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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, HUMANITARIAN RHETORICS, AND PUBLIC MEMORIES OF COLONIAL CAMP CULTURES



Marouf Hasian, Jr.



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and Public Memories of Colonial Camp Cultures

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Restorative Justice, Humanitarian Rhetorics, and Public Memories of Colonial Camp Cultures

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1

The Biopolitical Usage of Colonial Camp Systems between 1896 and 1908 and the Quest for Restorative Justice

[T]he camp is the most absolute biopolitical space that has ever been realized—a space in which power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without mediation.¹

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*

In 2004, a minister from Germany visited Namibia and personally apologized for the colonial-era violence that killed at least 60,000 Herero people who survived the Battle of Waterberg and who were then rounded up and placed in German prisoner of war camps. Seven years later, German medical institutions repatriated Herero and Nama skulls that had been transported from Africa to Germany for anthropological studies in race science. All this happened because today's Namibia have to deal with some of the imperial and colonial legacies that were bequeathed by those who once lived in a place called German South-West Africa (GSWA).

As Reinhart Kössler explains, the “postcolonial relationships and related intercultural communication” between Namibia and Germany have been marked by “entangled” histories and politics wherein the “negotiation of the past” has meant that diverse groups have advanced “competing claims” regarding the possession of “some truth” regarding what happened in German South-West Africa.² Some of these exchanges have gotten so heated that conflicting memories of colonial violence have led to the changing of German-named streets and towns in Namibia

to help wipe “colonialism off the map.”³ In August of 2013 Patricia Glyn interviewed many of the Khomani bushmen in the Kalahari region and asked them about their remembrances of forgotten camp cultures, and one of them had this to say about the effects of some of these geopolitical changes:

I don't think a couple of name changes goes far enough, bearing in mind not one of the German concentration camps has so much as a sign and you can still go out in a buggy and find yourself driving over the bones of those who died. There is absolutely no evidence of what really happened there. I don't think the Namibian government is doing one-eighth of what it should to honour the dead.⁴

For some, the thanatopolitical⁵ presence of those old bones of contention from forgotten camps were reminders that too many were willing for forget or forgive.

Glyn's interviewees need not worry, because a growing number of experts and lay persons have expressed an interest in reviving memories of what happened in the German concentration camps in GSWA during the early 1900s. We live in an era where many national and international communities write and argue about the need for restorative justice, acknowledgment of forgotten colonial misdeeds, apologies for colonial camp abuses, and reparations.⁶ During the early 1990s, stories about colonial violence in German South-West Africa were resurrected in new calls for colonial redress, and increased public pressure is now being brought to bear as 21st-century governments hear complaints about amnesiac practices. Academic libraries that already had rows of books on various facets of the World War II Holocaust are now having to find room for the public cataloguing of books that now cover the horrors of “colonial genocides.”

The Herero of Namibia are just one among the ethnic groups that refuse to forget about what happened in some of the German concentration camps that were organized in GSWA between 1904 and 1908. Since at least 2001, Herero communities have tried to use American courts and other venues to obtain legal redress for the descendants of those who died or suffered in German colonial camps.⁷ These efforts may be a harbinger of things to come as other colonial powers are invited to master their own entangled pasts.

For many observers who reflect on the remembrances and amnesias that swirl around what is now called the forgotten Herero “holocaust,”⁸ what is happening in Namibia is symptomatic of a growing, transglobal phenomenon, where world audiences join movements that advocate

the delivery of equitable compensation to former colonies for the abuses that their populations suffered during American, Belgian, British, French, Dutch, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, or Spanish colonial periods. Many cosmopolitan citizens who grew up reading textbooks about their own “model” colonies now have to watch as journalists and students today write about recovered “lost” colonial archives, famines,⁹ forgotten massacres, imperial labor abuses, or problematic colonial camp systems. Law firms that specialize in seeking civil redress for aggrieved plaintiffs are hiring historians and others who specialize in “commonwealth,” colonial or imperial research so that they can put together the briefs that make out a *prima facie* case against some of these former colonial powers. As I will argue throughout this book, documenting the horrors of colonial camps is often considered to be one of the focal points for these types of investigations.

