudice’, p.148.

May 1940 had passed, more positive attitudes towards aliens were able to resurface. However, the development of this more pro-alien atmosphere does not mean that xenophobic attitudes were completely suppressed. Indeed, the rapid shifting in attitudes during this period indicates just how close to the surface they remained.

### **The release process**

While gender did not deeply permeate public discussions regarding the release of internees, its significance at an administrative level can still be discerned. It seems likely that the national origins of the British-born women who had been interned meant that they tended to be released from internment earlier than others: Bill-Jentsch recalled that the British-born woman she encountered was “the first to be released”, while at least one case was personally considered by Sir John Anderson and granted release by the middle of August.<sup>962</sup> Although this procedure did not become an official part of the release procedure, these examples indicate that, in practice, British birth ensured more sympathetic treatment for interned women. For foreign-born female internees, however, freedom could be more difficult to secure, and, during the early months of the general internment episode, a clear gender divide developed relating to the system of release. By 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940, around a third of German and Austrian men had been released in comparison with only 15 per cent of German and Austrian women.<sup>963</sup> As has been seen, release from internment was determined by the criteria set out in the White Paper of the end of July, and was initially restricted to internees who had originally been placed by a tribunal in

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<sup>962</sup> Bill-Jentsch, ‘Internment of Women on the Isle of Man’. Hansard, HC Deb, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1940, vol. 364, cols 798-9W.

<sup>963</sup> Calculated from data in: Herbert Morrison, ‘War Cabinet. Internment of aliens of enemy nationality’, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940: National Archives, Kew, CAB 67/8/109. Due to the far higher number of male internees, the actual numbers of releases of men were higher.

Category C. Since all the interned women had belonged to Category B, this meant that they were excluded from applying for release, and three months after the internment of women had begun, only 58 German and Austrian women had been freed.<sup>964</sup>

At the end of August, a revised edition of the White Paper was issued. The publication introduced a new category of release, which covered any individual who had shown “by his writing or speeches or political or official activities he had consistently...taken a public and prominent part in opposition to the Nazi system” and was “actively friendly towards the Allied cause.”<sup>965</sup> The new White Paper was especially significant for female internees, however, because it included a clause which allowed Category B inmates to have their cases reviewed by an Advisory Committee. If, as a result, they were reclassified as Category C, they could apply for release under one of the nineteen categories.<sup>966</sup> While women’s general exclusion from the release process during the summer had in itself been shaped by considerations of security, rather than gender, the inclusion of women within the scope of the White Paper at the end of August ironically brought gender differences into a much sharper focus. This was particularly evident in the Home Office’s adherence to a procedure whereby, when a married man was released from internment, his interned wife’s case was also automatically considered. This was

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<sup>964</sup> Hansard, HL Deb, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1940, vol. 117, col. 389.

<sup>965</sup> ‘Civilian Internees of Enemy Nationality: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release from Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release’, August 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6223), Vol. X.

<sup>966</sup> ‘Civilian Internees of Enemy Nationality: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release from Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release’, August 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6223), Vol. X. The White Paper allowed the same option for Italian men, none of whom had been before a tribunal prior to internment due to Italy’s late entry into the war.

seen to be particularly important in the cases of men who were released on health grounds, in order that their wives could be released in order to care for them.<sup>967</sup> Just as the experiences of British-born wives of enemy alien were dictated by perceptions of their husbands' behaviour, so could those of interned enemy alien women. A woman whose interned husband had not been granted release would be far less likely to have her case considered early by a tribunal.

