



Deney's Reitz: "South African First, Dutchman Second" – A Case Study of the Evolution of South African Identity in South Africa in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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Deneys Reitz: “South African First, Dutchman Second” – A Case Study of the Evolution of South
African Identity in South Africa in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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A Thesis in the Field of History
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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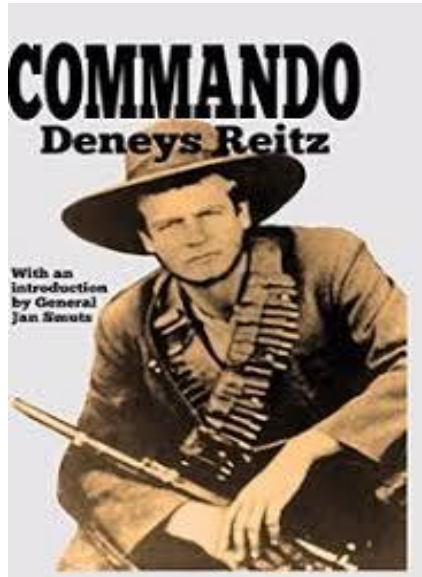
Abstract

This thesis considers the life of Deneys Reitz, a South African soldier, author and politician who was a key member of the Afrikaner ruling elite in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. This was a seminal period in South African history, which included the formation of the new Union of South Africa in 1910. During this time, a distinctive new South African identity, known as “South Africanism” developed, centered around reconciliation between the two primary white linguistic groups in South Africa, and an acceptance of South Africa’s place within the British Empire. Over time, under the influence of his mentor and future Prime Minister Jan Smuts, Reitz became a fervent advocate of this new philosophy and an ardent Anglophile. Through a biographical examination of Reitz’s life and works (and that of certain of his contemporaries), this thesis considers the factors that influenced moderate Afrikaners like Reitz to embrace this new identity. It contends that these factors were complex and multifaceted, and, at least initially, had more to do with personal loyalties and internal Afrikaner politics than a genuine ideological belief in the importance of reconciliation and the values of Empire. In some cases, like Reitz and Smuts, the ideological belief evolved over time. However, this thesis argues that at the heart of many other moderate Afrikaners’ acceptance of South Africanism lay a more transactional trade-off – a willingness to reconcile with their English-speaking countrymen and accept British sovereignty, in exchange for a restoration and protection of Afrikaner political and cultural rights and the economic and security benefits of being part of the British Empire. For many Afrikaners (particularly those who didn’t necessarily share Reitz and Smuts’

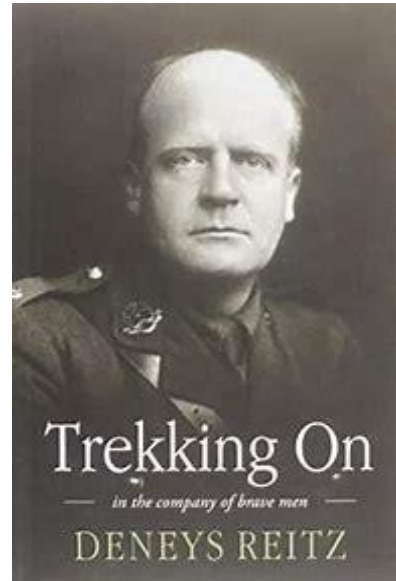
Anglophilia) this trade-off was arguably made more palatable in the years between the two World Wars by the increasing degree of autonomy afforded to the Afrikaner-controlled South African government as a result of Britain's slow-motion retreat from Empire after the First World War. This thesis further contends that a key motivating factor underpinning the philosophy of South Africanism was a belief in the necessity of white racial solidarity between Afrikaners and English South Africans of British origin, which was ultimately prioritized over other linguistic, ethnic and class divisions. Finally, this thesis considers the role played by moderate South African women in creating this new South African identity, with a particular focus on Deneys Reitz's wife Leila (a strong advocate for women's rights and South Africa's first female parliamentarian). It argues that women, both South African and British, played a key role in encouraging Afrikaner / English reconciliation. It also seeks to show how white racial unity became an important justificatory factor in the fight for female rights such as suffrage and birth control, and ultimately helped ensure a political alignment across the gender divide.

Frontspiece

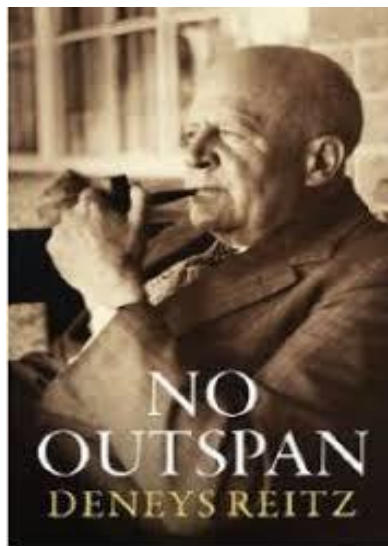
The Autobiographical Evolution of Deneys Reitz



Boer rebel¹



British soldier²



South African statesman³

¹ Deneys Reitz, *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War* (London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1929), front cover.

² Deneys Reitz, *Trekking On* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1933), front cover.

³ Deneys Reitz, *No Outspan* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1943), front cover.

Author's Biographical Sketch

David Yuill is a practicing lawyer and aspiring amateur historian currently based in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he lives with his wife, Susan and his 3 boys, James, Oliver and Ben. This thesis is the culmination of a Masters degree in History (and a general mid-life crisis) begun online through the Harvard Extension School during the dark days of the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020.

Dedication

To Suzy and my boys. With all my love. Hopefully they will enjoy reading this one day. Or at least watch the movie.

Acknowledgments

To my parents, with love, for instilling in me an appreciation of books and history from an early age and encouraging and supporting my numerous academic endeavors over the years and to father for reviewing my first draft with a fine-tooth comb.

To Deneys Reitz's nephew, Carl and his wife Mandy Reitz, and their son, Deneys, who started me off on this journey over a cold beer at the edge of the Tugela River near their farm at the foot of the Drakensberg mountains. Thank you for sharing your wonderful collection of Deneys' private papers and manuscripts with me, and for your unfailing hospitality when I came to visit.

To Deneys' grandson, Michael Reitz, for giving so generously of his time and knowledge of the Reitz family, for helping putting me in touch with various other people who could assist with source material for this thesis, and for allowing me unfettered access to his own treasure trove of Deneys' papers, as well as for his very helpful input on my thesis

To Arnold Van Dyk to helping me obtain access to Koos Bekker's fine collection of Deneys' letters, and to Mr. Bekker and his resident archivist, Daniel Malan, for allowing me to view those letters.

To, Briana Smith, who very bravely agreed to be my thesis director, notwithstanding its exotic subject matter. Thank you for keeping me on track, for your many helpful insights and pointers on further areas of scholarship to explore and for

helping me hone my ideas and polish my writing. Thank you mostly for your constant positive encouragement, even when given from the depths of a cold Minnesota winter.

To my research adviser, Ariane Liazos, for all her help and guidance on deciding which track to follow and crafting my thesis proposal and thanks to both Ariane and Trudi Styles, for their patient, eagle-eyed review of my thesis.

To Daniel Pretorious, a fellow historian trapped in a lawyer's body, for his very helpful comments and insights on the first draft of my thesis.

To Dale Forssman Snr, for his wisdom and insights, both thesis-related and on life in general.

Finally, to my long-suffering wife, and three wonderful boys, without whose love, support and forbearance none of this would have been possible.

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Chapter I

Introduction

At midday on 19 October 1944, as war raged on the European continent, Colonel Deneys Reitz was found slumped at his desk in London, having suffered a cerebral embolism at the age of sixty-two. At the time, Reitz was serving as the Union of South Africa's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, his final posting in a storied career of military endeavour and public service. A week later he passed away in a London hospital, his wife and son by his bedside. His other son, a pilot in the South African Defence Force, was in a German prisoner-of-war camp. Reitz's military career had begun at the end of the nineteenth century, when, as a young man, he had fought for the Boer forces during the Anglo-Boer War in their David-and-Goliath struggle for independence against the might of the British Empire. When the Boer armies were defeated in the field in 1900, Reitz joined the militias who continued to wage guerilla warfare for a further two years, a campaign he subsequently memorialised in his best-selling memoir "Commando."⁴ Upon the Boer surrender in 1902, he went into self-imposed exile on the island of Madagascar, rather than live under the hated British. Within three years, however, he was back in the country, living under British rule in the house of his former military commander and future South African Prime Minister, Jan Smuts. Within twelve years he was commanding a battalion in the British army on the Western Front in World War One. By the time of the Second World War, Reitz was Deputy Prime Minister in a

⁴ Reitz, *Commando*.

South African government under Prime Minister Jan Smuts that narrowly voted to fight on the side of the British Empire during the Second World War.⁵ On his death, his wife Leila received letters of condolence from the highest echelons of British society, including the King and Queen of England, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. Churchill's letter included the following passage:

It is one of the greatest tributes to the British Empire that men like your husband, who fought us with such firm resolution in their youth, should have come to be numbered among the wisest and most valued councillors that the British people could summon to their assistance in their hour of need.⁶

How did this young Boer soldier who fought doggedly against the British during the Anglo-Boer War and left the country rather than live under the British yoke, ultimately evolve into an Anglophile, feted by none other than the British Prime Minister as a great friend of the British Empire? Amongst Reitz's papers on his death was a half-finished biography of President Paul Kruger, the last president of the South African Republic, and the leader of the Boer forces in the Anglo-Boer War. In the preface to his biography, Reitz notes that Kruger "would probably turn in his grave were he to find himself counted among those who helped to build the British Overseas Empire, for all his days he strove against its might."⁷ These words could apply equally well to Reitz himself. My thesis will seek to consider the evolution of Reitz from Boer rebel to imperial loyalist over the first half of the twentieth century and in doing so, seek to gain some further

⁵ For a high-level overview of the facts of Reitz's life, please see "Deneys Reitz," Parktown Association, accessed 10 March, 2024, <https://www.parktownassociation.co.za/deneys-reitz/>. See also *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Deneys Reitz," accessed March 10, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deneys_Reitz. See also his three memoirs - Reitz, *Commando*; Reitz, *Trekking On*; and Reitz, *No Outspan*, which also provide a more detailed autobiographical overview of his life.

⁶ Winston Churchill to Leila Reitz, October 1944, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa.

⁷ Deneys Reitz, *Von Skaapwagter tot President* (From Shepherd to President), 1942-3, personal collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

insights into the evolution of South African identity over the first half of the twentieth century.

What importance does this have in the broader context of South African history? Reitz's life spanned one of the most consequential periods in South African history, from the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the nineteenth century, through the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 and two World Wars, up until shortly before the establishment of the first apartheid government in 1948. As noted above, Reitz was a key member of the Afrikaner ruling elite in South Africa during this period. During this time Afrikaners split into two distinctive camps – a loyalist camp that supported former Boer generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts and their vision of a united South Africa as a member of the British Empire and a nationalist camp that opposed reconciliation with the British and favoured greater Afrikaner autonomy. Reitz was a pivotal individual in the former camp, one of Botha and Smuts most loyal and outspoken supporters. He was a member of parliament from 1920 until just before his death in 1944 and served in the cabinets of Prime Ministers Smuts and Hertzog in the 1920s and 30s. As such he had a front row seat to some of the key developments during this period.

As discussed in greater detail in the historiography below, there is considerable secondary literature on the formation of a new “white” South African identity (described as “South Africanism”) in the aftermath of the creation of the Union of South Africa, which involved a complex interaction between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans, generally at the expense of non-white South Africans. Many moderate Afrikaners like Reitz ultimately embraced this new South African identity. However, as outlined in the historiography below, whilst South Africanism has been

comprehensively analysed in the academic literature, less consideration has been given to the role played by more moderate Afrikaners in the adoption of this new identity. This thesis aims to help fill some of that gap. Through a detailed review of the correspondence, diaries, writings and public pronouncements of Reitz and certain of his contemporaries, this thesis will look to consider the factors and considerations which influenced Reitz and other moderate Afrikaners to embrace or at least accept this ideology of “South Africanism”

This thesis contends that these factors were complex and multifaceted, and, in the years leading up to Union, probably had more to do with personal loyalties and internal Afrikaner politics, rather than any particular allegiance to the British. In some cases, like Smuts and Reitz, this evolved over time into a genuine appreciation of the British and the values of Empire (fueled in part by gratitude for British post-war magnanimity towards their defeated enemy). For many in the moderate Afrikaner faction, however, more prosaic considerations lay at the heart of their adoption of the new ideology – a willingness to reconcile with their English-speaking countrymen and accept British sovereignty, in exchange for the restoration of Afrikaner political rights and recognition of the benefits of imperial trade and protection. Even for those Afrikaners who didn’t share Reitz and Smuts’ Anglophilia, this transactional trade-off became increasingly palatable in the years following Union as Afrikaner political and cultural rights were legally entrenched and the Afrikaner-controlled South African government was afforded increasing degree of independence as a result of Britain’s gradual withdrawal from Empire after the First World War. This thesis will further contend that white racial concerns were a key motivating factor underpinning the philosophy of South Africanism.

Ultimately, a belief on both sides of the linguistic divide in the importance of maintaining a united white front in a Black majority country, helped paper over the numerous class, racial and linguistic divisions which existed between the key white settler groupings in South Africa. Finally, this thesis will consider the role played by white women in the evolution of South African identity during this period and will seek to demonstrate how racial politics also informed the fight for (white) women's rights in the 1920s and 1930s and also ultimately ensured an alignment of interests across the gender divide amongst South Africa's white population.

Methodology and Sources

This thesis aims to follow a biographical approach, by focussing on the life and views of one particular member of the moderate Afrikaner faction, Deneys Reitz, and his wife Leila. It has been suggested of historical biography that "cultural politics are most easily examined as well as empathetically imagined in the individual life."⁸ It is hoped that this will be the case here.