This, obviously, is not the first time that motivated human beings have spent time gathering evidence so that they could accuse some colonizers of having been involved in reprehensive behavior. A British author of the famous *Blue Book* had this to say after he stitched together a text that was filled with photographs, official administrative records, and testimonials of what purportedly happened in GSWA between 1904 and 1908:

After [General Lothar] von Trotha had left and surrenders were once more possible, the Germans decided to use their prisoners (men and women) as labourers on the harbor works at Lüderitzbucht and Swakopmund, and also on railway construction. . . . Probably 60 percent. [sic] of the natives who surrendered after von Trotha left perished this way. True indeed the cold and raw climate of the two port coasts contributed greatly to this huge death-toll. But for this the Germans who placed these naked remnants of starving humanity on the barren islets of Lüderitzbucht and on the moisture-oozing shores of Swakopmund must take the fullest blame and submit to the condemnation of all persons with even an elemental feeling of humanity toward the native races.¹⁰

The British South African *Blue Book*—written decades after these events took place—was a politicized text used to make sure the Germans would never regain their colonial empire after World War I.

The *Blue Book* was not just a chronicle of German misdeeds during the early 1900s—it also contained a host of rhetorical fragments that would haunt those who sought to forget about the annihilation of the Herero

and Nama. During the 1920s, when Afrikaners wanted to join hands with other whites in South Africa and let bygones be bygones, they asked the British to remove from circulation all copies of the *Blue Book* that had allegedly libeled the German nation. For many, this signaled the substitution of one public memory for another, the prioritizing of racial harmony through the forgetting of the loss of tens of thousands of lives of Herero and Nama. What some 20th-century humanitarians and rival imperialists called an “atrocious” was recontextualized as a propagandizing instrument that was produced by the same generation that signed the Treaty of Versailles.

The British *Blue Book* is obviously just one of many colonial texts that can be salvaged, dusted off, and deployed again as today’s (post)colonial generations debate about the beneficence or poverty of particular colonial or imperial ventures. Archival and testimonial research is now being gathered for use in public and legal forums where aggrieved parties are demanding that former colonial powers openly acknowledge, apologize, or pay for their past misdeeds. For example, during summer 2013, some 5,000 survivors of British prison camps that were established during the 1950s colonial “emergency” years in Kenya won an out-of-court settlement that compensated former Mau Mau victims who had been castrated, beaten, or tortured during British counter-insurgency operations.¹¹ Their legal victory had been aided immeasurably by the factual materials that came from the books of authors such as Carolyn Elkins and David Anderson; British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, may have given voice to wishful thinking when he argued that this particular “process of reconciliation” would not open the floodgates for other colonial-era claims from other former British colonies.¹² As I write these words, former camp detainees, or descendants of those who experienced the ravages of colonial violence in places such as Palestine, Cyprus, and the Caribbean islands, are all starting to marshal together their own arguments that will once again place the spotlight on what I call colonial camp cultures.

Many interdisciplinary memory scholars have pointed out that both our rhetorical histories and our public memories of past misdeeds are often partial, selective, and motivated, and the purpose of this book is to provide readers with a critical genealogical approach that studies the arguments that have been deployed by both defenders and critics of these colonial camp cultures. I compare the synchronic and diachronic arguments that were used by several generations or advocates who debated about several key colonial camp cultures, and I wish to show the repetitive nature of many of these claims. As Richard Reid argued

in early 2014, there seems to be a “direct genealogical link” between our generation’s notions of rights, well-being, and development and the older “benign paternalism” that was at the “heart of the imperial mission” a century ago, and all of these tales invite us to think about colonial “horror, hubris, and humanity.”¹³