Female internees hoping for release faced two other major problems. Firstly, they had to wait to have their cases heard by an Advisory Committee. This could take several months: one internee later recalled that cases were heard in alphabetical order, with the system inexplicably reversed half way through, resulting in long waits for certain individuals.<sup>968</sup> With this process, however, the delays were essentially dictated by category rather than gender, since all Category B internees of either sex, as well as all Italian internees, were required to appear before an advisory committee for consideration of their cases. The second part of the release process, applying for release under a specific category, put women at a particular disadvantage. The categories for release (extended to twenty-two in October 1940) provided far less scope for women than for men. While most of the categories could technically be applied to both male and female internees, this did not occur in practice, and Eleanor Rathbone noted that the fact that so "few of the release categories cover many

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<sup>967</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1940, vol. 365, col. 157. Since all interned women belonged to Category A or B the release itself was not automatic, but would be automatically considered.

<sup>968</sup> Margot Hodge, nee Pogorzelski, 'Memories and Personal Experiences of my Internment on the Isle of Man in 1940' (1999), pp.5-6: Manx National Library, Isle of Man, MS 10119.



women” was a considerable problem.<sup>969</sup> Categories of exemption included doctors and dentists, former members of the Armed Forces, and people who had been employed prior to their employment in “key positions in industries engaged in work of national importance”.<sup>970</sup> While women were not excluded from any of these categories, they were less likely to fall into them than men. Although there were, among the internees, a considerable number of highly intelligent and highly qualified German and Austrian women, the Government’s restrictions on immigration meant that many of them had been directed into domestic service roles on their arrival in Britain.<sup>971</sup> As a result, women were less likely to have been considered as being employed in a role of national importance prior to their internment.<sup>972</sup> As one female internee argued after the first revision of the White Paper, this was a document which appeared to have been designed with male internees in mind.<sup>973</sup>

The most serious difference in terms of the opportunities for release came in the form of Category 12 of the White Paper, which allowed internees to be released if they successfully applied to join the Pioneer Corps.<sup>974</sup> By January 1941, 1,724 men had been released under Category 12, a figure exceeded only by the number of people

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<sup>969</sup> Draft letter to internees, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1940: Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17 (25).

<sup>970</sup> ‘Civilian Internees of Enemy Nationality: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release from Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release’, August 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6233), Vol. X.

<sup>971</sup> Kushner, ‘Asylum or Servitude’, p.20.

<sup>972</sup> 360 men had been released under this category by January 1941, compared with 3 women: Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1941, vol. 368, col.180.

<sup>973</sup> Elen Behrman, Port Erin, to Eleanor Rathbone, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1940: Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17 (20).

<sup>974</sup> ‘German and Austrian civilian internees: Categories of persons eligible for release from internment and procedure to be followed in applying for release’, July 1940. *20th Century House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 1939-1940 session (Cmd. 6217), X (pp.2-4).

released on the grounds of ill health or infirmity.<sup>975</sup> However, women were not permitted to join the Pioneer Corps and so were ineligible to apply for release under this category. The inequality of this section of the White Paper was one which caused a great deal of resentment among female internees, and Rathbone recorded that she had received numerous written appeals on the subject; so many, in fact, that she was compelled to produce a generic letter of reply rather than responding to individual cases.<sup>976</sup> These appeals tended to be based not only on the women's desire for release and frustration at their continued internment, but more emphatically on a sense of injustice that men were given a chance to assist the war effort when they themselves were not. Lieselotte Katz, who was interned at Port Erin, complained bitterly about this gender divide, arguing: "we are treated worse than our menfolk, who get released, as soon as they join up."<sup>977</sup> Of the four letters from female internees which survive in the Rathbone papers, each correspondent expressed a desire to help with the British war effort, while two of them specifically suggested the establishment of a female version of the Pioneer Corps. Elen Behrman, another Port Erin internee, was typical in her call for female internees to be allowed to demonstrate their commitment to the Allied cause, arguing that she and other

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<sup>975</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1941, vol. 368, col.180. This number far exceeded the third highest category of 726 released under Category 18, 'Special Cases of Extreme Hardship'. 4,473 people were released under Category 3, the vast majority being male.

<sup>976</sup> Eleanor Rathbone to Graham White, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1940, XIV. 2. 17 (23) I; Elen Behrman, Port Erin, to Rathbone, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1940. Handwritten note at top: 'One of many', XIV.2.17 (20); Draft letter to internees, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1940, XIV.2.17 (25); Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool.