Any consideration of the life of Deneys Reitz has to begin with his own extensive autobiographical writings. His first book *Commando* covers his service during the Anglo-Boer War as a young man and is the most well-known of his books. Originally written in Dutch whilst in exile in Madagascar in 1903 under the title *Herinneringen van 1899-1902* (Reminiscences of 1899-1902),⁹ it was ultimately only published in English in 1929,¹⁰

⁸ Jo Burr Margadant, ed., *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, California, 2000), 7, as quoted in L.W. Banner, "Biography as History," *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 579–586, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.114.3.579>, 582.

⁹ Deneys Reitz, *Herinneringen van 1899–1902*, MS 196/1/2/3 and MS 272/2 (Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg), translated by Michael Reitz.

¹⁰ Reitz, *Commando*.

and became one of the best-selling accounts of the war, being reprinted twenty times over the next fifty years. His subsequent memoir, *Trekking On*,¹¹ published in 1933, covers the period from his exile after the Anglo-Boer War, his return to South Africa, his role in suppressing the Afrikaner rebellion of 1914 and his service during the First World War in South West Africa, East Africa and the Western Front in France. His final memoir, *No Outspan*,¹² covers his post-war-life, including his time as a Member of Parliament and cabinet minister up until the beginning of the Second World War. However, his memoirs, although erudite and historically interesting, are largely narrative accounts of his life which offer few insights into his personal motivations or views on the most controversial issues of the day. We learn almost nothing about his family in his books, even though his wife, Leila, was, as noted above, a character of significant historical interest in her own right.¹³ In *No Outspan*, which covers the latter half of his life and most of his time in government, he notes as follows: “in the following pages I am recording such [matters] as seem of interest. It is of these I wish to speak rather than of racial and political differences which mar the happiness of our country; and I intend to leave aside as far as I can the trivialities of party strife.”¹⁴

However, I have been privileged to obtain access to unpublished private collections of Reitz’s personal papers, correspondence and diaries, which provide new insights into his personal views on key events and themes of the period. My thesis focuses extensively on these primary sources, as well as other primary sources such as

¹¹ Reitz, *Trekking On*.

¹² Reitz, *No Outspan*.

¹³ For a high-level overview of the facts of Leila Reitz’s life, please see “Deneys Reitz,” Parktown Association, accessed 10 March, 2024, <https://www.parktownassociation.co.za/deneys-reitz/>.

¹⁴ Reitz, *No Outspan*, 31.

parliamentary records and newspaper articles. In addition, I have endeavoured to consider primary sources relating to some of Reitz's contemporaries, in particular the correspondence of Jan Smuts, a comprehensive collection of which has been compiled by his biographer, Keith Hancock, and South African academic, Jean van der Poel.

Reitz is an interesting choice for a biographical study. This is certainly not a micro-history in the sense of focussing on an individual that represents an under-represented population in the historical record. In fact, Reitz is a well-known figure in South African history, both through his widely read autobiographical books, and the fact that for much of the second half of his life he was a significant public figure in South Africa who moved in elite political circles. At the same time, he was not a "great man of history" in the sense that his mentor Jan Smuts was – he was perhaps more lieutenant than general, more understudy than leading man. But he was a hugely interesting, erudite, charismatic character who was involved, either directly or peripherally, in a number of key events in South African history and interacted with important historical characters including Jan Smuts, Louis Botha and Winston Churchill. The pitfalls of a biographical approach are many – there is always the danger of making over-generalisations from the views and actions of one individual and ignoring the broader context. I have endeavoured to avoid these by also considering the words and actions of other contemporaries alongside the voluminous secondary scholarship on South African identity in the first half of the twentieth century. I have also attempted to put Reitz's life in context by considering how it fits in with some of the broader themes of the period, including a decline in British imperialism, the rise of nationalism globally, colonialism (in particular

settler colonialism) and scientific racism. Whether I have successfully avoided these pitfalls remains to be seen.

Definition of Terms

I am aware that many of the terms used, and the key historical figures referenced in this thesis will not be familiar to a non-South African audience. I therefore set out below an explanation on some of these terms, as well as a separate high-level introduction to some of the significant role-players with whom Deney's Reitz, the subject matter of this thesis, interacted throughout his life, and who will be referenced throughout this work.

Afrikaner: In its narrow sense (and the sense used in this thesis), this refers to the white ethnic grouping in South Africa descended primarily from Dutch settlers who arrived at the Cape of Good Hope (home of present day Cape Town) in the middle of the seventeenth century, as well as German, French Huguenot, Malay and other immigrants.¹⁵ In its broader sense, it includes all persons in South Africa whose primary language is Afrikaans, not only those of primarily European descent, but also South Africa's large "Coloured" population (see defined term below).

Afrikaans: An indigenous South African language, derived from seventeenth century Dutch, one of South Africa's official languages and the second most spoken language in the country.¹⁶

¹⁵ For a useful general history of the Afrikaner people, please see Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: A Concise History* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2020), Kindle edition; as well as the fuller length version of the previous book - Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People. Reconsiderations in Southern African History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003). See also *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Afrikaner," accessed March 17, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Afrikaner>.

¹⁶ See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Afrikaans language," accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Afrikaans-language>.

Anglo-Boer War: A war fought between 1899 and 1902 between the British Empire and the Afrikaner people of South Africa – also often referred to as the “Second Boer War” or more recently, in recognition of the fact that the war was not just “a white man’s war and also involved a large number of Black participants, the “South African War”.¹⁷

Apartheid: A system of legalised racial segregation (literally “separate-ness), introduced by the South African white-led government in 1948.¹⁸

Boer: An informal word used to describe white Afrikaners at the turn of the nineteenth century, derived from the Afrikaans word for farmer.¹⁹

Coloured: Term used to describe South Africans of mixed race, primarily in the Cape Colony of South Africa. It does not have the same pejorative meaning in South Africa that it has in the United States and is considered one of the official racial designations recognized in South Africa.

Commando: A method of military organisation adopted by the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War, in terms of which the Boer army was divided into units of mounted militiamen which were formed by drawing soldiers from a particular geographic place or location.²⁰

¹⁷ For a high-level overview of the war, see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “South African War,” accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/South-African-War>. There are also a number of books on the war – a comprehensive overview can be found in Byron Farwell, *The Great Boer War* (London, Pen & Sword Books, 2009). The first Anglo-Boer War was fought in 1881-82 and resulted in a British defeat at the Battle of Majuba and the restoration of the independence of the Boer republics.

¹⁸ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Apartheid,” accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/apartheid>.

¹⁹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Boer people,” accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boer-people>.

²⁰ Sandra Swart, “A Boer and His Gun and His Wife Are Three Things Always Together: Republican Masculinity and the 1914 Rebellion,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 4 (1998): 737–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079808708599>.

Poor white problem or Poor-whiteism: The name attributed to a purported social problem in South Africa caused by the rising levels of white poverty in the first few decades of the twentieth century, culminating in publication of a 1932 report by the US-based Carnegie Commission: "The Poor White Problem in South Africa," which is said to form the basis for many of South Africa's subsequent segregationist policies.²¹ The causes of the poor white problem and whether such a problem in fact existed is much debated.

Scientific racism: An ideology that relies on pseudoscientific methods to argue for the biological superiority of the white race over other races.²²

Settler colonialism: A form of colonialism characterised by the displacement of the local indigenous populations by settler communities, who permanently settle on land previously owned by the indigenous population and operate it for their benefit as well as that of the original imperial metropole from where they originated and to which they maintain ongoing ties.²³

South Africanism: A political philosophy which came to prominence in the first few decades of the twentieth century in South Africa, which proposed a new form of South African national identity, centered around white unity and a reconciliation between the two primary white linguistic groups in South Africa, English-speakers and Afrikaners, whilst accepting South Africa's place within the British Empire.

²¹ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa," accessed February 3, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnegie_Commission_of_Investigation_on_the_Poor_White_Question_in_South_Africa.

²² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Scientific Racism," accessed February 3, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/scientific-racism>. On scientific racism in South Africa generally, see Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²³ See generally Sai Englert, *Settler Colonialism: An Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2022, Kindle edition).

Union of South Africa: The union formed between the British colonies of the Cape Colony and Natal and the former Boer republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State in 1910 to form the new country called the Union of South Africa.²⁴

Note on Use of Certain Racially Sensitive Terms: The term “native” was widely used in the early 20th century to describe Black Africans in South Africa – at the time it was a more neutral term and didn’t have the pejorative meaning it does today. For example, Deneys Reitz served in the 1930s as the Minister of Native Affairs, which was his official title. Another more derogatory term used to describe Black South Africans was the term “Kaffirs,” derived from the Muslim word for non-believers. This thesis will generally use the term “Black” to refer to Black South Africans, whereas the term “non-white” will refer to all non-white South Africans, including Blacks, Indians and Coloureds (which were the traditional racial groupings applied historically in South Africa).

Key Role-Players

Louis Botha: Boer General in the Anglo-Boer war, first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1910 to 1919. Along with Smuts, one of the architects of the Union of South Africa.²⁵

JBM Hertzog: Boer General in the Anglo-Boer War, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1924 to 1939. Strong advocate of Afrikaner nationalism.²⁶

²⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v "South Africa Act," accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/South-Africa-Act>.

²⁵ For an overview of Botha’s life, see Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v Louis Botha," accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-Botha>. See also Richard Steyn, *Louis Botha: A Man Apart* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2018) for a more comprehensive biography of his life.

²⁶ For an overview of Hertzog’s life, see Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "J.B.M. Hertzog," accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/J-B-M-Hertzog>.

Leila Reitz: Wife of Deneys Reitz. Elected as first female member of parliament in 1934. Leading member of the South African suffragette movement and prominent social rights campaigner.

Isie Smuts: Wife of Jan Smuts, often referred to later in her life as “Ouma” [Grandmother] Smuts.²⁷

Jan Smuts: Key figure in South African history. Polymath and long-time mentor and father figure to Deneys Reitz. Boer General in the Anglo-Boer war, leader of Reitz’s commando. One of the architects of the Union of South Africa. South African Prime Minister, from 1919 to 1924, and 1939 to 1948. Member of the British Imperial War Cabinet during both World Wars. Played a key role in drafting the charter of the League of Nations, the Balfour Declaration and the United Nations Charter.²⁸

Historical Background

In considering the life of Deneys Reitz and the evolution of South African identity in the first half of the twentieth century, it is perhaps useful to begin with some brief historical background.²⁹ Afrikaners of Dutch origin first arrived at the Cape of Good Hope (home of present day Cape Town) in the middle of the seventeenth century, where they established a fuelling station for Dutch ships travelling to the Spice Islands in the

²⁷ Trevor MacDonald, *Ouma Smuts: The First Lady of South Africa* (London: Hurst & Blackett, Limited, 1946).

²⁸ For an overview of Smuts’ life, see Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v “Jan Smuts,” accessed 17 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jan-Smuts>. See also Richard Steyn, *Jan Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015) for a more comprehensive biography.

²⁹ For an overview of South African history of the period, see Leonard Monteath Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, ed. Lynn Berat, 4th ed., illustrated (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold and War: The Making of South Africa* (London: Pocket Books, 2007). For a more specific overview of the life of Reitz, one can read his memoirs *Commando* (Reitz, *Commando*) *Trekking On* (Reitz, *Trekking On*) and *No Outspan* (Reitz, *No Outspan*).

East, the heart of Holland's sprawling trade empire. In 1795, the British took over the Cape Colony from the Dutch during the Napoleonic wars, and although it briefly returned to Dutch rule after the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, the British took it over permanently in 1806. In the 1830s, Dutch settlers, chafing under British rule, and objecting in particular to the freeing of their slaves, travelled into the South Africa hinterland, on an epic journey known as the Great Trek. Ultimately, after fighting many wars against local African tribes, the Boers established two new republics, the South African Republic (home to present day Johannesburg) and the Orange Free State. The two Afrikaner republics were initially impoverished backwaters, but the discovery of vast deposits of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) revolutionised not only the agrarian economies of the two republics but dramatically shifted the power dynamics of the Southern African region.³⁰ It is also at this point that young Deneys Reitz enters our story, born in 1882 and the son of F.W. Reitz, then President of the Orange Free State, and later Secretary of State in the South African Republic.³¹

Over the next eighteen years, a cascading series of events resulted in the Boer republics declaring war on the British Empire in 1899 (by way of an ultimatum signed by Deneys' father), a war that became known as the Anglo-Boer War. Britain ultimately prevailed after three years, but at great cost in lives and money. Unable to compete with British numerical superiority, the Boer armies successfully resorted to guerilla tactics, and the exasperated British, mindful of their mounting costs in lives and money, responded with brutal scorched earth tactics, burning Afrikaner farmhouses and

³⁰ See generally Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold and War*.

³¹ See Reitz, *Commando*. For an overview of the history of the Reitz family see Martin Meredith, *Afrikaner Odyssey: The Life and Times of the Reitz Family* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2017, Kindle edition).

incarcerating Afrikaner women and children in the world's first concentration camps. The death toll in these camps due to disease and malnutrition was horrific, resulting in much bitterness on the Afrikaner side.³²

The end of the war saw the Afrikaners divided into three camps – “joiners,”³³ “hensoppers” (those who wished to surrender, literally “hands-uppers”) and “bittereinders” (those who were determined to carry on fight to the bitter end). It was this divide that percolated through Afrikanerdom over the next few decades, with hugely consequential results for South Africa and its politics. Young Deneyz Reitz, who served in one of the Boer commandos under future South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts, was initially very much in the latter camp. After attending the peace negotiations at Vereeniging in 1902, he refused to stay in South Africa under the despised British and headed off to exile in Madagascar to work as a transport rider. However, a couple of years later, he was convinced to return by Isie Smuts, the wife of the future Prime Minister, who pointed out that if her husband could tolerate living under British rule, then there was no reason he should not be able to.³⁴ Reitz returned to a very different country. A change of government in Britain resulted in the two Afrikaner republics being granted de facto self-government in 1907, and in 1910 the two republics joined with the British colonies of the Cape Province and Natal, to form the Union of South Africa. The first Prime Minister of the new South Africa was Louis Botha, one of the most prominent

³² See Hermann Giliomee, Bernard Mbenga, and Bill Nasson, *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2022), 293-320.

³³ By the end of the war, approximately 5 000 Afrikaners were fighting on the British side, which accounted for more than one quarter of the Boers still in the field – Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 256-260.