Colonial violence during this period was so horrific—where witnesses wrote about the use of artillery, Maxim guns, the burning of entire villages, the shooting on sight of some indigenous peoples, and so forth—that even otherwise objectionable colonial camps could be characterized as places of “refuge.” Devin Pendas explains that many of the colonizers argued that the Hague Conventions conceptualized “military atrocity as essentially a civil law violation” that did not involve any criminal penal sanctions,¹⁴ and the military leaders who supervised the first colonial “concentration” camps often claimed that these were temporary facilities that were used to *protect* the detainees. When these temporary facilities became more permanent—what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben would call a legalized state of exception¹⁵—then critics learned about the losses of hundreds, thousands, and sometimes even tens of thousands of lives, and the camps were used in humanitarian critiques of colonial violence or imperialism itself.

Although many colonial camp cultures warrant attention, in this particular book I have chosen to focus on some of the ones that have the *most rhetoricity*—meaning that ones that have captured the attention of international presses during several historical points in time. The four case studies that I cover in this book—reviewing colonial camp systems in Cuba, South Africa, German South-West Africa, and the Philippines—have also become selected because memories of these cases have become ensnared in some of today’s complex memory wars as arguers debate about the politics of regret or monetary compensation for aggrieved parties.

As I write about these four camp systems, I will sometimes cover some of the legal aspects of these camp systems, but most of the time I will be providing readers with a more perspectival, *rhetorical study* of how both defenders and critics of these camps talked and wrote about these facilities.¹⁶ In other words, I want to show readers some of the persuasive and strategic dimensions of these colonial camp controversies, and I want to explain how some of this colonial violence may have been “forgotten” as defenders of empire won key arguments and patrolled key archives.

Throughout this book I will build on the insights of writers such as Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler,¹⁷ Michel Foucault, and other theorists who have written about the importance of biopolitical and

thanatopolitical rhetorics, and I will constantly underscore the importance of reflecting on the contested nature of our colonial histories and memories.¹⁸ An argumentative approach—that studies that ways that arguers build “cases” and compose arguments for the purpose of persuasion—reminds us that we need to be circumspect when we hear that any particular historical account, from either the colonized or the colonizer, is providing us with some preferred, “objective,” or accurate rendition of “what happened” in the camps. A critical genealogical approach views the colonial archives and historical records as repositories that have been filled by motivated social agents who wanted future readers to take for granted select ways of thinking about colonial beneficence or depravity.

This comparative way of thinking about colonial texts and images assumes that elite histories and vernacular memories are simply intentional resources for disputation, places, and spaces that allow for all sorts of geopolitical wrangling.¹⁹ Researchers and readers need to admit that in some cases, the archival materials that don’t suit the needs of those seeking restorative justice sometimes sit and gather dust, while the recovery of more helpful “forgotten” materials are combed through and catalogued by those who wish to make cases against camp administrators or others who may have been involved in some problematic “system.” For example, Woodruff Smith recently complained that some of Jürgen Zimmerer’s work on the Herero and the Nama seemed to be geared toward arraigining “the ghost of General von Trotha before the International Criminal Court or to show that Trotha’s actions—and those of the government that appointed him—meet current legal standards for genocide.”²⁰ Smith implied that Zimmerer as acting like a rhetor instead of a historian, and Smith noted that Zimmerer wasn’t using the right type of comparative historiographical methodology as he advanced his controversial claims. Smith argued that there were a wide range of other facts that needed to be researched before anyone could claim to be documenting the existence of another German genocide. From a critical argumentative standpoint, *both* Smith and Zimmerer are deploying versions of arguments that have been around for more than a century.

Our colonial histories and memories are made up of constitutive rhetorics, constellations of descriptive and symbolic meanings that contain fragments from many potential perspectival pasts that can be appropriated to suit the present needs of today’s advocates. Walter Benjamin, who talked about historical materialism instead of the power of argumentation, wrote in a rhetorical vein when he famously advocated the adoption of a form of pragmatic historicizing:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.” It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. . . . the danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients. For both it is one and the same: handing itself over as the tool of the ruling classes. In every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew. . . . the only writer of history with the gift of setting alight the sparks of hope in the past, is the one who is convinced of this; that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he [sic] is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.²¹

Benjamin’s sixth thesis does a nice job of explicating why memories can be dangerously deployed in argumentative contexts, and why they are contested. He also hints at why dominant powers police some archives and admonish us to remember why it is so difficult to counter some of these reified pasts.