<sup>977</sup> Lieselotte Katz, Port Erin, IOM to Rathbone, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1941: Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17 (37).

internees “would greatly prefer to share the hardships under which England is suffering just now than to lead an idle life as so-called enemy aliens.”<sup>978</sup>

The desire of these women to share in the experiences of wartime Britain is significant when considered in the context of discourses on national identity and civic duty which became dominant during the Second World War. Rose has argued that the conflict saw the development of a concept of ‘Britishness’ which was underpinned by individuals’ “willingness to make sacrifices and put community needs ahead of personal ones”.<sup>979</sup> During the First World War, it has been noted that the internment experience, characterized as it was by vilification and rejection of enemy aliens from the national community, tended to rekindle internees’ sense of loyalty to their country of origin.<sup>980</sup> In contrast, the letters from female internees in the Rathbone collection indicate a desire to embrace discourses of Britishness and prove their compatibility with the British national community. Ugolini and Schaffer have shown that accounts written in the years after the war by former German and Austrian internees have been largely positive and conciliatory, due, they argue, to the desire of these individuals to cement their place in the post-war British community.<sup>981</sup> The letters addressed by internees to Rathbone indicate that such responses were already being articulated by some individuals even while their internment experience was ongoing. The letters criticised the system of release rather than attacking the internment policy itself, and were couched in terms which stress a willingness to earn

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<sup>978</sup> Behrman to Rathbone, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1940: Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17. The other letters referred to are: Handwritten letter from Lizi Bournvill, Bradda Glen, Port Erin, IOM, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1940, XIV.2.17 (30); Jorysz to Rathbone, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1940, XIV.2.17 (21): Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool.

<sup>979</sup> Rose, *Which People's War*, p.71.

<sup>980</sup> Gullace, ‘Fictive Communities’, pp.360-361.

<sup>981</sup> Ugolini and Schaffer, ‘Victims or Enemies?’, pp.213-214.

a place within the national community. It is perhaps also significant to recall that earlier hostility towards enemy aliens had often involved the accusation that internees were wiling away the war in the holiday atmosphere of the Isle of Man, while the real war work, as well as the hardships of the conflict, were being experienced by others.<sup>982</sup> That many female internees responded to their marginalisation by embracing, rather than rejecting, the 'British' ideal was perhaps an inevitable result of the ideological underpinnings of the Second World War itself, but is also reflective of the way in which, as foreign women, they had to work much harder than foreign men to prove their loyalty and usefulness to the war effort.

While the British authorities were slower to consider the employment potential of interned women than men, this was an issue which was consistently pushed by Rathbone, and in mid-October she noted with satisfaction that the International Labour Branch of the Ministry of Labour and National Service had proposed the compilation of an employment census among both men and women interned on the Isle of Man with a view to facilitating their release.<sup>983</sup> However, the utilisation of the labour of women internees remained a difficult cause to promote due to the continuing high levels of female unemployment in the country generally. Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield have shown that while male unemployment fell between 1939 and 1940, the rapid retraction of the female-dominated consumer industries on the outbreak of war meant that unemployment among women increased during that

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<sup>982</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1940, vol. 361, col. 1005; *Daily Mail* 14<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.5; 'Alien Women to Cost Us 21s. a Week', *Daily Mail*, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1940, p.5.