³⁴ Reitz, *Trekking On*.

Boer leaders, and his first cabinet was filled with ex-Boer generals including Jan Smuts. The Afrikaners had lost the war but won the peace.³⁵

One of the first major tests of the new government, and one of the first indications of the growing split in Afrikanerdom came in 1914 with the British declaration of war on Germany. Botha felt strongly that South Africa was obliged, as a dominion of the British Empire, to join the war on the side of the British. At the same time, he agreed that South Africa would attack the neighbouring German colony of South-West Africa (present day Namibia). This precipitated a great outcry amongst Afrikaners, many of whom were violently opposed to fighting on the same side as their erstwhile enemies. The result was a violent rebellion, whereby a number of prominent Boer generals (including the head of the newly formed Union Defence Force) resigned their commission and took up arms against their government. To avoid inflaming tensions further, Botha and Smuts resolved to only use Afrikaner volunteer troops to quell the rebellion, meaning the rebellion turned into a de facto Afrikaner civil war. The rebels were soon defeated, but not before a number of prominent Boer leaders had been killed. One of the ringleaders was executed, but ultimately, in an act of reconciliation, most were freed. The Union Defence Force went on to soundly defeat the Germans in South-West and East Africa, some of the first substantial Allied victories of the war.³⁶

Young Reitz reappears on the public stage at this point – serving in the government forces under Louis Botha at Mushroom Valley (one of the pivotal battles of the Afrikaner rebellion) and in South West Africa, and then serving under Smuts in East

³⁵ Giliomee et al., *New History of South Africa*, 321-344.

³⁶ Giliomee et al., *New History of South Africa*, 345-351.

Africa, all detailed in his second memoir *Trekking On*.³⁷ He then decided to go and fight on the Western Front in France – not in the Union Defence Force but in the British army, ending the war as a lieutenant colonel commanding the first battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Returning home in 1919, he was persuaded to run for Parliament as a member of Botha and Smuts' South Africa Party and so began a successful political career, which saw him serve as a Member of Parliament for a significant part of the next twenty years, as well as being appointed to ministerial posts in various administrations, including a stint as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Native Affairs under Smuts in the late 1930s and early 1940s. During the decades after Union there was an ongoing tussle between the two strands of Afrikanerdom – those who favoured closer alignment with Britain, represented by Smuts and his South Africa Party and the other, more nationalistic inward-looking strand, represented by ex-Boer general, JBM Hertzog and his National Party. In 1924, Hertzog's National Party, in alliance with the worker-friendly Labour Party, had a shock victory over Smuts' South Africa Party, and formed the so-called Pact government. Ultimately the two strands were forced by the Great Depression to form a unity government in 1934, which led to the formation of the United Party. However, this uneasy alliance fell apart as a result of South Africa's decision to join the British side in World War II. The decision was ultimately a close-run thing - a mere thirteen votes in the parliament separated the two sides, and the early years of the war saw terrorist activity and threats of a possible coup by a shadowy neo-Nazi organisation of disgruntled Afrikaners known as the Ossewa Brandwag.³⁸

³⁷ Reitz, *Trekking On*.

³⁸ Richard Steyn's book *Seven Votes: How World War II Changed South Africa Forever*, gives a detailed accounting of the narrow 1939 parliamentary vote which took South Africa into the war on the side of

In the early 1940s, Reitz, suffering from ill-health, was sent by Smuts to London to serve as South African High Commissioner, ostensibly to give him a less stressful posting (although it may have also had something to do with his more liberal racial views, a potential political liability with an upcoming election in 1943).³⁹ Shortly afterwards, in late 1944, he passed away. After the conclusion of war, Smuts suffered a similar fate to his good friend and lifelong confidante, Winston Churchill, and was kicked out of office in 1948 after a narrow defeat by the Afrikaner nationalists. The new government was quick to introduce apartheid, its new policy of formalised racial segregation, followed a few years later by a withdrawal from the British Commonwealth and the declaration of a South African republic. In the decades-long tussle between Afrikaner nationalists and pro-South African unionists, the nationalists had ultimately prevailed and a new era in South African politics had begun, one that was to last until the election of Nelson Mandela and the first multiracial South African government in 1994.⁴⁰

Historiography

The historiography relating to the life and times of Deneys Reitz, and the evolution of the Afrikaner identity and politics over this time accordingly needs to be considered against this historical background.

There is a surprisingly limited amount of secondary scholarship about Reitz's life, given that he was such a prominent public figure. Gerhard Calitz has written a

Britain, and indirectly fueled both Afrikaner and African nationalism – See Richard Steyn, *Seven Votes: How WWII Changed South Africa Forever* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2020). See also Giliomee et al., *New History of South Africa*, 406-437.

³⁹ Frances Mouton, *Die Politieke Loopbaan van Margaret Ballinger* (PhD diss., Department of Arts and Philosophy, University of Pretoria, April 1990), 85.

⁴⁰ Giliomee et al., *New History of South Africa*, 448-452.

comprehensive and useful doctoral thesis on Reitz's life in Afrikaans,⁴¹ but it is primarily based on publicly available material. Calitz himself states that he had limited access to Reitz's personal papers – in particular he notes that he wasn't able to access the collection of diaries, letters and notebooks in his family's possession, although he suggests that”in light of Reitz's published works the damage is not as significant as it may seem at first blush.”⁴² Whilst Reitz's published works provide a detailed chronological account of his life, they arguably, as discussed above, provide only limited insight into his personal motivations or views. This is something this thesis hopes to address, and in doing so provide further insight into the role of the broader historical question of the development of Afrikaner and South African identity during this period.

The secondary literature on this topic is extensive. However, some gaps remain. In his article, “Imagining the New South Africa in the Era of Reconstruction,” Saul Dubow suggests that much of the academic focus on this period has looked at the “rise of the modern, segregationist state,” the growth of the African and Afrikaner nationalist movements and the role played by South Africa's rapid industrialisation after the turn of the century.⁴³ He proposes, however, that one of the major themes of this period, the creation of a new “South African” identity centred around the two white races (Afrikaner and English), has been neglected. Dubow himself seeks to address this by looking at the

⁴¹ Gerhard Johann Calitz, *Deneys Reitz (1882–1944): Krygsman, avonturier en politikus* (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2008).

⁴² Calitz, *Krygsman*, 8-9: “There are limited primary sources about Reitz which can be tracked down. Different collections in different archives, libraries and museums possess items about him, but none of the collections have a complete collection of all his correspondence, official documents etc. Even the private collections in his family's possession are deficient insofar as relates to sources. These collections exist of personal notebooks, diaries and correspondence that Reitz composed during his life.... Unfortunately I was unable to gain access to these collections, but in light of Reitz's published works the damage is not as significant as it may seem at first blush.” (translated from the original Afrikaans by the author).

⁴³ Sal Dubow, “Imagining the 'New' South Africa in the Age of Reconstruction, 1902-12,” in *The Impact of the South African War*, edited by D. Omissi and A. S. Thompson (London: Palgrave, 2002), 76-95.

role played by one of the architects of the Union of South Africa, British High Commissioner, Lord Milner. Dubow argues that Milner and his Oxford-educated acolytes (the so-called Milner Kindergarten) promoted a new “South African” white nationalism, incorporating both British and Afrikaans South Africans.⁴⁴ John Lambert’s article “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s” focuses on the evolution of the identity of English-speaking South Africans into dual citizens of the British Empire and the fledgling South African nation.⁴⁵ Albert Grundlingh has written about Afrikaners fighting in the South African Defence during the Second World War in “The King's Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa's Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939–45.”⁴⁶ From the Afrikaner perspective, the rise of the Afrikaner nationalist movement during the period has received considerable attention.⁴⁷ However, an area of the study that appears to have received less focus in the study of South Africanism and South African identity in the early years of Union is the role played by more moderate Afrikaners (those who favoured reconciliation with the British, and who saw South Africa’s place in the world as being within the British Empire) in creating a new South African identity. As Albert Grundlingh has noted “far less [has been written] on Afrikaans-speakers who outwardly

⁴⁴ Sal Dubow, "Colonial Nationalism, The Milner Kindergarten, and the Rise of 'South Africanism', 1902-10," *History Workshop Journal* 43 (1997): 53-85, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/hwj/1997.43.53>.

⁴⁵ John Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s,” *South African Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (2000): 197–222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470008671913>. See also Andrew Thompson, “The Languages of Loyalism in Southern Africa, c. 1870–1939,” *The English Historical Review* 118, no. 477 (2003): 617–50, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/118.477.617>.

⁴⁶ Albert Grundlingh, “The King's Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa's Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939–45,” *Journal of African History* 40, no. 3 (1999): 351–65, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853799007537>.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Hermann Giliomee, “Constructing Afrikaner Nationalism,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies (Leiden)* 18, no. 1-2 (1983): 83–98, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852183X00074>.

did not measure up to the ideal stereotype of what constituted a “real Afrikaner” and their role in creating a new South African identity.”⁴⁸ It is this gap that this thesis hopes to help address. Although Reitz was in many ways “the ideal stereotype of... a real Afrikaner” - he was descended from Afrikaner “royalty”⁴⁹ with a proud record of service in the Anglo-Boer War - he, like his mentor Smuts, was a different kind of Afrikaner from his more nationalist brethren. Although he identified strongly with his Afrikaner roots, he had a more worldly, internationalist perspective, was completely bilingual with an English wife and children and social views that were moderate for their time. It is for this reason that a study of Reitz and his moderate Afrikaner contemporaries is of interest in understanding the evolution of a new South African identity during the first half of the twentieth century and addressing the gap in the literature around the role played by moderate Afrikaners.

In 1914, Reitz, along with a number of his fellow Afrikaners, volunteered to fight against his fellow Afrikaners in the Afrikaner rebellion of 1914-15. There is considerable academic scholarship on the causes of this rebellion, which has been described as “a struggle for power between traditionalists and modernisers for the soul of Afrikanerdom.”⁵⁰ It has been suggested, however, that a question that needs further

⁴⁸ Grundlingh, “The King’s Afrikaners,” 353. In this article Grundlingh considers the factors that played in role in many Afrikaners enlisting in the Union Defence Force during the Second World War to fight on the British side.

⁴⁹ See further Chapter II (Evolution) below. Reitz’s father was Secretary of the South African Republic and his grandfather had been the president of the Orange Free State. On the Reitz family generally, see Martin Meredith, *Afrikaner Odyssey*.

⁵⁰ Kent Fedorowich, “Sleeping With the Lion? The Loyal Afrikaner and the South African Rebellion of 1914–15,” *South African Historical Journal/South African Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (November 2003): 71–95, 76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470308671448>. See also John Bottomley, “The Orange Free State and the Rebellion of 1914: The Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whiteism” in R. Morrell, ed., *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940* (Pretoria, 1992): 29-39, <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/items/d06684e0-eb56-4ebe-a508-29a4e999945d>. See also Sandra Swart, “‘Desperate Men’: The 1914 Rebellion and the Politics of Poverty,” *South African Historical*

examination in the context of the rebellion is who the “‘loyal’ Afrikaners were and what their reasons were for supporting General Botha” in what amounted to a de facto Afrikaner ‘civil war’.⁵¹ This is also a question that this thesis hopes to answer, along with the related question of why Reitz, along with many others, was happy to fight on the side of the British, their erstwhile enemies, in the First World War, and to consider what this says about the evolution of South African identity during these early years of Union.

This thesis also contributes to our knowledge of the role played by women in supporting and advancing the cause of the reconciliatory faction. Scholars have examined the role of Afrikaner women in promoting and supporting the Afrikaner nationalist faction. This scholarship suggests, for example, that Afrikaner women played a key role in supporting and mobilising the Afrikaner forces in both the Anglo-Boer War and the 1914-1915 rebellion, and also got involved politically, forming their own nationalist parties in 1915.⁵² Yet, once again, the role played by women in the moderate faction is largely overlooked.

Reitz’s wife Leila was certainly not your stereotypical Afrikaner wife. For starters, she was English, and as already mentioned, she was an important historical figure in her own right, being South Africa’s first female Member of Parliament and a leading light in the South African suffragette movement, as well as a vocal campaigner

Journal/South African Historical Journal 42, no. 1 (May 2000): 161–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470008671372>. Swart, “‘A Boer and His Gun and His Wife Are Three Things Always Together’.

⁵¹ Fedorowich, “‘Sleeping with the Lion?,” 73.

⁵² Louise Vincent, “The Power behind the Scenes: The Afrikaner Nationalist Women’s Parties, 1915 to 1931,” *South African Historical Journal* 40, no. 1 (1999): 51-73, SADDa, Provost Marshal Papers, K series, box 127, PM 2797, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582479908671348>. See also Elsabe Brink, “Man-Made Women: Gender Class and Ideology of the Volksmoeder” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, Cheryl Walker ed. (Cape Town; London : D. Philip ; J. Currey, 1990); Sandra Swart, ‘Motherhood and Otherhood’ – gendered citizenship and Afrikaner women in the South African 1914 Rebellion, *African Historical Review*, 39(2), 2007, 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17532520701786160>.

on social reform issues. As such she provides a useful opportunity to consider an additional angle in the development of South African identity during this period – the intersection between gender politics and identity politics. In this regard, Cheryl Walker and others have written extensively about the women’s suffrage movement in the early decades of the union, the central role played by middle-class English women in that movement, and the alignment of interests between the suffragette movement and Afrikaner nationalists in increasing the number of white voters and diminishing the non-white vote.⁵³ Suzanne Klausen has also written about the birth control movement, and how that was motivated in part by a desire to limit the burgeoning population growth amongst so-called “poor whites” which it was felt was bringing down the “quality” of the white population.⁵⁴ As Leila Reitz was heavily involved in both these movements, this thesis will examine her role in and views on these matters, in order to ascertain how it interplays with the other factors impacting the development of a new South African identity during this period.