For most of the 20th century, many legal experts, journalists working for mainstream newspapers, textbook writers for students, and other purveyors of vernacular commentaries on colonial camp cultures assiduously *avoided* writing or talking about colonial acknowledgments, apologies, and reparations. “A rich literature on the Nuremberg Trials as well as other mass atrocities committed during the bloody twenty-century” addressed some issues, noted David Bargueño, “but the fraught terrain of colonial Africa remains comparatively neglected by memory theorists and legal analysts.”²² The same could be said for the study of colonial camp cultures on other continents.

I join those who refuse to forget about these colonial camps and historical genocides, and I investigate how the colonizers and the colonized, the writers in the metropole and those who lived on the periphery, wrote, talked and argued about the realities of camp life. For example, I will review how national and international audiences reacted when they heard Emily Hobhouse telling British audiences about starving Boer children in British camps, and I will try to explain how various writers expressed themselves when they heard about the Herero who were pushed into the deserts of German South-West Africa. At the same time that this book explores some of the dangerous constellations that bedeviled those who conversed about colonial camp cultures between 1896 and 1908, it shows how transglobal generations *after* these periods strategically remembered and forgot about the treatment of camp detainees.

While imperial expansionists liked to collect biopolitical photographs of fortified towns, missionaries helping “natives” and doctors dispensing

medicine in the colonies, the critics of the colonial camps circulated thanatopolitical texts and visual registers that highlighted the suffering and the deaths of those who died building railroads, towns, and harbors. Imperial expansionists often wrote as if colonization itself was a progressive, humanitarian venture—what the French referred to as “*la mission civilisatrice*”²³—while anti-imperialists or colonial reformers complained about the land grabs, the exploitation of indigenous resources, the abuse of “native” labor, the excessive colonial taxation, and the daily horrors of colonial camp life.

if we really want to get a more nuanced picture of just why historical and contemporary figures have been motivated to use various rhetorics as they debated about colonial “atrocities” or annihilations then we need to see some of the rhetorical argumentative *topoi*, the imperial ideographs,²⁴ the myths, and other figurations that supplied the form and content of these arguments. In other words, we need to study how dominant argumentative claims and conclusions about the camps *became* the taken-for-granted *epistemes* that fill our libraries, archives, and pictorial collections.

Instead of trying to piee together a single, definitive, composition picture of what “really happened” during any one colonial camp controversy, we would adopt critical genealogical approaches that underscore the importance of tracing the competing histories and memories that were constructed at one time in order to gain the warranted assent of audiences. It is imperative that we follow Ann Laura Stoler’s suggestion that when we analyze colonial archives we read *along* the grain as well as *against* the grain as try to understand the epistemic and affective dimensions of these colonial worlds.²⁵ Benjamin’s haunted victors are not the only social agents who should have some say in all of this disputation.

This humanistic approach to colonial camp cultures also takes seriously Michel Foucault’s admonition that critics who study ambiguous, contingent, and partial knowledge keep in mind that these genealogies are “grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary.”²⁶ As noted above, there are ideological reasons why particular recollections of these controversial camps end up in our history books and in our colonial archives, and regardless of our own political proclivities, we need to recall that earlier generations also cared about how future generations would remember “their” colonies.