<sup>983</sup> Council on Aliens, 'Notes on the Employment of Alien Women', 17<sup>th</sup> October 1940: Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17 (28).

period.<sup>984</sup> This situation inevitably impacted on the employment prospects of female internees. Rathbone noted that, during 1940, “the problem of utilising wasted alien woman power....[had] been...even more difficult than the corresponding problem of alien man power, because of the large amount of unemployment – or under-employment – among British women.”<sup>985</sup> It was not until the end of that year that general unemployment figures were finally announced to be falling, and Rathbone regarded this as a turning point in her campaign for the employment of female internees.<sup>986</sup> As the need for war workers became more pressing, the Ministry of Labour began to develop its policy towards the enlistment of female labour. During 1940, the focus of employment policy had been on enlarging the female workforce on a voluntary basis, but March 1941 saw the beginnings of a move towards compulsion, with the introduction of registration of women aged between 19 and 40 at Employment Exchanges, in order to facilitate their redirection into useful war work.<sup>987</sup> At the same time, the drive for the employment of female internees was stepped up. By the beginning of March, representatives from the Ministries of Labour, Agriculture and Aircraft Production had visited the Isle of Man to undertake a “survey of skills” of all internees, plans were in place to open Labour Bureaux on the Island to assist in finding posts for internees, and interned women were finally informed that that they were able to apply to join the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS).<sup>988</sup> The

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<sup>984</sup> Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, (London: Pandora, 1987), pp.155-156.

<sup>985</sup> 'ALIEN WOMAN POWER', International Women's Service Groups Meeting, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1941: Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17 (36).

<sup>986</sup> 'ALIEN WOMAN POWER', International Women's Service Groups Meeting, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1941: Eleanor Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool, XIV.2.17 (36).

<sup>987</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict*, (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p.34.

<sup>988</sup> Minutes of the Joint Committee on Welfare of Refugees, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1941: London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/2793/03/03/06 193/12.

increasing focus on the employment of female aliens during this period therefore reflected the wider developments in attitudes towards women's wartime roles.

The initial failure to provide women with a form of national service which would facilitate their release from internment appears to be less of a deliberate omission by the Government than a complete oversight. Peake's reaction in November 1940 to the suggestion that a scheme would be useful to grant women release on similar lines to men, indicates that this was an idea which had not previously been considered; the Under-Secretary seemed to accept this as a new suggestion and responded by promising the MP in question that he would pass the idea on to the relevant government departments.<sup>989</sup> By this point, the opportunity for male internees to apply to the Pioneer Corps had been available for about three months, and although it sometimes drew negative comment (Anderson implied, for example, that applications might be more about evading internment than demonstrating loyalty<sup>990</sup>), the scheme appears to have received general support. Anderson's successor, Herbert Morrison, stated that, for a male alien, enlistment in the Pioneer Corps was "the best way of demonstrating his loyalty to [the Allied] cause."<sup>991</sup> The emphasis on the demonstration of loyalty to the nation through military service indicates the continual, automatic association of men, rather than women, with the military sphere; it also suggests that the circumstances of war heightened the idea that contribution to the nation was primarily a male prerogative. It was not until general attitudes towards the role of women in the war effort began to shift during 1941 that the capacity of alien women to serve the nation started to be acknowledged.

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<sup>989</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1940, vol. 365, cols 1191-1193.

<sup>990</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1940, vol. 364, col. 1554.

<sup>991</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1941, vol. 374, col. 1926W.

## **Conclusion**

Gender assumptions played a highly significant role in driving decisions on internment during the Second World War, and the contrasting approaches to the issue of the female enemy alien which emerged in the public and official spheres shaped the way in which the policy developed. The emergence of a specific, racialized image of the enemy in popular culture was a factor which had been vital in determining policy towards enemy civilians during both the First World War and the South African War. During the Second World War, this process underwent a change, and the development of a wider understanding of the 'enemy within', based on the concept of the fifth columnist, allowed overlapping themes of gender, class, race and political ideology to influence a much more fluid image of the enemy than had emerged during the earlier conflicts. As a result, pre-existing undercurrents of antisemitism and xenophobia were able to surface during this period, with both these forms of hostility finding a place in emerging discourses of prejudice towards enemy aliens. A notable element of the fifth column scare, however, was its focus on foreign women as a point of threat to national security. While by no means the only way that the fifth columnist was imagined, the female domestic worker as undercover Nazi agent appears to have drawn together the main features of the anti-alien atmosphere of early 1940. The female domestic epitomized the potential threat of fifth columnists at the very heart of British society, with the idea given credence by a popular preoccupation with stories of female espionage and the connection between ideas of female foreignness, disloyalty, and sexual manipulation. In addition, the status of these women could tap into established anxieties about the servant 'class'. All these themes reinforced the sense of the unreliability of the female enemy alien, and

contributed to an atmosphere in which the internment of women could be received with enthusiasm.