Overview

The second chapter of this thesis will focus on the philosophy of South Africanism generally and will look to consider how the views of Reitz and other

⁵³ Helen Dampier, ““Going on with Our Little Movement in the Hum Drum -Way Which Alone Is Possible in a Land like This’: Olive Schreiner and Suffrage Networks in Britain and South Africa, 1905–1913,” *Women’s History Review* 25, no. 4 (2016): 536-550, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2015.1114319>; Cheryl Walker, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement: The Politics of Gender, Race and Class,” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Rebecca K. Shankar, Chapter 13 (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1990); Deborah Gaitskell, “The Imperial Tie: Obstacle or Asset for South Africa’s Women Suffragists before 1930?” *South African Historical Journal* 47, no. 1 (2002): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470208671432>.

⁵⁴ Susanne Klausen, “The Uncertain Future of White Supremacy and the Politics of Fertility in South Africa, 1930–1939,” presentation at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, Johannesburg, November 5, 2002, <https://phambo.wiser.org.za/files/seminars/Klausen2002.pdf>.

moderate Afrikaners on South African identity evolved over time from the end of the Anglo-Boer, through to his death in 1944. It will be argued that at the heart of Reitz's moderate faction's adoption of this new ideology lay a trade-off, a willingness to adopt a more reconciliatory approach to their English-speaking countrymen and accept a subordinate status within the British Empire, provided Afrikaner political and cultural rights were protected and recognizing the economic and security benefits of being part of what was (at that time) the world's largest empire. It will be further argued that complex interplay of other factors ultimately made it more palatable for many Afrikaners to accept this pragmatic quid pro quo and eventually in some cases, as the example of Reitz demonstrates, saw it evolve over time from something transactional to something more heartfelt. This included the magnanimous post-war behavior of the British in granting self-government to the Boer Republics, the personal loyalty which the key leaders of the moderate faction, such as Botha and Smuts, engendered amongst many Afrikaners, and an increased degree of interconnectivity between Afrikaans and English-speakers in South Africa's small white population. This all took place against the backdrop of "retreating British imperialism,"⁵⁵ as Britain granted an increasing degree of free reign to certain of its colonies, primarily those that were governed by white settlers. This thesis argues that as Britain loosened the colonial leash, and Afrikaners became more comfortable that their cultural and political rights would be protected, this helped mute the more strident forms of Afrikaner nationalism and made many Afrikaners more willing to accept a new South African identity centered around white racial unity between Afrikaner and English, rather than purely Afrikaner-centric concerns.

⁵⁵ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, 361

However, none of this can be properly explained without understanding the racial context of the time, the focus of the third chapter. As the chapter will seek to demonstrate, a key motivating factor underpinning the desire for reconciliation on both sides and the philosophy of South Africanism was the belief that white racial solidarity was imperative for ensuring the maintenance of white minority power in a Black majority country. Ultimately, as this thesis argues, it was this consideration that trumped all others – at its heart South Africanism was an identity in which race was central, and the desire for white racial unity ultimately trumped the linguistic, class and other differences between the two groupings. It will also demonstrate how this increasing focus on white unity took place against a backdrop of questionable pseudo-scientific beliefs about the inherent biological superiority of whites, as well as industrial interest caused by the growing threat of cheap Black labor and increased concerns in the 1920s and 1930s about a growing poor white problem, which it was felt increased the risk of “social-levelling” between Blacks and whites.

Finally, the fourth chapter of this thesis will consider the role played by women in creating this new South African identity, with a particular focus on Deneys Reitz’s wife Leila. It will also contrast her with Jan Smuts’ wife Isie, who represented a very different version of South African womanhood, but also ultimately ended up as a fervent advocate for South Africanism. The chapter argues that women, both South African and British, played a key role in encouraging Afrikaner / English reconciliation. It further contends that racial considerations were once again key in ensuring an alignment of interests between male and female white South Africans, whether English or Afrikaans, and whether conservative or progressive. It demonstrates how the success of the women’s

suffrage movement was ultimately only achieved once its' goals aligned with the interest of Afrikaner nationalists in maximizing the white vote. Furthermore, it shows how racial motivations underpinned some of the other campaigns undertaken by women's rights campaigners, in particular the fight for improved birth control. Finally, the chapter considers some of the British women with strong ties to South Africa and close friendships with men like Smuts and Reitz and show how they also impacted directly and indirectly the conversation around South African identity in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter II.

South Africanism

“South Africanism had to find a place for itself between advancing Afrikaner nationalism and retreating English imperialism.”

- Herman Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*⁵⁶

A couple of years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War, young Deneys Reitz found himself at a train station in the eastern part of the Transvaal province of South Africa, penniless, stricken with malaria and thoroughly despondent about his future. The other members of his family were in exile, and he had nowhere to go and not a cent to his name. He was taken in by his old wartime leader, General Jan Smuts, and his wife Isie,⁵⁷ the latter of whom had enticed Reitz back home from exile, by gently encouraging him in a letter sent to Madagascar: "If your own general of the war, my husband, had now accepted the hand of friendship from England under the Union Jack, surely you, his lieutenant, can do likewise."⁵⁸ Reitz spent the next three years recuperating at the Smuts' simple family home in Pretoria, where as a young man he got to watch Boer generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, both future Prime Ministers of a united South Africa, plotting the way forward for the war-stricken, divided country. This was a formative period in young Reitz's life, during which his future political ideology was shaped. In his second autobiographical novel, *Trekking On*, he described it as follows - "[Louis Botha

⁵⁶ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, 361.

⁵⁷ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 47; Own Correspondent, "Why He Returned from Madagascar," *Rand Daily Mail*, March 14, 1921, Stellenbosch University Library, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

⁵⁸ Trevor MacDonald, *Ouma Smuts: The First Lady of South Africa* (London: Hurst & Blackett, Limited, 1946), 44.

and Jan Smuts] showed me that only on a basis of burying past quarrels and creating a united people out of the Dutch and English sections of the population, was there any hope for white men in South Africa. I became their devoted follower, and my acceptance of their creed was profoundly to influence my life in the years to come.”⁵⁹ Scholars have since dubbed the ideology he refers to as “South Africanism,”⁶⁰ which is described as “the dominant force in white politics” in the period from the end of Anglo-Boer War up until the formation of the first apartheid government in 1948.⁶¹ It was, in essence, an ideology which sought to promote a new kind of South African national identity, one which, in the words of Reitz, was “based on the equality of the two [white] races, on co-operation between them and an acceptance of the Union’s place in the Empire.”⁶²

Through a detailed review of the correspondence, diaries, writings and public pronouncements of Reitz and certain of his contemporaries, this chapter will look to consider the factors and considerations which influenced Reitz and other moderate Afrikaners to embrace this ideology of “South Africanism.” It argues that for some Afrikaners like Reitz, the initial adoption of South Africanism had more to do with personal loyalties and intra-Afrikaner political infighting than any particular fondness for the British. Over time, however, this evolved into a more genuine appreciation of the British and the benefits of Empire. In cases like Reitz and Smuts, this change of heart was

⁵⁹ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 47.

⁶⁰ In his article considering why so many Afrikaners enlisted in the Union Defence Forces in WW2, Grundlingh defined South Africanism as follows: “It was an ideology that in part had its roots in capitalist interests which sought to subdue and incorporate a fractious white working-class during a period of considerable strife on the labour front during the first quarter of the century. It promoted a composite white South African nationhood consisting of Afrikaans and English-speakers which stood in contrast to the narrow ethno-nationalist line taken by the National Party” - Grundlingh, “The King’s Afrikaners?,” 359.

⁶¹ Saul Dubow, “Imagining the new South Africa,” 92.

⁶² D. Reitz (edited by T.S. Emslie), *Adrift on the Open Veld: The Anglo-Boer War and its Aftermath, 1899-1943* (Cape Town, 1999), 364.

inspired in part by an appreciation of the generous treatment of the Boers after the war, in particular the granting of self-government, and made easier by a familiarity with the English language and strong connections with the English-speaking community. In other cases, it will be argued that the adoption of this new ideology was more transactional, a practical trade-off which recognized that many of the trade and security benefits of being part of the world's largest empire could be obtained, whilst still maintaining a significant amount of autonomy. This trade-off became increasingly palatable for many Afrikaners in the years after the First World War, as Britain's role in South Africa became increasingly hands-off, and various domestic legislation was passed to protect Afrikaner cultural and political rights, as well as entrenching white supremacy. A key motivating factor underpinning the desire for reconciliation on both sides and the philosophy of South African was the belief that white racial solidarity was imperative for ensuring the maintenance of white minority power in a Black majority country. Ultimately, it was this consideration that trumped all others – at its heart South Africanism (as Reitz's quote above suggests) was an identity in which race was central, and the desire for white racial unity ultimately trumped the linguistic and other differences between the two groupings.

In his comprehensive history of the Afrikaans people, Herman Giliomee notes that "South Africanism had to find a place for itself between advancing Afrikaner nationalism and retreating English imperialism."⁶³ It is at this uncertain intersection of identity that Deneys Reitz, a young man of twenty-eight at the time of Union, ultimately found himself.

⁶³ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, 361.

British Magnanimity

Before analyzing which factors influenced Reitz's embrace of the new "South Africanism," it is useful to consider what caused the original founding fathers of this creed, Botha and Smuts (both Boer generals who had fought to the end of the war), to favor a reconciliatory approach to their erstwhile adversaries. The conventional wisdom is that they were inspired to do so by the magnanimity of the new Liberal government that came to power in Britain in 1906 under Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and in particular their decision to grant the Afrikaners self-government in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1907 (a mere five years after the end of the war).⁶⁴ To the end of his days, Smuts took credit for the role he played convincing Campbell-Bannerman of the merits of allowing Afrikaner self-government after a trip that he and Botha took to Britain in 1906.⁶⁵ In his article "Post-war: the myth of magnanimity, 1905-1907," Ronald Hyam argues, however, that the British decision to allow Boer self-government had more to do with expedience than magnanimity, and questions whether the Afrikaners had any genuine desire for reconciliation with the British, at least initially.⁶⁶ There is no doubt that there were good pragmatic reasons for the British decision – the war in South Africa had been won at great cost in men and money, and Britain, with its large, expensive empire, could ill-afford to maintain a far-flung colony with an antagonistic local population on its hands. Indeed, one of Smuts' arguments to Campbell-Bannerman was

⁶⁴ Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw, "Post-war: the Myth of Magnanimity, 1905-1907," in *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa Since the Boer War* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 57, fn 1.

⁶⁵ Hyam, "Post-war: the Myth of Magnanimity"; Roger Southall, *Smuts and Mandela: The Men Who Made South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2023), 91.

⁶⁶ Hyam, "Post-war: the Myth of Magnanimity," 72.

that they didn't want another Ireland on their hands.⁶⁷ The tactics used by the British to win the war, in particular the internment of Boer women and children in concentration camps in which many thousands had died, had done no small harm to Britain's international reputation. A show of magnanimity in victory could go a long way to helping restore that. Hyam also suggests that the British had not intended that Smuts and Botha's party, Het Volk (the People), would win the local elections, but once their gamble in calling elections proved unsuccessful, they dressed it up as magnanimity.⁶⁸

On the Afrikaner side, Hyam questions the genuineness of the Botha and Smuts conciliatory approach. He points, for example, to the Botha government's decision to invade German South West Africa in 1914 at Britain's request, and points to evidence that it was motivated primarily by the government's own territorial ambitions.⁶⁹ A letter written from Smuts to Reitz in 1914 suggests there is some merit to this. Smuts was responding to a letter from Reitz informing him of the activities of local Afrikaner nationalists in Heilbron (where Reitz was living) during the 1914 rebellion. In the letter, he agrees that the rebellion is driven in part by political motives but then goes on to state that he is not afraid it will lead to civil war. He seeks to allay Reitz's concerns by assuring him: "You will see, when all is over and German South West Africa again forms a part of our Afrikaner heritage, feeling will quickly swing round and our action be generally approved."⁷⁰ His use of the phrase "our Afrikaner heritage" is particularly interesting. It suggests that Botha and Smuts' motivations for invading German South-

⁶⁷ Richard Steyn, *Jan Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015), 74; Hyam, "Post-war: the Myth of Magnanimity," 59, fn 6 and 7.

⁶⁸ Hyam, "Post-war: the Myth of Magnanimity," 65.

⁶⁹ Hyam, "Post-war: the Myth of Magnanimity," 71.

⁷⁰ J. C. Smuts to D. Reitz, September 22, 1914, Nr 594 in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume II, June 1910-November 1918)*, 595.

West Africa were not driven purely by feelings of obligation to their new British masters and were at least partially driven by territorial ambitions of their own. Even more interesting, however, is that Smuts refers to “Afrikaner heritage” rather than “South African heritage”. Despite his publicly stated commitment to the new union and reconciliation of Boer and Briton, this language suggests Smuts still thought himself more of an Afrikaner than a South African some four years after the formation of the Union.

There is no doubt as well that some political calculus lay behind their decision to pursue a policy of reconciliation with the English. On the international stage, Botha and Smuts appreciated that the best chance for the fledgling South African union to survive would be within the comforting embrace of the British Empire, with easy tariff-free access to its markets which covered a quarter of the world’s surface and with the protection of its globally dominant navy. Later in life, in a speech in 1938, Smuts described the benefits of dominion status as follows:

What advantage is there for South Africa in secession? Nearly 80% of our products are sold on the markets of Great Britain. Just try to sell all that produce elsewhere you will find that there would be nothing doing. Then there is the question of protection. Will these arrogant Nationalists protect us from aggression? Enemy warships could destroy our coastline; they could send aeroplanes inland to bombard our cities. We have no ships to protect ourselves. But the British Navy is still the greatest force in the world, and we have its protection free, gratis and for nothing.⁷¹

This statement was obviously made against the backdrop of the dark clouds gathering over Europe in the late 1930s when the threat of war was very real. However, in the early 1900s, these considerations would have been equally valid. South Africa,

⁷¹ "General Smuts Castigates Republicans who Ran," *Rand Daily Mail*, April 22, 1938, Stellenbosch University library, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

something of an economic backwater at this time, could only benefit from being incorporated into British trade routes. Furthermore at a time when European powers were still greedily eyeing Africa and its resources as part of the Scramble for Africa,⁷² the young nation(with no navy of its own to speak of) would have been vulnerable to predation from other colonial powers. Political considerations were equally important - domestically, Botha and Smuts had become increasingly reliant on English-speaking South African votes to win elections, following the split with Hertzog's National Party in 1914.⁷³ As we will see in the next chapter, there was also some racial calculus in this decision as well.

