Rudolf Mrázek, *The Complete Lives of Camp People: Colonialism, Fascism, Concentrated Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, pp. 496. ISBN: 9781478006671, price: USD 32.95 (paperback); 9781478005773, 119.95 USD (cloth).

What was everyday life like for camp internees? Conjuring memories of sorrow, the internment camp often comes across as a place where suffering was never-ending. Tragedy, however, was not the only component constituting lives in the camps. In his new book, *The Complete Lives of Camp People*, Mrázek takes an intimate look at the daily lives of two radically different internment camps in the early twentieth century: Theresienstadt, in the modern-day Czech Republic, and Boven Digoel, in Dutch New Guinea. The former was a transit concentration camp for Jews during the Nazi era, while the latter was built for Indonesian rebels who attempted to overthrow the Dutch colonial government. Mrázek refers to these rebels as “the jews” with a lowercase “j”, since they were not religiously Jewish but shared their misery and exclusion. Mrázek’s main argument in this book is that the camp was not unplugged from reality and progress. Instead, it was a place of “concentrated modernity” where “an unprecedented energy and ethos that emerged in the camps, and radiated out of the camps” changed our world (p. 5).

This book is arranged thematically into five big parts exploring different aspects of camp lives. Part 1: Fashion explores how bodies were governed and taken care of—through clothes, diet, and sports—in Theresienstadt and Boven Digoel. There is no doubt that discriminatory practices, like lice inspections and racial profiling (pp. 32–33), were present in the camp. However, leisurely activities relating to the body did not completely vanish in the face of adversity. Mrázek describes, for example, the vibrant practices of dressing up in both camps: on how Theresienstadt women wore lipstick as resistance (p. 34) or how Boven Digoel men got haircuts at tropical-styled “barbershops” (p. 28). The art of “taking care” (p. 45) by camp physicians and hospitals was also an important part of the camp lives. Food, as Mrázek describes, was scarce, and internees were forced to subsist mostly on potatoes in Theresienstadt (p. 70) or to hunt for kangaroo and cuscus (a kind of possum) in Boven Digoel for protein intake (p. 64). On many occasions, sports were enjoyed in both camps, with soccer being the number one sport both in Theresienstadt and Boven Digoel (pp. 74 and 76).

Part 2: Sounds captures the vibrant soundscape of the camps. Although isolated from the outside world, the camps did not lie in what Walter Benjamin called a “moral speechlessness” (p. 101). They were, in fact, built upon a jumble of sounds: Papuan birds that seemed to “talk nonsense” (p. 85), clicks of typewriters (p. 87), loud commands from the Schutzstaffel (p. 92), intimate lullabies

BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE

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(p. 112), and intriguing rumors among the internees. These noises, coming from all parts of the world, resounded through the isolated camps and created “concentrated acoustics” (p. 87) that echoed off enclosed walls. Not only among the internees, “voices” coming from outside also filled the camp through letters, newspapers, and radio connections, which served as the “bridge between the camp and the civilized world” (p. 133).

The stories of light and enlightenment become the focus of Part 3: Light. It might be convenient to describe the camp as a place where darkness reigned. But Mrázek argues that in fact, the camp was a place of concentrated lights and modernity (p. 147). Various kinds of lights—literal and metaphorical—shone “brilliantly ... merciless and unstoppable” (p. 167) in the camps. Both Theresienstadt and Boven Digoel started with light: they were initially made ready by creating a clearing that “opened one big sunny spot” (p. 146). More and more illuminations followed afterward: from the colors that popped from flowerbeds (p. 163) and exotic plants (p. 156) to electric lights and firework shows on special occasions. Brilliant people of various professions—such as scholars, musicians, and students—also “brightened up” the camps. The camps themselves, according to Mrázek, were always under the limelight as they were staged and made ready for camp inspectors and the outside world to see (p. 190).

Part 4: City looks at camps architecturally and geometrically. Theresienstadt and Boven Digoel were sculpted out of “geometric spirit” (p. 219): maps and technical drawings were central to the realization of the camps. An internee in Boven Digoel remembered his mother talking about camp spaces in geometrical terms, such as blocks and rectangles (p. 223). The practice of partitioning—which Foucault argues is an art of disciplining space (p. 225)—was done by internees to circumvent the lack of privacy by building fences and hanging clothes (p. 225). Although resembling towns, these camps were not meant to accommodate the internees forever. Mrázek describes the camps as temporary spaces with an open-ended destination (p. 272) where people never knew if they would go home or get transported somewhere worse.

Mrázek closes this book with Part v: Scattering, which tells “a story about when the foundations of the camps were shaken” (p. 301). It is the time when unsettlement and resentment culminated in the camps. Internees went on strikes and sang provocative songs to protest the degradation taking place in the camps (p. 302). Some of them also attempted to escape by climbing over the Theresienstadt walls or fleeing into the Boven Digoel jungle—efforts that often ended miserably. Suicide had become a way out for those who could not bear the horror; so often it happened that the Theresienstadt camp officers had to regulate death and suicide attempts (p. 316). Escape from the camps, however, were not always tragic. After liberation, Theresienstadt ex-internees were able

to go “home”: either to their country of origin or to a new land. Quoting Mrázek, “when the gates of the camps opened, the camp people carried the light of the camps into the world, expanding the clearing” (p. 362).

Covering a broad area of everyday existence, this book offers a well-rounded perspective on camp lives that are often overlooked and unimagined. Firsthand interviews with camp survivors in this book are especially crucial, as they give the book an emotional intimacy with the internees’ experience. Although comparing two geographically and politically different camps, Mrázek does not treat these places as unrelated to each other. Instead, he picks up the “fragments of the broken modern” from these camps and stitches them together “into one sign, one constellation” of camp-ness (p. 3). His portrayal of the internees is also humanizing and compassionate, as he does it without discounting their suffering or reducing them into oppressed victims without agency. All in all, this book is recommended for those interested in exploring more on the everyday life in the camps.

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