Hostility towards female enemy aliens in popular discourses appears to have had a significant impact on official decisions to include women in its internment policy, a move which contrasted dramatically with the experience of the First World War. The fact that female internment took place despite extreme reservations from many Home Office officials indicates the continuing power of public opinion on the development of policies towards aliens. However, the limits placed on the internment of women, and the difference in the administration of male and female camps, clearly indicate that more traditional understandings of gender relations on the part of government officials also had a profound impact on the way the policy developed. The initial reluctance to introduce female internment, and the special treatment accorded to women in contrast with men, demonstrate a continuation in official circles of attitudes which can be traced back to the South African War, when the internment of women by the 'male' state had been seen as highly questionable. In addition, the administration of the camps, with far greater freedom accorded to women, suggests that traditional assumptions about the relative threat posed by men and women, and their contrasting relationship with the military sphere, continued to be significant. By interning only Category B women, the Home Office was able to pacify that section of public opinion which was increasingly hostile towards enemy aliens, but by ensuring that the majority of women remained immune from internment, it reconciled the belief of many of its officials that the internment of women was ethically inadvisable. However, while government officials may have been preoccupied with concerns



about the morality of female internment, this was not something which emerged during the debates on internment during July and August 1940. Although critics of internment utilised language based on ideas of British prestige, some of which shared striking similarities with that used in 1900-1901, the 1940 debates were characterised by an absence of gendered dialogue. The lack of focus on women's internment is further indication of the disparity between official and public opinion on the issue, and may indicate that gendered concepts of male duties of protection towards women within popular discourses were beginning to fade.

Although the government's traditional attitude towards gender relations allowed the majority of female enemy aliens to avoid internment, the conservative nature of official gender ideologies also had a negative impact on a number of women. The most striking example of this was the government's refusal to reconsider the outdated laws which enforced foreign nationality on British-born women married to aliens. While, as the war progressed, the Government acknowledged the British origins of these women by relaxing their restrictions to a certain extent, the insistence that restrictions should be based on an assessment of the husband's reliability stemmed from traditional ideas about the subordinate status of women within a marriage. The introduction of naturalisation opportunities for the British-born wives of enemy aliens detracted from the more negative elements of nationality policy and ensured that the internment of such women, as well as the judgement of wives on their husbands' merits, remained largely overlooked. This theme indicates that, while women could be perceived as having a basic connection to the nation, even after marriage to an alien, it was the loyalties and behaviour of men which were seen as

most significant in defining a family's relationship to the national community. The idea that men could be identified more closely than women with a sense of nationhood was also reinforced by the system of releases for internment introduced from the end of July 1940. The complete failure to provide women with an opportunity to prove their loyalty to nation in the first three months of the scheme demonstrates the continuing sense at this stage of the war that men, principally through their ability to defend the country, had more capacity to demonstrate national loyalty. The eventual expansion of the release categories to provide female internees with a chance to prove their commitment to the British cause paralleled a wider trend towards an acceptance of women's war service.

As Kushner has argued, gender, as a concept, was highly significant in shaping the experiences of enemy aliens during the Second World War. In their adherence to traditional gender assumptions, British government officials seem to have been at odds with the British public, a theme which has parallels with the First World War experience. The clash between a conservative official mindset and a more volatile popular atmosphere can explain why some aspects of the internment policy developed in a way which, on the surface, appeared to be haphazard. Although the ideological nature of the Second World War meant that popular imaginings of the enemy, and the impact of these ideas on policy, developed in a less coherent way than in the previous two conflicts, internment policy was once again strongly underpinned by discourses of nationality, race, class and, most significantly, gender.