All of that being said, it seems apparent from the written record that Smuts felt a genuine gratitude to Campbell-Bannerman, which suggests that, at least on the Boer side, the reconciliatory talk wasn't all smoke and mirrors. In a letter written to Jan Smuts by his close friend, the Quaker Englishwoman, Margaret Gillet, on Campbell-Bannerman's death in 1908, she recalls Smuts describing Campbell-Bannerman as his rock and the Afrikaner's best friend and she wonders "if he [Campbell-Bannerman] realized how much he had done in South Africa."⁷⁴ In response, Smuts wrote as follows:

Many thanks for your dear letter which I read with great pleasure. The loss of [Campbell-Bannerman]. we have felt severely, but really so far as South Africa was concerned his work was done. It is enduring work and will ever remain a monument to Liberal policy at its very best.... [Campbell-Bannerman] and Louis Botha—both men of the same type and mould—will ever remain in history as co-workers of this miracle in South Africa.⁷⁵

⁷² *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. "Scramble for Africa," last modified December 20, 2024, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Scramble-for-Africa>.

⁷³ Lambert, "South African British?," 213; Southall, *Smuts and Mandela*, 158-160.

⁷⁴ M.C. Gillet to Jan Smuts, April 24 1908, Nr 379 in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 430.

⁷⁵ Jan Smuts to M.C. Gillet, May 14, 1908, Nr 380 in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 381 .

“Liberal policy at its very best” refers to here to the pacifist and anti-imperialist policies of the British Liberal Party in the early twentieth century.⁷⁶ Indeed, part of the reason for the Liberals’ victory in the 1906 election was their success in attacking the conduct of the Boer War by the governing Conservatives⁷⁷ and it was allegedly General Kitchener’s assurance to Smuts and Botha that the more Boer-friendly Liberals were likely to come into power at the next election that encouraged the Boer leaders to agree to lay down their arms in 1902.⁷⁸ These letters were written less than two years after Smuts had met with Campbell-Bannerman, and six years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War. They were private letters not meant for public consumption, and they certainly suggest that Smuts’ belief in the magnanimity of the British was genuine, and not purely an ex post-facto manufactured myth as Hyam suggests. As we will see, this belief was shared by others: Deneys Reitz and Smuts’ wife, Isie.

It is perhaps also telling that at the Versailles peace conference at the end of the First World War, Botha and Smuts were two of the biggest opponents of imposing excessive war reparations on Germany, due primarily to their experience of the benefits of magnanimity in victory following the Anglo Boer War.⁷⁹ Reitz described Botha as saying that “we in South Africa had experienced the benefit of generous treatment of the vanquished by the victor, and he and General Smuts agreed that it was a mistaken policy

⁷⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Liberal Party,” last modified October 17, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Liberal-Party-political-party-United-Kingdom>.

⁷⁷ One particularly effective attack was a speech made by Campbell-Bannerman decrying the “methods of barbarism” used by Britain in conducting the war, which speech was motivated by information fed to him by Emily Hobhouse - British Library. “Methods of Barbarism: How Emily Hobhouse Exposed the Humanitarian Crisis of the Boer War.” *Untold Lives Blog*, January 21, 2019, <https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2019/01/methods-of-barbarism-how-emily-hobhouse-exposed-the-humanitarian-crisis-of-the-boer-war.html>.

⁷⁸ Steyn, *Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness*, 64.

⁷⁹ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 307.

to impose humiliating conditions on a beaten enemy.”⁸⁰ Reitz clearly also felt the same way - in a speech to the South African Club in 1939, shortly after South Africa had declared war on Nazi Germany, Reitz said the following about the British – “the British have treated us with greater generosity than any other nation has treated any other race they have beaten in war. I have not forgotten that.”⁸¹ In an opinion piece written in the New York Times in 1943 he wrote “...the British treated South Africa with generosity. They not only returned the two republics, but they threw in the provinces of the Cape and Natal for good measure, and when, years later, I decided to return to my country I found that there was complete freedom and safety within the four corners of the Empire.”⁸² Regardless of the British motivations for their magnanimous treatment of the defeated Boers, it certainly appeared to have created significant goodwill amongst a sector of the Afrikaner population, which undoubtedly made it easier for them to pursue a policy of reconciliation with their English-speaking countrymen. As we will see below, from an analysis of some of Reitz’s private writings in the immediate aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War, he did not always feel so well-disposed towards the English, but as is clear from the above, the subsequent post-war magnanimity of the British, regardless of the reasons for it, helped contribute to his Damascene conversion, and ultimately made it easier for him to buy into a new South African identity which saw itself as part of the greater British Empire.

⁸⁰ Reitz, *No Outspan*, 11.

⁸¹ "Col Reitz Tells Inside Story of Cabinet Split," *Rand Daily Mail*, September 14, 1939, Stellenbosch University Library, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

⁸² Deney's Reitz, "Again the Land of Good Hope: South Africa under General Jan Smuts," *New York Times*, August 22, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

Personal Loyalties

In the post-war period leading up to Union and the First World War, Reitz's conversion into a committed Anglophile lay in the distant future. If one reads his private correspondence during this time, it suggests that Reitz's initial embrace of South Africanism had little to do with any particular affinity for the British and much more to do with Afrikaner internal politics of the time and his personal relationships. As Reitz's quote in the introduction to this chapter suggests, a key factor in his early adoption of South Africanism was his personal loyalty to General Smuts. Not only did Reitz spend two years on commando under Smuts in the Cape Province behind enemy lines, but as already noted, he spent three years living with Jan and Isie Smuts at their home in Pretoria recuperating from his year in exile. The depth of his gratitude to the Smuts' is clear from the following letter that Reitz wrote to Isie Smuts in 1906:

Now, I know you and Uncle Jannie do not like expressions of thanks, but I still cannot refrain from giving you my sincere thanks for the three years of friendship and help I received at Zorgvliet, three years during which I got back on my feet and for which I can never be too grateful. When I came back from Madagascar, I was so despondent that I almost went to the Germans or to Humpata, but thanks to your help and that of Uncle Jannie, I got back on track, and it will be my own fault if I do not progress now. So I thank you once again from the bottom of my heart, and what I cannot express here on paper, you can know stands firm in my heart.⁸³

This personal devotion to Smuts continued throughout his life. In their correspondence they affectionately called each other "Nyssie" and "Oom [Uncle] Jannie" respectively,⁸⁴ and Reitz's political career closely tracked that of Smuts. He served as a minister in both Smuts administrations (including as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister

⁸³ D Reitz to I Smuts, December 12, 1906, South African National Archives, Pretoria, South Africa.

⁸⁴ See, for example, D Reitz to J C Smuts, September 14, 1914, Letter Nr 593 and J C Smuts to D Reitz, 22 September 1914, Letter Nr 594 both in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers* (Volume 2), June 1910-November 1918, 197-198.

of Native Affairs in the wartime administration during WWII). An entry from his personal diaries in June 1923 shows the extent of this devotion:

The more I see of General Smuts and his conduct of complicated problems, the more I admire him. I have always respected and liked him but never until I was thrown in close daily contact with him, as at present, did I fully realize what a genius he is. ... We all loved General Botha but as far as ability is concerned there is no comparison between them.... Gen Botha was a great-hearted lovable man who had the faculty of binding men to him with great personal attraction, but he was no great mind. Smuts, on the other hand, may lack the human touch, but in mental power and intellectual price he is head and shoulders above any other man that I have ever met.... Am [sic] no blind hero-worshipper of any man but he is the one man in SA to whom I would subordinate my judgement so implicit is my faith in him.⁸⁵

Notwithstanding his protestation to the contrary, it is apparent that Reitz's devotion to Smuts did border on hero worship. Reitz was not alone in this. Both Smuts and Botha inspired considerable loyalty amongst those who had fought with and under them. Historian Kent Fedorowich suggests that personal loyalty and family ties played an important role in Afrikaner post-war politics.⁸⁶ The post-war Afrikaner political elite was small and heavily interconnected, and many of them had fought alongside each other during the Anglo-Boer War. In his personal diary of 1918, Reitz himself recounts an anecdote which illustrates the point: Coenie Brits, one of Louis Botha's generals in the German South-West Africa campaign, was asked by Botha if he would fight for him in the campaign. Brits allegedly responded by saying he was ready to fight but wanted to know who they were fighting against – the Germans or the British?⁸⁷ Like Reitz, personal loyalty often seems to have been a more important initial factor in encouraging many

⁸⁵ Deneys Reitz, *Personal Diaries*, 1923, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa.

⁸⁶ Fedorowich, "Sleeping with the Lion," 93.

⁸⁷ Deneys Reitz, *Personal Diaries*, 1918, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa; Reitz, *Trekking On*, 68.

moderate Afrikaners to follow the path of reconciliation, rather than any ideological conviction or particular fondness for the English. Certainly, once Smuts and Botha became fervent advocates of reconciliation, whether inspired by British magnanimity, or for pragmatic political reasons (or a combination of both), it encouraged a number of their supporters, such as Reitz, to follow suit.

Afrikaner Civil War

The evolution of Reitz's political views in the early years of the century also need to be understood against the internal Afrikaner politics of the time. In 1937, in his personal diary, Reitz described the Afrikaners as follows: "We are like the Irish; when we have no external enemy we turn upon ourselves."⁸⁸ The factional in-fighting in Afrikanerdom in the decades following the Anglo-Boer War certainly demonstrates the accuracy of this quote. In his private journals written at the end of the Anglo-Boer War, Reitz highlighted the nuanced hierarchy that existed amongst Afrikaners in the immediate post-war period. There was a clear pyramid of social acceptability, with a person's ranking being largely determined by the role he played in the war. He placed himself in the top tier of the pyramid, in a category he classifies as "Wild Boers (also called the Irreconcilables, Bitter-enders, and Malignants by the English) - to this detachment I had the honour to belong to myself."⁸⁹ In the next level down were those who had participated in the war until its end, but in non-military roles. "After us came the bush-lancers, the ambulancemen, and other lager-types [those who stayed behind in the camps]

⁸⁸ Deneys Reitz, *Personal Diaries*, 1937, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa.

⁸⁹ Deneys Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar 1902 - 1903* (Pretoria, South Africa, 1905), translated by Michael Reitz, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa, 56.

who, although they did not fight much and were a bit looked-down on by us, had after all also remained in the field for the whole war.”⁹⁰

These non-militants in turn looked down on the “hands-uppers” (those who surrendered before the war’s end) and prisoners-of-war. As Reitz recounted:

Then again there were the castes among prisoners of war, who were divided into a number of sub-groups; to wit those who had been honourably captured in the field; and those who had hands-upped and after that were trans-shipped by the enemy because refusing to give their parole. The former group did not associate with the latter class, who they called the “not-nabbed but gave-up” section... Even among the hands-uppers there were a host of hair-fine distinctions that had to be minutely observed so as not to hurt their feelings... Similar razor-fine barriers also prevailed among the women, so it was a matter of great difficulty to know with which particular caste or group or sub-group one was dealing and it required not a little tact to go through society without mishap.⁹¹

Reitz’s use of the word “caste” is interesting – he is suggesting that post-war Afrikaner society was not unlike the rigid Indian class system which persists in parts of India to this day. It is clear from subsequent events and Reitz’s writings that these hierarchical rankings based on one’s war service continued to percolate through and play a role in Afrikaner society in the years to follow. It is noteworthy, for example, that all the South African Prime Ministers from 1910 to 1948 (namely Botha, Smuts and Hertzog) were “bittereinders,” as were many of the Afrikaner members of their cabinets, including Reitz. Arguably, it is Smuts, Botha and Reitz’s status as “bittereinders” that gave them credibility amongst their fellow Afrikaners and afforded them greater leeway to pursue a policy of reconciliation with their erstwhile British foes. One could draw parallels in this regard with a later South African leader, Nelson Mandela, whose impeccable credentials

⁹⁰ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar*, 56.

⁹¹ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar*, 57.

in the struggle against apartheid gave him the political capital necessary to pursue a policy of reconciliation with his former opponents.⁹²

Yet Reitz's experience in the post-war years demonstrates how the dynamics of this hierarchy also began to shift. After three years spent recovering at the Smuts home, Reitz took up legal studies and then moved to the town of Heilbron in the Orange Free State to practice law. It is not clear why Reitz chose a small, provincial town and future hotbed of Afrikaner nationalism, as the place to settle and launch his practice. In his second book, "Trekking On" he had the following to say about his new home:

The place had under fifteen hundred inhabitants, but it was the centre of a sturdy Boer peasantry who had fought bravely during the war, in the course of which they had suffered great losses. Their grim jest, "my wife and children died in the concentration camps, my home is burnt down and my cattle gone, but otherwise there is nothing to complain of," was a fair illustration of what many of them had suffered, and of their unbroken spirit. Now they were back on their ruined farms, patiently at work, and among them I lived for the next five years."⁹³

In a letter to his sister Bessie, written in 1907, he made it clear that he felt very comfortable amongst his fellow Afrikaners – "The people here are all very friendly, and I already feel completely at home."⁹⁴

The idealized terms in which he describes his new neighbors and his choice of this rural, heavily Afrikaans hamlet as his new home suggests that he still identified strongly with his Afrikaner roots. However, six years later, by 1913, things had changed dramatically. The two British colonies of the Cape and Natal and the two Boer states of the South African Republic and Orange Free State had united to form the Union of South

⁹² See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. Nelson Mandela," accessed October 7, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nelson-Mandela/Incarceration>.

⁹³ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 48.