A comparative argumentative approach to these issues is challenging because it asks that critics keep track of how social agents who operated in one colonial camp context may have used and redeployed

arguments that sometimes came from *other* imperial or colonial camp situations. For example, thick layers of argumentative discourses were (re)crafted in Cuba, the United States, and England when writers in those countries critiqued how Spanish General Weyler defended his earlier establishment of camps for civilians. Weyler and other military figures could often deflect blame away from themselves for the horrors of colonial camps, and in this case it could be argued that the Spanish colonizers were simply following the lead of Cuban insurgent forces under General Máximo Gómez, who burned cane fields on the island.²⁷

Synchronic studies are also intriguing because they allow scholars to take into account the ways that contentious communities living during the same period disagreed about how to interpret diplomatic accounts, photographs, parliamentary proceedings, memoirs, travel books, settler narratives, administration requests, and imperial defenses of military decisions. Some of these materials were republished in missionary appeals, lantern shows, “ethnographic” studies, and journalistic accounts of the camps.

As I note in more detail later on in this book, focusing on the rhetorical *effectivity* of colonial arguments about the camps shows readers that in many cases *fin-de-siècle* audiences were totally dismissive of the idea that their militaries were involved in any type of “systematic” camp abuses. In some situations, expansionists viewed race wars between the colonized and the colonizer as something that should be expected and condoned; others viewing this destruction wanted to see camps that reflected liberal, reformist, and humanitarian measures that *prevented* the total annihilation of the “natives.” For example, when German Prime Minister Bülow rescinded a military “Extermination Order” in December 1904 that set the stage for camps in German South-West Africa, this was viewed as Christian charity, a negotiated political concession in Berlin to those who worried about the colonial practice of shooting Hereros on sight.²⁸ In theory, the Herero and Nama who were placed in “labor” camps were saved from the annihilation that might have come from totalizing colonial warfare.

The presence of all of this elite or public disputation about colonial violence has led me to conclude that the colonial camps were not always “forgotten”—sometimes these colonial camp cultures were simply recharacterized in ways that offended other generations who did not share similar views regarding settlement rights, the inferiority of “natives,” the need for martial law, and so forth.

Talk of “Atrocities,” European Regulation and Control of Imperial Violence, and the Rhetorical Framings of Colonial Human Rights Violations

Audiences today in Cuba, Spain, the Philippines, Germany, South Africa, Namibia, the United Kingdom, and the United States may feel that they understand the camp “history” that is usually associated with particular colonial administrations or genocides. They may circulate revised textbooks or put up blogs commenting on colonial “atrocities,” but often these 21st-century discussions of human rights violations look nothing like some of the *dominant* rhetorics that circulated near the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Racial stereotyping, social Darwinism, and other forms of human classification contributed to a situation in which colonial whites often argued that their own violent acts involved acceptable *defensive* measures that had to be taken against aggressive, and unappreciative, natives.

For example, note the ways that many high-minded European reformers differentiated between the regulatory laws that were needed to control armaments and the spread of violence on the European continent and the ways that they talked about violence in the colonies. In 1899, at the behest of Tsar Nicholas II and other aspiring humanitarians, the Hague Conference was called so that the great “powers” of the world would get together and deal with at least three major topics—disarmament, arbitration, and the modern “laws of war.” David Caron explains that many of those who gathered in the Netherlands sought to go beyond the dark fatalism of the times, whereby complacency about growing imperial arms races threatened the progressive thinking of those who wanted to ban or regulate destructive international warfare.²⁹ While colonial expansionists in various empires viewed these efforts as naïve attempts to stave off nationalist aspirations, more hopeful Hague attendees prayed that their collective efforts at legal wordsmithing might provide needed persuasive counterweights to some of the excessive military triumphalism that could be heard on the streets of many European cities.

The diplomats, army generals, naval officers, and others who attended the 1899 Hague Convention argued that they were trying to curb the “anarchical tendencies” that sometimes produced warfare in Europe, and they aspired to at least try to find ways of regulating this conduct on battlefields “so as to make it less rather than more unpleasant.”³⁰ Today we call these the “*jus in bello*” international law principles that are used to regulate our conduct during wartime.