## CONCLUSION

By addressing the three case studies of the South African War, the First World War, and the Second World War, this thesis has aimed to enhance understandings of the development of internment policy during the first half of the twentieth century, and in particular the place of the South African 'concentration camps' within the broader history of internment. While not dismissing the unique characteristics of South African internment, particularly in terms of its colonial context, the thesis has shown that in a number of ways the experience played a formative role in the development of later wartime internment policies. The most significant legacy of the South African experience stemmed from the debates and publicity it provoked about the ethics of civilian internment. The dominant discourses which emerged from these debates went a long way towards confirming what was, and was not, considered acceptable practice in terms of the treatment of civilians in war. Reactions to the episode, and the concern expressed by government supporters and pro-Boers alike for the welfare of the female internees, confirmed that the internment of women was highly problematic. The strong criticism expressed in Britain at the introduction of such a policy was vital in shaping the way that the British authorities approached later internment episodes. The predominantly 'male' experience of internment during the First and Second World Wars should not therefore be regarded as a break from the South African policy, but as a consequence of the outcry which developed during 1901 against the internment of women and children.

Miriam Kochan has suggested that Second World War internment was “characterized throughout by irrationality”<sup>992</sup>, and indeed, all three internment episodes examined here could be said to have involved apparently illogical elements. However, the contradictions of internment policy are less perplexing when the policy is considered in light of Tammy Proctor’s discussion of the First World War, where she has identified a tension between an increased blurring of military and civilian experiences and the simultaneous development of discourses stressing the ideal of separation between the combatant and non-combatant spheres. In all three conflicts, decisions on internment were based, to some extent, on perceptions of the military threat posed by the civilians, but the significance of internment in signifying an overlap between civilian and military cultures was particularly evident during the South African War. Surrenders and re-enlistment by Boer troops, examples of men working as farmers by day and guerrillas by night, and the use by Boer guerrillas of local communities for support and supplies, meant that the distinction between combatants and non-combatants became increasingly indistinct. During the First and Second World Wars, the ‘totality’ of the conflicts meant that the status of the civilian also came into question. The very concept of ‘total war’ implied the erosion of barriers between military and civilian spheres; civilians fuelled the war effort with their economic and ideological support and in turn became military targets themselves. Civilian internment appeared justifiable since it was introduced within a context of discourses which pitted entire populations against each other, rather than simply their military representatives. The close involvement of civilians in each of the three

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<sup>992</sup> Kochan, ‘Women’s Experience’, p.147.

conflicts therefore allowed their targeting by the essentially military policy of internment to be perceived as a legitimate act.

While the introduction of internment during each of the conflicts examined here was therefore closely related to the increasingly significant role of the civilian in war, the way the policy developed was shaped by rhetoric which extolled the ideal of separate military and civilian spheres. As this thesis has shown, and as a number of historians have noted, this 'separate spheres' rhetoric was highly gendered and hinged on distinctions between the 'masculine' military front and 'feminine' domestic front, however inaccurate these images might have been in reality. The significance of such ideas became very obvious during the South African War in the debates which emerged on the concentration camp policy. Tentative efforts by British officials to argue for the necessity of internment based on the military capacity of Boer women were quickly abandoned as the British authorities realised the depth of public feeling against female internment. Instead, officials adopted justifications for the policy couched in language of male chivalry and protection, and underpinned by accusations of the failure of Boer women to adhere to traditional female roles. The idea that female internment was not palatable to the British public was one which influenced the Government's wartime policy-making for the next forty-five years, even when, as during the First World War, large sections of public opinion expressed support for such a policy. The highly critical reception of internment and the mistreatment of civilians during the South African War encouraged the British authorities to commit to the idea of an ideological divide between civilian and military spheres.