⁹⁴ Deneys Reitz to Bessie Reitz, April 4, 1907, translation by D Yuill, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Africa, which was headed by the new South African Party, under the leadership of two former Boer generals, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts. Another Boer general, JB Hertzog, had been fired from his position as Minister of Justice in the Botha cabinet after publicly disagreeing with various government policies, and had broken away from the South African Party to form a new political entity, the National Party (which was to ultimately dominate South African politics for the second half of the twentieth century). This party became a home for disgruntled Afrikaner nationalists, particularly those who were strongly opposed to the Botha government's policy of reconciliation with Britain. Afrikanerdom was splitting in half, and these divisions were percolating throughout Afrikaner society. The Orange Free State (previously the Orange River Colony), in particular, had become a hotbed of Afrikaner nationalism – in the national elections of 1915, all but one of the parliamentary seats in the province were won by Hertzog's Nationalist Party.⁹⁵

Afrikaner unity was always historically a largely illusory concept,⁹⁶ and the letters written by Reitz to his family from Heilbron during this period demonstrates the extent to which whatever fragile Afrikaner unity had existed in the post-war years had rapidly disintegrated in the heat of the contentious politics of governing a new country. Writing to his sister, Bessie, in 1913, Reitz suggested the following about the Afrikaner nationalists in Heilbron: "If the innocent rural population continues to be incited by those narrow-minded leaders, there may be another civil war here in the Free State - I have

⁹⁵ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "1915 South African general election," accessed 7 October, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1915_South_African_general_election.

⁹⁶ "No sooner have [the Afrikaners] set up a leader or a government but they start undermining their own handiwork and all our history has been one of hiving off into bickering factions and internal quarrels among ourselves." – Reitz, *No Outspan*, 84.

already been threatened by several fanatics with physical violence - being a "Botha-man" (as I am) is considered a greater insult among these people than "Handsupper" or "National Scout" used to be."⁹⁷ This suggests that amongst certain sections of Afrikaner society, the elaborate post-war hierarchy described by Reitz in his journals was therefore becoming inverted, at least among certain sectors of the Afrikaans population, with those who supported Botha and Smuts (i.e. those who favored reconciliation with the British) now seen as the traitors to the Afrikaner cause.

By 1914 things had got even worse. That August, the British declared war on Germany. South Africa, as a British dominion, was drawn in on the British side. The Botha government went a step further, however, by acceding to a British request to invade German-held South-West Africa, on South Africa's north-western border, and this event then precipitated the rebellion and *de facto* civil war amongst Afrikaners. Much like the nasty European scuffle which ostensibly triggered it, the 1914 rebellion and its underlying causes have been much debated in the academic literature. The conventional wisdom is that whilst the decision to fight on the British side and invade South-West Africa was the immediate trigger, this was ultimately a pretext for Afrikaner nationalists, increasingly unhappy with a reconciliatory pro-British Union government, to overthrow their erstwhile comrades, or at the very least to cut the imperial apron strings of a distracted Britain.⁹⁸ Fedorowich calls the rebellion "a struggle for power between traditionalists and modernisers for the soul of Afrikanerdom," others such as John Bottomley and Sandra Swart have suggested respectively that factors that motivated the

⁹⁷ Deney's Reitz to Bessie Reitz, translation by David Yuill, April 25, 1913, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

⁹⁸ Fedorowich, "The Sleeping Lion," 72.

Afrikaner rebels included poverty⁹⁹ and growing threats to Boer masculinity of the newly developing society.¹⁰⁰

Undoubtedly, the factors which led to the tumultuous events of 1914 were complex. However, Reitz's letter referenced above, written in the year before the rebellion, certainly suggests that the rebellion was not a spontaneous response to the decision to invade German South-West Africa. It seems apparent the split in Afrikanerdom was reaching a boiling point well before the events of 1914. Reitz's correspondence also seems to suggest, at least in his view, that those who were stoking the flames of rebellion were doing so for their own political purposes. Writing to his stepmother in the Cape Colony at the end of 1914 he observed:

Our opposition to the Rebellion has nothing to do with love or otherwise for the British Empire, but we can never allow the illiterate element to establish their dominance over us.... just as little as an Englishman would tolerate coal heavers or hop-pickers wanting to play the boss, we will not tolerate here a class of illiterate narrow-minded people trying to establish a Jacquerie over us.¹⁰¹

Reitz's use of the term "Jacquerie," a reference to a 14th century peasant revolt in medieval France,¹⁰² is an interesting one. It suggests that there is some merit to the thesis proposed by Bottomley – that a number of the Afrikaner rebels were motivated partially by their parlous economic circumstances, and their fear that there was no place for them in a new country dominated by capitalist and imperialist interests.¹⁰³ On the other hand, it has been pointed out that Botha's followers were mostly professionals or men of means

⁹⁹ Bottomley, "The Orange Free State and the Rebellion of 1914"; See also Swart, "'Desperate Men.'"

¹⁰⁰ Swart, "'A Boer and His Gun and His Wife Are Three Things Always Together'."

¹⁰¹ Deneys Reitz to Cornelia Reitz, translation by D Yuill, April 25, 1913, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

¹⁰² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Jacquerie," accessed October 7, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jacquerie>.

¹⁰³ Bottomley, "The Orange Free State and the Rebellion of 1914."

who were benefiting from an economy that was rapidly growing under a united and increasingly integrated South Africa.¹⁰⁴ Reitz, a practising lawyer, clearly fell in the latter camp, and his reference to the rebellion as a peasant revolt would suggest that he saw an element of class struggle in the rebellion.

However, Reitz's correspondence also suggests that the economic fears of the poorer rebels were being manipulated by those seeking to promote their own narrow political interests. A letter to his father written at the beginning of 1915 makes it clear exactly who he blames in this regard –

As concerns Hjalmar, my feelings echo yours. He and Tielman Roos.... and all of their kind, sitting in the villages and inciting our rural population in order to fish for political advantage in troubled waters. You have no idea of the unbearable bitterness that has arisen from nothing other than such so-called Nationalistswho sit in the villages and use our population as pawns in their political chess game driven by petty personal ambitions.¹⁰⁵

Roos was a founding member of Hertzog's National Party and a future Minister of Justice in Hertzog's cabinet. Hjalmar was Reitz's elder brother, an avowed nationalist who in later years travelled with Hertzog to the Versailles peace conference to press the argument for an independent Afrikaner state. Why Hjalmar took a different political path to his brother is not immediately clear from the sources, but he was very close to Roos, one of the founding members of the National Party along with General Hertzog, and appeared to have a personal loyalty to him not unlike that of his brother to Smuts.¹⁰⁶ He was captured during the war and spent time in a British concentration camp in India, which presumably led to a degree of resentment to the British. Interestingly, his

¹⁰⁴ Fedorowich, "Sleeping with the Lion," 90.

¹⁰⁵ Deney's Reitz to FW Reitz, translation by David Yuill, 18 January 1915, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

¹⁰⁶ Hjalmar Reitz, *The Conversion of a South African Nationalist* (Cape Town: Unie-Volkspers, 1946), 54.

biography was entitled “The Conversion of a South African Nationalist,”¹⁰⁷ and later in life, Hjalmar was to moderate his views and become a member of the same political party as his brother. The reasons for this are discussed further below.

In Reitz’s eyes, it was “Hertzogites” like his brother who were seeking to take advantage of the fears and concerns of their fellow Afrikaners for their own selfish political interests. The extent of the fraternal bitterness that existed between followers of Hertzog and followers of Botha and Smuts (such as Reitz) at this time can be seen from a later paragraph in the same letter. “If Hjalmar and his ilk had the courage to rebel, I might still respect them, but they do not. They spare their own hides and incite the poor countryside - those who are shot and killed - while Hjalmar and his brave fellow nationalists safely retreat to their hideouts until the danger is over, then they start all over again.” In Reitz’s case the bitterness is literally fraternal –

You speak of respecting each other's political opinions, but I respect any man's opinion, yet here it's not a matter of differing political opinions, it's something much more profound - these people, under the guise of language and nationality, destroy and demean our people. I feel that if I were to meet Hjalmar, it would only result in tension, and therefore, I do not wish to see him.¹⁰⁸

In a letter to Smuts in September 1914, Reitz expresses a similar view about the role played by Nationalist leaders in inciting rebellion –

The Hertzog leaders are, of course, making capital out of the German South West expedition and the Boers in this district are in commotion...Hertzog's address was a sheer electioneering speech with an eye to the next election. He is too petty even in these days to sink his personal interests, but nevertheless the fact remains that his oration has aroused the people amazingly.....¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ H. Reitz, *The Conversion of a South African Nationalist*.

¹⁰⁸ Deney's Reitz to Bessie Reitz, translation by David Yuill, 18 January, 1915, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

¹⁰⁹ J C Smuts to D Reitz, September 4, 1914, Nr 593 in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume II June 1910-November 1918)*, 197.

It is clear that Reitz does not believe that the rebellion was a spontaneous response to current events, nor that it was driven by pure ideological motives – rather his correspondence suggests he sees it as an orchestrated event, using the declaration of war as a pretext to promote the political interests of a narrow section of the Afrikaner population.

In order to avoid inflaming existing intentions, Botha and Smuts decided to only rely on loyal Afrikaans troops to put down the rebellion. Ultimately, most of the rebels were pardoned and freed, other than Jopie Fourie, a colonel in the new Union Defence Force, who had failed to resign his commission before joining the rebellion, and was ultimately executed in 1914 for treason (a decision that earned Smuts no end of opprobrium from his fellow Afrikaners).¹¹⁰ The decision to pardon the rebels was ultimately a politically savvy decision, but it appears not all Afrikaners on the loyalist side felt this way. In December 1915, an angry Reitz wrote to Smuts criticizing the decision to free 118 Heilbron rebels *en masse*:

Dear Oom Jannie, It is a damned disgrace the way we have been treated by the Government. General Botha and Klaas de Wet solemnly promised us not to release the prisoners and this morning it is as much as my life is worth to show my face in the street. All the Heilbron rebels came back yesterday with the result that today everything is in a state of turmoil. The rebels are riding about the streets with the returned heroes and taunting us and demonstrating throughout the town... I must tell you plainly that in these parts we have now done with the Government—they have grossly broken their word to us and shown us a hundred times less consideration than to the rebels... We have had a hasty executive meeting here and the whole branch (South African Party) has decided to resign from the Party. Of course we are not going to join the Nationalist trash but we have now done with the present Government. This will, of course, not affect our

¹¹⁰ Steyn, *Unafraid of Greatness*, 102. Interestingly, amongst his private papers, Reitz had the original of Jopie Fourie's final letter, written some ten minutes before his execution, entitled "*Fourie's Laaste Brief Aan Die Volk* " (Fourie's Last Letter to the People) – Jopie Fourie, *Fourie's Laaste Brief Aan Die Volk*, 20 December, 1914, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It is not clear how this ended up in Reitz's possession or why he chose to keep it.

personal friendship— towards New Year I shall probably be in Pretoria and shall come to see you.¹¹¹

Despite his later declaration in Commando that he had fully bought into Smuts and Botha's reconciliatory policies, it is clear that he was not quite on the same page as them when it came to extending the olive branch to his fellow Afrikaners. Reitz was, of course, at the coalface of the Afrikaner civil war, as a Union loyalist living and working in a heavily Nationalist enclave, so perhaps his lack of magnanimity to his Boer brethren is understandable. However, as we will see later on, these intra-Afrikaner divisions were to soften in later years.

The 1914 rebellion highlights some of the class divisions which existed in white South African society at this time – many of the rebels were poor rural “bywoners” (tenant-farmers who worked someone else's land in exchange for the right to occupy the land).¹¹² These kind of class struggles were a feature of the early years of Union – there were large white labor strikes in 1913,¹¹³ 1914¹¹⁴ and (after a hiatus during the First World War), 1922. The most serious of these was the Rand Revolt of 1922,¹¹⁵ a revolt of white miners on the gold reefs of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, in response to decreasing wages following a drop in the gold price and increased competition for skilled jobs from Black South Africans following a relaxing of the color bar by struggling mine

¹¹¹ D Reitz to J C Smuts, September 14, 1914, Letter Nr 593 in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume II June 1910-November 1918)*, 327.

¹¹² Dictionary Unit for South African English, "Bywoner," *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles*, accessed February 2, 2025, <https://dsae.co.za/entry/bywoner/e01424>.

¹¹³ "The 1913 Mineworkers' Strike," *South African History Online*, accessed March 1, 2025, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1913-mineworkers-strike>.

¹¹⁴ René Geyer, "The Union Defence Force and the 1914 Strike: The Dynamics of the Shadow of the Burgher," *Historia* 59, no. 2 (2014): 1-24, https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0018-229X2014000200009.

¹¹⁵ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Rand Rebellion," last modified January 25, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rand_Rebellion.

owners. The war cry of the strikers was "Workers of the world, unite and fight for a white South Africa!" The revolt was brutally put down by Smuts' government with planes and troops, with four of the ringleaders being hanged. This heavy-handed response is likely to have contributed to Hertzog's electoral victory in 1924 in alliance with the pro-labor Labour party. In the following decade under Hertzog, various legislation was passed to strengthen and protect the position of the white worker.¹¹⁶ This included the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 (which prohibited Black South Africans from joining or forming trade unions), the Wage Acts of 1925 and 1930 (which effectively reserved certain types of skilled and semi-skilled work for whites only and aimed to raise the wages of such work to a "civilised level"), and the Mines and Works Act (which recognized white trade unions and reinforced the color bar for certain types of work in mines). This was in contrast with some of the previous legislation passed under the Botha and Smuts government, which focused on ensuring a supply of cheap Black labor for the mines.¹¹⁷ As Fourie notes, Hertzog's ascension to power in 1924, in conjunction with his labor party allies, brought about "a change in the emphasis of government policies, from focusing on the needs of the capitalist class to the needs of the working class – specifically white poverty alleviation."¹¹⁸ At the same time, they *were* mindful of the need to not increase the labor costs of South Africa's low-margin mining industry, and so

¹¹⁶ See generally *South African History Online*, "Apartheid Legislation 1850s-1970s," last modified June 12, 2020, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s>.

¹¹⁷ This included the Land Act of 1913 (which set aside 7% of the land for the Black population) and the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) Act (aimed at controlling the influx of Black workers into urban areas). The goal was to limit Black South Africans to small, "economically-unsustainable enclaves," encouraging mass migration to the urban centers, a process referred to as "bantustanisation". See Englert, *Settler Colonialism*, 114.