Those who traveled to the Hague worked on banning the use of “asphyxiating or deleterious gases,” the dropping of weapons from balloons, the regulation of bombardment, the banning of soft-nose “dum-dum” bullets, and the protection of civilians caught in the crossfires of modern warfare. For those who doubted either the spirit or the letter of the law, attendees added what was known as the “Martens Clause” to the Preamble of the Hague Convention, and these normative words were supposed to remind everyone that all concerned were “under the protection and the rule of the principles of the law of nations, as they result from the usages established among civilized peoples, from the laws of humanity, and the dictates of public conscience.”³¹ For hopeful attendees, the circulation of both particular and general guidelines would help curb militarist tendencies of European powers, and these words would guide those who insisted on waging warfare on the European continent.

However, for many of those in attendance, these same rules did not apply when the “civilized” came in contact with the “uncivilized.” As Frédéric Mégrét noted in 2005, it was the Franco-Prussian conflicts and the Crimean War that the 1899 delegates had in mind when they came up with their regulations on the waging of civilized warfare, and many of the attendees were themselves colonizers who had no interest in extending many of these same protections to the “savages” who fought in colonial wars.³²

There were a plethora of different reasons why the Hague protections only extended to the civilized. First of all, it was assumed that the “uncivilized” were so far down the social evolutionary ladder that it would take decades (or centuries) before many of them had the rational capacity to understand the rights and duties associated with international treaties or other agreements. Moreover, it was thought that the savages in the colonies were inherently treacherous and devious, primitives who lived in a pre-modern, Hobbesian world that was best regulated by the natural laws of the survival of the fittest. If these types of arguments weren’t persuasive enough, then listen to the pragmatic assertions that were proffered by one of the losers in the debates over the banning of British dum-dum bullets, Sir John Charles Ardagh:

In civilized war a soldier penetrated by a small projectile is wounded, withdraws to the ambulance, and does not advance any further. It is very different with a savage. Even though pierced two or three times, he does not cease to march forward, does not call upon the hospital

attendants, but continues on, and before anyone has time to explain to him that he is flagrantly violating the decision of the Hague Conference, he cuts off your head. For this reason the English delegation demands the liberty of employing projectiles of sufficient efficacy against savage races.³³

Instead of viewing the determined actions of these alleged savages as courageous behaviors in the face of overwhelming odds, the British colonizers were configuring themselves as the shackled victims of biopolitical warfare who were placed in disadvantageous colonial situations as they fought irrational barbarians. Similar arguments were used to justify the detention of many “rebels” and “natives” who were placed in detention camps in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean Islands. Camps became policing devices for those who worried about massive populations overseas.

What happens when these supposed barbarians are denied legal or moral protections, when even the humanitarian spirit behind texts such as the Martens Clause does little to protect indigenous communities who are considered bandits, guerrillas, or insurgents who defy the will of imperial nations or colonial settlers? This book tries to answer that type of question, and it provides readers with is a collection of related stories about the creation of colonial camp cultures that were circulated by colonizers who corresponded with authorities in Spain, Britain, Germany, and the United States.

Three of the chapters in this book will cover what would be called “concentration” or “reconcentration” camps, while another chapter reviews the “annihilation” camps that were set up in German South-West Africa.³⁴ A comparative study of these camps allows us to see “the global portability of the concentration camp and the concepts and ideas behind it,”³⁵ and it helps illuminate how earlier commentators on these colonial camps helped craft the arguments that would be revised and refurbished by today’s audiences.

Adding up all the official estimates of those who died in the four camp systems that I will be studying, we find that at least 400,000 individuals may have lost their lives in these colonial camps between 1896 and 1908. At various times, those who organized these camps were accused of committing “atrocities,” war crimes, and crimes against humanity, but I will contend that those who criticized the camps were often *dissenters* whose claims often lost out in public and legal argumentation. Most of the time, defenders of imperial missions tried to argue that the colonized who ended up in camps deserved their fate.