Despite propaganda during both world wars urging women in Britain to 'do their bit' for the war effort, and the fact that in many practical ways women/civilians became very closely involved in war, rhetorically men and women were depicted respectively as protectors and the beneficiaries of that protection. While First and Second World War internment, as military-driven policies against civilians, seemingly undermined the "civilian/military dichotomy"<sup>993</sup>, the gendered nature of internment actually reinforced wartime images of male (military) aggression and female (civilian) vulnerability. Internment removed the male enemy threat from the 'feminine' home front and, as a military policy implemented against large numbers of civilian men, emphasized the extent to which males were largely excluded from conceptions of the civilian sphere. While such discourses generally protected the majority of women from internment, their strength is also demonstrated in the experience of female internees during the Second World War, who often found it more difficult to prove their commitment to the war effort than men and thus secure their release. While their sex initially offered some protection from the threat of internment, once interned, the significance of military service to rhetoric on national loyalty made it difficult for women to demonstrate their commitment to the nation.

The introduction of predominantly male internment policies reinforced the idea that, in general, women did not pose a serious physical threat in the same way as men. This was particularly apparent in Home Office responses to internment proposals during the First World War, and was implicit in the government's decision, in 1940, not to intern any Italian or Category C women despite the internment of men in both these

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<sup>993</sup> Proctor, *Civilians*, p.7

categories. This decision was particularly interesting since it was made against the background of a hysterical press campaign against foreign female domestics, which in itself appears to have contributed to a climate of fear in which internment became justifiable. However, perhaps more significant was the development of internment in the context of a deeply-held belief, strengthened by the debates provoked by the South African 'concentration camps', that the imprisonment of women was unethical. During both world wars the British governments' military campaigns were reinforced by rhetoric which depicted the British cause as righteous and just, in contrast with the brutality and immorality of the opposing forces. During the First World War, in particular, propaganda campaigns demonized the enemy and emphasized the German forces' lack of respect for women and children and the sanctity of the home. The emphasis on these areas implicitly reinforced their significance in British culture, meaning that officials had to tread carefully in their own treatment of women and children. The introduction of extensive female internment during either the First or the Second World Wars may have had the potential to undermine a positive British national image and to provide the 'enemy' with a powerful propaganda tool of its own.

Dominant understandings of 'Britishness' not only contributed to a gendering of the internment experience but were particularly significant in shaping opposition to the policies. Indeed, articulations of 'Britishness' were so central to negative reactions to internment that insights can be gauged from these case studies into how this concept changed over time. The use of arguments against internment based on the incompatibility of the policy with British traditions was particularly apparent during the South African War and the Second World War. A comparison of the development of

opposition in these two cases reveals highly similar language being utilised by critics. Lloyd George's assertion, in 1901, for example, that the death rates in the South African concentration camps undermined the "credit and good name of this country", was echoed in Eleanor Rathbone's campaign against internment in 1940, which she described as "a question which affects our prestige as a nation".<sup>994</sup> However, the nature of the concept of 'Britishness' utilised in these arguments did differ between the two conflicts, and by 1940 had come to be underpinned principally by ideals of justice rather than the chivalrous masculinity which dominated the notion during the South African War. The experience of the First World War, when Germanophobic sentiment was so powerful that such anti-internment discourses were almost totally suppressed, demonstrates that the utilisation of the concept of 'Britishness' was by no means consistent. However, such inconsistencies should not detract from the fact that beliefs in British traditions had, and continue to have, the potential to act as a restraint on internment, just as Kushner and Knox have shown that such concepts could sometimes limit wider anti-immigration discourses during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>995</sup> Lord Belmarsh's comments in 2004, with which this thesis opened, indicate that such discourses continue to play a significant part in anti-detention discourses during the twenty-first century.

While positive constructions of British national identity could be significant in limiting the scope of internment, the policy was also shaped by more restrictive examples of national rhetoric. In each of the three internment episodes examined here, discourses developed which defined internees as 'Others', sited firmly outside the

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<sup>994</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901, vol. 95, col. 589; Hansard, HC Deb, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1220.