¹¹⁸ Johan Fourie, "The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today," Working Paper, Department of Economics and Bureau for Economic Research, University of Stellenbosch, 11, <https://resep.sun.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/wp-14-2006.pdf>.

focused on reserving public sector jobs for white South Africans.¹¹⁹ It was a compromise that helped quieten labor unrest, and ultimately helped align the interests of white capital and white labor.¹²⁰

The imperial homeland, being Britain, was aligned with this compromise, as it resulted in a stable, local settler community which, fueled by cheap labor, was able to continue producing the raw materials that it required. Ultimately, as will be discussed in the next chapter, in the 1920s and 1930s we see an increasing alignment of the interests of the white working class, capitalist owners and the colonial head-office around the need to keep the Black African worker at the bottom of the employment ladder, with racial concerns outweighing historical class divisions.

Off to War

It was during the First World War that we see the first signs of an evolution of Reitz's views towards the British. After returning from fighting under Louis Botha in German South-West Africa and Jan Smuts in German East Africa, he decided to go to the Western Front and join up with the British army in France. In his personal unpublished memoirs of the war, written whilst recovering in a British hospital in 1918, he explains his decision as follows:

While we were awaiting demobilisation orders at Dodoma in German East, I decided to go overseas and join up there. I came to this conclusion

¹¹⁹ As Caroline Elikins and Susan Pedersen note in their book on twentieth century settler colonialism African settler colonial societies like South Africa are “characterised by the structuring of tax policies and labour laws to favour white the white settler community. South Africa provided the model: there, a complex system of regulations restricting African enterprise, employment, movement, and residence proved capable of supplying the labor (and status) needs of internationally owned mining companies, Afrikaner farmers, and the white working class alike.” Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen, *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies* (Taylor & Francis, 2012: Kindle edition), 192.

because I was convinced that if the Germans won this war then there would be no liberty left for anyone. I also wanted to go and see for myself what the trenches were like. I was unmarried and had no one dependent on me and so I considered that for me the alternative between going across to see the biggest crisis in the world's history and returning to a little backwater like Heilbron & vegetating there as a country attorney did not permit of argument and so my choice was easy and my mind soon made up.¹²¹

Reading between the lines, this quote suggests that for this young man, the decision to fight in France was as much motivated by a desire for adventure as his purported love of liberty. It is nevertheless telling that he sees the British, his recent colonial overlords, as the defenders of liberty. It would suggest that by this time his bitter memories of the war were softened by Britain's magnanimous post-war behavior. However, clearly not all Afrikaners felt the same. He goes on to note that his family, most of whom were staunch nationalists, who came to see him off in Johannesburg, were not particularly understanding of his decision or his explanation "that I was not going to fight for the British but with them, that I had as much right to fight for the freedom of the world as a Britisher had." That is not to say he was unaware of the optics of a Boer fighting for the British army - he goes on further to explain his decision to join the British army as follows:

I had at first a half formed idea of joining the French or American forces as more in keeping with the past for I thought it more appropriate enlisting with a republican army than with an army I had fought against in years gone by but on going into all aspects of the question I came to the conclusion that after all it mattered very little where one joined as they were all united in a common cause and besides I found that there were a great many obstacles in the way of entering the French or American armies as I was a British subject.¹²²

¹²¹ Deneys Reitz, *Personal Memoirs of World War One*, 1918, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa.

¹²² Deneys Reitz, *Personal Diary*, 1917, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa.

Once again one sees an element of pragmatism in his decision, but ultimately it was a pragmatism that was only possible in the context of a diminished antagonism towards the British. However, a passage from his personal diaries from 1917 suggests more than simply diminished antagonism – it appears that, like Smuts, he was on the path to becoming a genuine Anglophile (perhaps unsurprisingly given that he had spent a year in the trenches fighting alongside British soldiers):

The whole character of the British Empire has changed in our days. From being a set of colonies governed from Downing Street it has evolved into a system of free states, each in effect an independent republic bound to each other by no ties other than a similar love of liberty and free institutions. For us in S.A. to belong to this federation of free sister states is no humiliation, there is in it no bondage and no subservience – on the contrary it should be a matter of pride to us that we have grown to such stature as to be able to take our place among the nations of the new world and in whose hands lies the future destiny of the progress and civilization.¹²³

This quote, written in his personal diary shortly before the end of the First World War, highlights the retreating British imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century that Herman Giliomee refers to in the introductory quote to this chapter. Weakened by the First World War, and the costs of maintaining a global empire, Britain became increasingly willing to outsource governance of its empire to local settlers. In 1926, Britain passed the Balfour Declaration granting Dominion status to colonies such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa, effectively making them largely autonomous states within the British Empire.¹²⁴ In 1931 the Statute of Westminster was passed granting

¹²³ Deneys Reitz, *Personal Diary*, 1917, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa.

¹²⁴ The declaration declared certain countries of the "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations" - *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Dominion," last modified October 4, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dominion-British-Commonwealth>.

these Dominions full legislative independence and the ability to join international bodies such as the League of Nations in their own right.¹²⁵

Moderate Afrikaners like Reitz were clearly more willing to accept South Africa's place as part of the broader British Empire in a world where South Africa was afforded greater autonomy and Britain's position increasingly symbolic. In a letter to his father, written in 1920 upon his return from WWI, Reitz describes himself as an "internationalist" (whilst somewhat rudely telling his father that he stills clings to the old ways).¹²⁶ By referring to himself as an "internationalist" he is seeking to highlight his broad view of South African identity – unlike his father he does not tie his identity to narrow considerations of ethnicity or language, but rather, sees himself as part of a broader whole, united by shared liberal and progressive values. In a world where nationalist movements based along ethnic, religious, linguistic or tribal lines were increasingly making themselves heard, the new South African nationalism was a different animal. The large degree of autonomy which the colonial parent was willing to afford its colonial children (at least the white ones), seemed to have dampened their more rebellious nationalistic instincts and engendered in some Afrikaners like Reitz and Smuts a genuine affection for Britain. Whilst in others (like Hertzog and his supporters), it instilled a grudging acceptance that life under the benevolent parental wing was better than going it alone out in the world. The narrower form of ethnic Afrikaner nationalism wasn't completely extinguished, however, and would rear its head again in the fight over

¹²⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Statute of Westminster," last modified October 24, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Statute-of-Westminster>.

¹²⁶ Deneys Reitz to F W Reitz, translation by D Yuill, June 19, 1920, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

neutrality in the Second World War, and again in 1948 when D.F. Malan's National Party took power. That is a story for another thesis, however.

Fusion

When Hertzog and his Nationalist Party took power in 1924, they rode a wave of Afrikaner nationalism and general labor dissatisfaction. In 1929, the Nationalists won a further election off the back of a successful campaign centered on Smuts' supposed liberalism and the threat of the so-called "*swart gevaar*" (black peril). By the early 1930s, however, the fierce rivalries that existed between the two Afrikaner groupings at the beginning of the First World War began to soften. By 1933, the Smuts and Hertzog camps were able to put aside their differences enough to form a combined political party, the United Party, and jointly govern the country under the so-called Fusion Government with Hertzog as Prime Minister and Smuts as his deputy. What led to these two bitter political opponents coming together? In one sense, the Fusion Government was born out of political necessity – a political marriage of convenience necessitated by the dire economic circumstances that South Africa found itself in after the Great Depression. However, it was arguably also made easier by the fact that during the 1920s and 1930s many of the contentious issues important to the Afrikaner nationalists – Afrikaans language rights, South Africa's status in the Empire and the Cape non-white franchise, had been addressed in a way that gave the nationalists comfort that Afrikaner rights would not be prejudiced. Once the Hertzog faction came into power in 1924, legislation was passed that, *inter alia*, recognized Afrikaans as an official language,¹²⁷ as well as

¹²⁷ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 129; *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Official Languages of the Union Act, 1925," last modified December 20, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_Languages_of_the_Union_Act,_1925.

adopting a new South African flag that included both the Union Jack and the Vierkleur of the Zuid-Afrikaanische Republiek. As noted above, the Balfour Declaration and the Statute of Westminster had also effectively made colonies such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa autonomous states within the British Empire. Upon returning from England after the passing of the Statute of Westminster, Prime Minister Hertzog was said to have told his Nationalist colleagues that there was “no longer any necessity for a republic and that he would fight any one who, from then on, made propaganda in that direction.”¹²⁸ Perhaps, most importantly, and as will be further discussed in Chapter III, the granting of the franchise to white women in 1930 and the dropping of education and property requirements for the white male franchise diluted the non-white vote in the Cape Colony to a level which made it largely politically meaningless. Thus, once these areas of division were satisfactorily addressed in a way that guaranteed that Afrikaner political and cultural rights would be protected, the political calculus amongst Afrikaners changed to a degree. The cultural, class and political issues which had previously divided Afrikanerdom into camps arguably became secondary to the more important goal of ensuring white unity. Indeed, part of the quid pro quo for the establishment of the Fusion Government was that Smuts’ South African Party would support legislation to abolish the Cape non-white franchise, which they did in 1936. The changing political calculus is demonstrated by the following extract from a letter written by Deneys Reitz’s brother, Hjalmar (an avowed nationalist earlier in life) to the *Star* newspaper in Johannesburg in 1936, exhorting voters to vote for the new United Party in order to ensure it could achieve the necessary numerical superiority in Parliament to meet the two thirds majority

¹²⁸ H. Reitz, *The Conversion of a South African Nationalist*, 117.

threshold required to abolish the Cape native franchise: “At present the Government Party is numerically strong enough to pass legislation dealing with the Native Franchise. But we do not know when the various parties may again be so distributed that no party has the required two-thirds. Surely then, now is the time to deal with the matter once for all.”¹²⁹ The quid pro quo is clear. Fusion between the two Afrikaner parties was the only way to achieve the desired political majority to remove the remaining remnants of the non-white vote, and in face of the need to achieve white unity, intra-tribal divisions over issues of language, class and identity were put to one side.

Language

Language was another key factor dividing Afrikaners. Afrikaner nationalists, such as Hertzog, advocated strongly for Afrikaans (an indigenous form of Dutch) to receive equal prominence with English in the new Union, particularly in education. Disagreements over the language policy of the new Union government (which he saw as being overly favorable to English speakers), was one of the key factors that led to Hertzog being kicked out of Botha’s cabinet and his founding of the Nationalist party.¹³⁰ However, many other Afrikaners, particularly those from the Cape, were relatively comfortable speaking English. Grundlingh, suggests that the “high rate of working bilingualism amongst many Afrikaners contributed to a certain pragmatic language outlook on the part of those Afrikaners subscribing to “South Africanism”.¹³¹ Grundlingh

¹²⁹ H. Reitz, *The Conversion of a South African Nationalist*, 148.

¹³⁰ "Louis Botha," *The Observation Post*, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://samihistory.com/tag/louis-botha/>; Fedorowich, *Sleeping with Lions*, 75.

¹³¹ Grundlingh, "The King's Afrikaners, 359. J. C. Coetzee, "The bilingual problem in South Africa" in E. G. Malherbe (ed.), *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society* (Cape Town, 1937), 879.

could well have been talking about Reitz himself. Reitz was proficient in both English and Afrikaans. This is partially a result of his upbringing – he was raised in a home where both English and Afrikaans were spoken¹³² and he attended English schools in Bloemfontein. His father was partially educated in Scotland and admitted as a barrister at the London bar, and had a great love of English literature, in particular the poems of Scotland’s most famous son, Robbie Burns, which he had translated into Afrikaans. London journalist Leo Amery described Reitz’s father as a delightful old man “who was as whole-heartedly pro-British in his love of British literature ... as he was frankly anti-British and pro-Afrikaner in his political ideas.”¹³³ Such a dichotomy was not unusual in the Afrikaans elite – a number of Boer leaders, such as Jan Smuts and Free State president Marthinus Steyn, had studied abroad in England – indeed Smuts was described by the head of Christ College in Cambridge as one of the three finest minds that the college had produced, alongside John Milton and Charles Darwin.¹³⁴ As we will see further in Chapter IV, Smuts had a number of close English confidantes with whom he regularly corresponded. Although Reitz was to part ways with his father politically, he undoubtedly inherited his father’s love of English literature. In his unpublished journal of his time in Madagascar, he notes that he believes English literature to be the finest in the world¹³⁵ and in *Commando* he tells an anecdote of how he surprised some British soldiers into laughter by quoting Dickens at them.¹³⁶ Towards the later stages of his life, Reitz

¹³² Meredith, *Afrikaner Odyssey*, 44.

¹³³ Meredith, *Afrikaner Odyssey*, 81.

¹³⁴ Steyn, *Unafraid of Greatness*, 221.

¹³⁵ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar*, 281.

¹³⁶ Reitz, *Commando*, 52 – According to Reitz, when he passed two wounded English officers he heard one of the officers remark: “Here comes a typical Boer for you.” The officer asked Reitz whether he understood English. When Reitz said that he did, the officer asked him why the Boers still carried on the war, because surely it was hopeless to stand against the wealth and power of England. According to Reitz, he replied,

was clearly as comfortable in English as in Afrikaans – many of his Parliamentary speeches were in English, he had commanded a British battalion on the Western Front, all of his post-World War One diaries were written in English, his wife was English and his two boys went to a private English school in Johannesburg. Reitz’s strong views on the language issue are demonstrated by the following quote from his 1917 diary (written in English):

It matters not to me what language man chooses to express himself in so long as he makes himself intelligible – this is a free country and every man has the right to talk whatever language he pleases but no man has the right to assent that his predilection for the Dutch language makes him a better and truer S. African than the man who chooses to speak English. The language question is ridden to death in South Africa. It is largely the cause of all our troubles – once we reduce the language question to its proper level of recognizing that it is quite immaterial what tongue a man uses and once we stop the idea held by so many that man who speaks Dutch has a greater share of patriotism than all others we are in fact a way towards settling down in amicable progress towards building up a united nation.¹³⁷

This is clearly a sensitive point for Reitz – when he wrote these words he was certainly fully bilingual – he was serving in the English army, commanding English troops, and writing in his diaries in English – something which he undoubtedly received flak about from some of his more nationalistic countrymen on his return from the war. However, language became less of a political hot potato in the 1920s – as noted above, under the Hertzog government, legislation was passed that, *inter alia*, recognized Afrikaans (as distinct from Dutch) as an official language in 1925. This arguably helped make language less of a divisive issue for Afrikaners and broadened the appeal of South

“Oh, we are like Mr Micawber, we are waiting for something to turn up.” The officers response was to turn to his colleague and say “Didn’t I tell this was a funny country and now here’s your typical young Boer quoting Dickens.”