Many of the camp logics that were produced during the 19th century and early 20th century became parts of the ideological drifts that were later used by police and military states when they wanted to declare emergency regulations or impose harsh systems of regulations on both military and civilian populations. Obviously local politics, nationalistic expectations, and colonial rivalries affected the exact contours and the global portability of these camp logics, but some contemporary scholars have also written about the lingering discursive or material influences of the colonial camps.

Some observers go so far as to argue that colonial camps served as the testing grounds, the biopolitical and thanatopolitical experimental places, that would link together colonial logics with Nazi exterminationist logics. For example, in the context of the Herero or Nama camps, this is known as the “Windhoek to Auschwitz” thesis, as Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski explain:

[scholars] on both sides of the Atlantic are currently engaged in a controversy about the alleged genocidal nature of western colonialism and its connection with the mass violence unleashed by Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1945 Convinced that the idea of the Holocaust’s “uniqueness” or “singularity” has too long overshadowed “lesser,” “marginal,” or “incomplete” genocides in various colonial contexts (from Australia, Asia, and Africa to Latin and North America), scholars such as Enzo Traverso, Sven Lindquist, Dirk Moses, Mark Levene, and Dan Stone have recently offered challenging interpretations of colonial genocides and their repercussions on the western world.³⁶

Gerwarth and Malinowski note that many of these arguments can be traced to the work of Hannah Arendt as well as to the theorizing of writers, such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon’s comments on French decolonization.

These types of comparative investigations have heuristic value, because they allow researchers to explain just why these infamous colonial camps lasted as long as they did—and why it took so long for some humanitarian arguments about these detention facilities to become part of the 21st-century calls for restorative justice.

At the same time, these scholarly inquiries supply the theoretical and methodological lens through which we can see the relative successes and failures of those who tried to *stop* what the early 20th-century generation called the “methods of barbarism” that were used in some of

these camps.³⁷ Liberals battled with conservatives, expansionists quarreled with isolationists, and promoters of small colonizing schemes conversed with those with grander imperial visions—and much of this verbal sparring often touched on questions related to just how far dominant colonizing powers were willing to go in segregating certain populations from bandits, insurgents, rebels, or other alleged “barbarians.”

One of the conclusions I reach in this book is that colonial camp reforms were matters of concern for both humanitarian imperialists and anti-imperialist Europeans and Americans—but that it often took *time* before radicals, liberals, or conservatives were willing to critique the military powers that were often in charge of colonial camps in the Caribbean, Africa, or Asia. Wartime critiques of colonial camps failed to resonate with many patriotic listeners, and efficacious camp intervention could only come when a sufficient number of *imperialists* joined the lists and decided that camp reformation helped the cause of those who defended empires or colonial systems. In other words, reformation of any kind was an *argumentative achievement*, and the colonial camps often became contested sites of military, political, social, and legal struggle.

This is not to say that dissenters always failed, or that incremental change did not take place. Sometimes the camps became a source of international embarrassment, especially when they were viewed as inhumane detention centers that violated explicit or implicit imperialist norms. Within social Darwinian hierarchies, the “imperial characters” who were at the very top of the mythic imperial “racial” pyramid were supposed to take their responsibilities as wards or superior beings seriously, and if they wanted to keep the camps they needed to be viewed as hygienic encampments.³⁸

Although anti-imperialists or “pro-Boers” were some of the most vocal critics who first called for camp reformation, strange and unwieldy alliances were sometimes temporarily formed when missionaries, anxious settlers,³⁹ and at least a few expansionist imperialists worried about colonial reputations. Regardless of whether one lived in the metropole or on the peripheries of empire, the everyday debates about colonial camp cultures became a part of larger conversations about the proper ways to deal with a “native problem,” settler needs, land disputes, militaries abroad, the use of coercive labor in the colonies, and modern ways of thinking about policing what came to be called the “new imperialism.”⁴⁰ Although many of these debaters would have been shocked to hear that their colonizers were being accused of what we call genocidal behavior, they were bothered by some of this colonial camp violence.