<sup>995</sup> Kushner and Knox, *Refugees*, p.398.



British nation. During the First and Second World Wars in particular, an emphasis in popular discourses and official propaganda on national cohesion in the face of a common enemy resulted in (and was reinforced by) the exclusion of certain groups from the national community. The 'enemy alien', automatically defined by his or her nationality as 'un-British', was particularly vulnerable to such exclusion, and the introduction of internment gave physical reinforcement to such ideas. In addition, while internment was ostensibly driven by nationality, during each conflict racialized imagery affirmed the 'Otherness' of internees and enemy nationals. During the South African War, the image of the unwomanly and innately unmaternal Boer woman drew on wider stereotypes relating to the backwardness of the Boers and allowed internment to be construed in a positive and benevolent light. As well as this, language which implicitly associated Boers with non-white colonial subjects and the 'residuum' of Britain's working-class population, both groups which were widely regarded as belonging to the lowest rungs of the 'racial' order, was articulated in order to play down the significance of the policy. The 'black' African camps established alongside the 'white' camps attracted little or no concern from British observers, and observations on the degeneracy of the Boer 'race' may have been designed to reflect the Boer camps as similarly unimportant.

The extensive Germanophobia of the First World War, which was central to the development of internment policy during that conflict, demonstrates the extremes to which exclusionary, anti-alien rhetoric can develop in the context of 'total war'. The extent to which concepts of 'race' came to be conflated with those of 'national identity' is indicative of both the broader cultural themes of the period and the impact

of a conflict widely imagined in terms of national survival. Although some form of racialization of the 'enemy' was evident in each of the conflicts examined here, the First World War represented the most excessive example. While such racialization took its most obvious form in wartime atrocity propaganda, it was also evident in the British government's policies of segregation and exclusion. In fact, the significance of 'race' in perceptions of both the enemy and the British nation itself led the segregation of enemy aliens to take on eugenic undertones. The physical removal of enemy aliens from the country through repatriation, and the strong resistance to both the entry of German-born families of British men and the exit of British-born children, demonstrates the increasing significance placed on the post-war health of the British 'race'. In contrast, by the Second World War, while 'race' continued to be a factor in discussions of internment, overt expression of racial thinking was far less tolerable. Between the two world wars a notable shift occurred from an atmosphere in which racial exclusion was an acceptable policy to one in which discussions of enemy internment were generally expressed in carefully 'race'-free language. This is likely to have been associated with contemporary awareness of Nazi racial policies as well as a decline in the validity of 'race' as a concept. However, the popular xenophobia expressed during 1940, as well as the evidence of anti-semitism in discussions on internment, indicates that ideas regarding 'race' and 'otherness' were never far from the surface.

This thesis opened with reference to the Belmarsh case of 2004, and Lord Hoffman's depiction of detention without trial as an unusual and essentially 'un-British' event. This thesis has shown that internment or detention without trial has been a regular

British measure during times of national conflict, which has frequently attracted strong levels of popular support. Indeed, the fact that successive governments during the early twentieth century outlined internment plans as part of their preparations for potential wars indicates that some measure of internment has been regarded as standard practice during times of international conflict. It is therefore not surprising that detention without trial has again been introduced in the context of what has been widely labelled the 'War on Terror', an episode which, again, has been shaped by fears of an 'enemy within'. As this thesis has shown, internment is particularly likely to be regarded as acceptable at times of great national pressure, when the lives of British nationals are perceived as being at risk. Uneasiness regarding the ethics of internment and its compatibility with 'British' values, which has tended to emerge once immediate crises have subsided, explains why the policy has little place in popular memory. However the frequent rehabilitation of the policy in the face of fresh conflict, with clear references to earlier episodes, demonstrates that internment has retained a significant place in 'official' approaches to international conflict.

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