Academic Worries about Comparative or Synchronic Genealogical Studies of Colonial Camps

As noted above, although we have countless studies of Stalinist or Nazi camps, we have relatively few book-length comparative studies of the colonial camps. As Jonathan Hyslop has recently argued, this is surprising, especially seeing that there appeared to be a high degree of agreement among both social theorists and historians as to “when and where the practice and discourse of the concentration camp arose”:

Almost universally, it has been identified as emerging either in the policies of the Spanish government in response to the revolt in its Cuban colony from 1894, or in British policies in the South African War of 1899–1902, or both. More recently, there has been some general acceptance amongst scholars that aspects of American policy in the war against the Filipinos of 1899–1902 and the German repression of the Herero and Nama revolts in Southwest Africa from 1904 to 1907 also constitute genuine early examples of the concentration camp.⁴¹

Yet in spite of this emerging consensus most of the studies that take a comparative approach to these colonial camps are excellent, relatively short essays that can’t go into any great detail as the comment on the coverage of discursive and material parallels. These shorter monographs often provide readers with slivers of key arguments and theoretical claims about colonial rivalries, but space limitations militate against the possibility that they can provide readers with evidence of the repetitive nature of the argumentative structures that need to be studied in book-length investigations.

Academic politics may also have influenced the disparate treatment of these various camp cultures. Professor A. Dirk Moses is probably spot on when he provides one possible reason for this marginalization of colonial camp studies—we appear to be living at a time when the “study of indigenous genocides and the Holocaust is marred by dogmatically held positions of rival scholarly communities.”⁴² For many of those who have heard about these colonial camps, the very thought that these facilities might have contributed to massive depopulation is a melancholy proposition, something that forces us to rethink our traditional notions regarding the supposed bright-lines that might hypothetical exist between nineteenth colonization schemes and 20th-century “concentration” and “death camps.”

Comparative victimage battles take place as those who argue for the uniqueness of the Holocaust engage in heated disputation with those who are equally convinced that we need to expand our genocidal horizons so that we can study the horrors of transatlantic slave trades, Native American mass murders, or colonial settler practices that contributed to the loss of millions of lives. Moses worries that all sides in these debates can be equally dogmatic as they study the various roles that perpetrators and victims played in all of these varied contexts, and he invites scholars to think about “solidarity” as they search for critical methods that allow us to take into account *both* intentionalist and functionalist ways of thinking about the “mutual recognition of common suffering.”⁴³

I share this concern, and in this book I am not interested in getting involved in these types of victimage wars. I refuse to argue that one genocide is more important than others, or that the study of one genocidal context means that we have to prioritize our research in some hierarchical fashion. While each of my chapters will provide readers with some insight into how particular historical or contemporary generations have *argued* about the effects of particular camp detention systems and their relationship to conceptualizations of colonial mass murder, annihilation intentions, or genocide, I am not interested in privileging any one set of victims or critiquing the “uniqueness” of the World War II Holocaust. Nor will I be arguing that the nature and scope of some colonial incident might lead one to conclude that other “forgotten” imperial or colonial genocides should overshadow the Holocaust. I see no rational reason why we can’t study the horrific nature of colonial camp cultures while at the same time respecting the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

I will not be arguing that these colonial camps or colonial genocides need to be scaled in ways that overshadow other large-scale atrocities. My goals for this book are much more modest. I want to join in the academic conversations about the colonial camps by providing argumentative case studies that complicate the ways that we think about each of these colonial camp situations. I also want to show how each of these particular camp cultures influenced the gradual acceptance of colonial mentalities and imperial behaviors that may have led to the legitimization of other concentration camps, especially during the interwar years between World War I and World War II that interested Jöel Kotek and others. At the same time, I want to acquaint readers with some of the recurring, presentist usages of these camp debates as we converse about the importance of regret, sorrow, trauma, restoration, and repatriation in 21st-century contexts.

I contend that our perspectival views on these topics are often linked to our acceptance of particular colonial archival histories, public