¹³⁷ Deney's Reitz, *Personal Diary*, 1917, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa.

Africanism as an ideology amongst Afrikaners. As Grundlingh suggests, as long as Afrikaner interests (such as official recognition of Afrikaans) were protected, many Afrikaners were willing to be more pragmatic about reconciling with their English-speaking countrymen and living under British dominion.¹³⁸ Reitz's views arguably evolved to more than just pragmatic acceptance – over time, as we have seen, he developed a genuine affection for the English and their language. However, Grundlingh's point is that even for those Afrikaners who hadn't quite fully drunk the reconciliatory Kool-Aid, many were sufficiently comfortable with the English language and sufficiently secure about the position of Afrikaners in South African society to accept the trade-off of reconciling with their English countrymen and accepting South Africa's Dominion status, in exchange for the benefits of being part of the Empire.

Evolution

Later in life, Reitz, like Smuts, appears to have developed a genuine liking of the British. In his second book, *Trekking On*, published in 1933 he wrote of a visit to London: "A Dutch South African feels at home at once in England, for the two races in our country have lived together for so long that although we quarrel at times, we understand each other's ways, and I felt no more of a stranger in London than in Capetown or Johannesburg, and had little difficulty in making friends."¹³⁹ In a private letter to a friend, Connie Lomax, written in 1943 whilst he was serving as South African

¹³⁸ Grundlingh, "The King's Afrikaners," 359.

¹³⁹ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 142.

High Commissioner to the UK during the Second World War, he described the British people as – “amazing people doing amazing things.”¹⁴⁰

The evolution of Reitz’s views on the new South Africa and his place in it over the first few decades of the twentieth century can be seen from a detailed textual comparison of his autobiographical books and the original journals or manuscripts on which they are based. John Gouws has, in a series of insightful articles,¹⁴¹ conducted such a comparison of the original manuscript of his most famous work, *Commando*, written during his post-war exile in Madagascar, and the subsequent printed edition of his book, first published almost 30 years later in 1929. *Commando* is one of the bestselling books pertaining to the war and it has been reprinted some twenty times over ninety-five years, the latest as recently as 2024, and was also translated into a number of other languages, including French, German and Gaelic.¹⁴² The original diaries were written in Dutch and exist in manuscript form in the Brenthurst library in Johannesburg, and have been translated into English by Reitz’s grandson, Michael Reitz¹⁴³ Interestingly, however, the first published version of the book was written in English and published in London. Why did Reitz choose to write the book in the language of his former enemies (and his second

¹⁴⁰ Deneys Reitz to Connie Lomax, April 22, 1943, private collection of Koos Bekker, Babylonstoren, Western Cape, South Africa.

¹⁴¹ John Gouws, “Deneys Reitz and the Imperial Co-option” in *Print, Text and Book Cultures in South Africa*, Zimble, Jarad, et al., (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2012), Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/book/50567; John Gouws, “The Textual Trek of Deneys Reitz’s *Commando*,” in *Variants : the Journal of the European Society for Textual Scholarship* 9, No.9 (2012): 185, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1242488878/fulltextPDF/7992BEE04D8E40E8PQ/1?accountid=11311&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>; John Gouws, “Deneys Reitz and the Bounds of Self-Understanding,” *Cross / Cultures*, no. 157 (2013): 51, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1448004908/fulltextPDF/980E5805B27D491EPQ/1?accountid=11311&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journal>.

¹⁴² Gouws, “Bounds of Self-Understanding,” 51-52.

¹⁴³ Deneys Reitz, *Herinneringen van den Engelschen Oorlog 1899–1902*, unpublished, Brenthurst library, MS 272, translation by Michael Reitz, Brenthurst Library, MS 419.

language) and to publish it in the city from which many of the decisions which triggered the Anglo-Boer War emanated? And why wait thirty years to publish it?

In answering the first question, Gouws suggests that this was a deliberate decision, made with an eye on the more lucrative English market, which retained a fascination with the war.¹⁴⁴ There is undoubtedly some merit to this view. The significant number of reprints since the book's first publication (all printed in London) certainly suggest this was a smart commercial decision. Only one edition was printed in Reitz's mother tongue, Afrikaans, which makes sense, given that it would have had a significantly more limited audience.¹⁴⁵ Why then did Reitz only publish the book some thirty years after the war ended? The book was written and published during the interregnum between 1924 and 1933 when the South African Party was out of power, and Reitz himself out of a job (although he remained a member of parliament). Gouws suggests that it was written at the instigation of Smuts, "as an exercise to encourage reconciliation and understanding between the English and Afrikaans speakers at home."¹⁴⁶ Gouws does not provide any evidence for this proposition but the text of *Commando* itself lends some credence to the proposition that the book may have been intended, in part, as an act of nation-building.

Although I was unable to find any explicit documentary evidence that Smuts was the driving force behind its publication, it is noteworthy that Smuts himself wrote the foreword to the book, and there are some telling phrases that point to the book's real motivations. After giving a brief overview of Reitz's history from Boer war soldier to

¹⁴⁴ Gouws, "Bounds of Self-Understanding," 52; Gouws, "Imperial Co-Option," 114.

¹⁴⁵ Gouws, "Bounds of Self-Understanding," 52.

¹⁴⁶ Gouws, "Imperial Co-Option," 114.

South African parliamentarian, Smuts writes: “The Boer boy who wrote this book was in the Wordsworthian sense the father of the man of after years....He learnt to see Botha’s great vision of a united South African people to whom the memories of the Boer War would mean no longer bitterness but only the richness and the inspiration of a spiritual experience. The loyalty of the Boer boy ripened into the broader loyalty of the South African.” He also concludes his foreword with the following somewhat flowery wording: “This book is a romance of truth; but behind it is a greater personal romance, and behind that again is the even more wonderful romance of South Africa, to whom much should be forgiven for the splendour of her record during a period as difficult as any young nation has ever passed through.”¹⁴⁷ These excerpts certainly suggest that even if Smuts wasn’t the instigator of the book, he was a willing accomplice in using the book as a possible tool of reconciliation in a divided country. In the original handwritten manuscript of the book, some interesting notes at the end appear to have been written by Reitz’s wife, Leila. In respect of a couple of the more controversial paragraphs in the manuscript, she has suggested that her husband consult with “Oom Jannie” (Uncle Jan) for his views. This certainly suggests that Smuts was intimately involved in the book project.

The textual differences between the original manuscript and the final published version also suggests that the book was intended as more than just a simple narrative recounting of Reitz’s wartime experiences. Gouws has highlighted a number of key differences between the book and the original manuscript. For example, he highlights Reitz’s original description of the defeated Boers at the Treaty of Vereeniging:

When the final moment dawned, when it was announced that our land and freedom were lost, it was a bitter cup to drain. In the tents, grown men were sobbing like children. Weatherbeaten faces which had looked

¹⁴⁷ Reitz, *Commando*, 12.

undaunted on the greatest dangers, streamed with hot tears of sorrow. These men who had stood with dry eyes at the graves of friends and sons and fathers now wept bitterly at the grave of their freedom. In truth it was a bitter hour... Well, the matter had run its course, and all our striving had been for nothing. Our country lay devastated, half our nation was exterminated and our flag struck; perhaps for eternity. With sore hearts, the conference broke up and the envoys were transported back to their commandos.¹⁴⁸

As Gouws notes, the version that made it into the final published text is significantly more subdued:

of the sting of defeat I shall not speak, but there was no whining or irresponsible talk. All present accepted the verdict stoically, and the delegates returned quietly to their respective commandos, to make known the terms of the surrender.¹⁴⁹

In the latter case, writing some 30 years later, Reitz underplays the bitterness of defeat, the Boers' response presented as stoic acceptance, rather than devastation. However, the latter is written with the benefit of hindsight, with the knowledge that four short years later, the Boer republics would be granted self-government, and three years after that, a united South Africa would be led by two ex-Boer generals, which helps explain why some of the rancor has diminished.

As Gouws also notes, there are also some graphic descriptions of British atrocities which didn't make it into the final edit. As Reitz describes in the original manuscript:

It was awful riding through the devastated districts for days on end without seeing a single sign of life, neither human nor animal. Everything lay black and ruined and even the little birds appeared to have abandoned the region. Not a single house was left standing. They were all burnt down or blown up with dynamite. Here and there, next to the burnt down houses, the women were living in a sort of shelter which they had constructed from sheets of corrugated iron or grass. It was terrible to see the poor creatures – gaunt and under-nourished, with wan faces drawn-in from cold and hardship. Their clothes were made from mealie [maize] sacks picked up from Khaki [British] encampments and sewn together, and their food

¹⁴⁸ Reitz, *Herinnigen*, 954–56.

¹⁴⁹ Reitz, *Commando*, 321–322.

consisted of mealies which they still found here and there in the old fields. It was enough to make one weep to see how these poor women had suffered from the monstrous tactic of destruction by the enemy.¹⁵⁰

As Gouws points out, the corresponding page in the published book talks only, in sparse, unemotional terms, about riding over “bare and deserted plains”.¹⁵¹ The page on which this passage appears is headed by the following quotation from the Roman general Tacitus: “They made a wilderness and called it peace.” Tacitus is actually quoting Calgacus, a Scottish chieftain and enemy of Rome, and it is worthwhile to quote the entire passage from which this quote comes:

These plunderers of the world [the Romans], after exhausting the land by their devastations, are rifling the ocean: stimulated by avarice, if their enemy be rich; by ambition, if poor; unsatiated by the East and by the West: the only people who behold wealth and indigence with equal avidity. To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under false titles, they call empire; and where they make a desert, they call it peace.¹⁵²

This quote could very easily have applied to the British Empire at the turn of the nineteenth century, and Reitz’s choice of the quote is a clear demonstration of the bitterness he felt towards the British in the immediate aftermath of the war. It is also telling that this quote (as well as the picture of an emaciated child in a Boer concentration camp on an adjoining page) were omitted from the final published version. Gouws highlights another noteworthy omission – a comment by Reitz in the margins of a page discussing a commitment made by Lord Kitchener (the leading British general in South Africa), to treat the Boers in a friendly manner, if they were to surrender. The comment is a Latin quote from Aeneid, Virgil’s epic poem about the battle of Troy - “Timeo Danaos

¹⁵⁰ D.Reitz. *Herinneringen*, 951–52; Gouws, “Bounds of Self-Understanding,” 66.

¹⁵¹ Reitz, *Commando*, 109.

¹⁵² Bryan Caplan, “Tacitus, Peace, and Desolation,” *Econlib*, June 21, 2011, https://www.econlib.org/archives/2011/06/tacitus_peace_a.html.

Dona Ferentes,” the literal translation of which - "I fear the Greeks even when bearing gifts" - has become common modern day parlance for the need for caution when something seems too good to be true. The comment is presumably a contemporaneous one, written whilst in exile in Madagascar, when Reitz still felt distrustful of British intentions. When *Commando* was published in 1929, Reitz is writing with the benefit of hindsight. With one eye on his domestic goal of fostering Boer / British unity and the other on his lucrative British target market, there were no such snide Latin asides to be found.

One sees a similar editing exercise when one compares the original journals written by Reitz in the early 1900s covering the period from the Anglo-Boer War's end to the time of his return from exile in Madagascar¹⁵³, with his recounting of the same period in his second book, *Trekking On*. These unpublished diaries are written in Dutch, but the book itself, written some 30 years later in 1933 and published in London, is written in English. There are various examples in the diaries that suggest a certain degree of animus to the English. He writes, for example, of the “hated English”¹⁵⁴ and that “cursed peace document,”¹⁵⁵ when referring to the Treaty of Vereeniging, phrases which are not to be found in the final edited publication. He tells the following story about his re-entry into South Africa after exile:

However, when we walked to the consul [in Mozambique] the next morning he[advised] that a permit would only be granted to me provided that I took the oath of allegiance to His Majesty Erdvark VII, something that I firmly refused to do and I referred to the terms of the

¹⁵³ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar* (English translation).

¹⁵⁴ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar* (English translation), 214.

¹⁵⁵ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar* (English translation), 21.

Vereeniging Conference under which a burger who had stayed in the field to the last did not have to swear any oath.¹⁵⁶

His refusal to sign the oath almost scuppered his chances of re-entry and suggests that he still had strong anti-British feelings at the time of writing the diaries in 1903/4. The reference to the English King as “Erdvark VII,” of which there are many examples throughout the text, is a deliberate play on words taking advantage of the similarities between his name of Edward and the Afrikaans word for an aardvark. Neither this story, nor the disparaging name for the king, appear in the final edited publication. There is the following poignant description of the Boer women and children that Reitz sees in concentration camps at the end of the war –

Not far up the line were great concentration camps and at our passing hundreds of hungry emaciated women and children were standing along the wire entanglements that enclosed them and they waved to us and called out benedictions with weak, wasted voices. My father and I were very [saddened] at the sight of these poor victims of the war, with their pale faces and pathetic attempts with their weak shaking voices to still call encouragement.¹⁵⁷

Once again, this reminder of the atrocities committed by the British does not make it into the final published version of his second book, *Trekking On*.

A comparison of the strong language used in Reitz’s contemporary letters written during his time in Heilbron about his fellow Afrikaners with his later published works also shows the softening of his views. Consider, for example, this passage from a letter written in February 1915 to his sister Bessie, shortly after his return to Heilbron after the rebellion. It appears that Reitz, as the head of the local Heilbron commando, had been tasked with enforcing the payment of a war indemnity imposed upon the local rebels:

¹⁵⁶ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar* (English translation), 427.

¹⁵⁷ Reitz, *Journey to Madagascar* (English translation), 10.

Meanwhile, I am busy making my name into a nemesis for the evildoers and have appointed myself as a local scourge of God. I cast the rebels with [knives] in the form of summonses and execution letters – which causes much wailing and gnashing of teeth - and I am the most hated, deepest cursed of people, the forsaker of the northern districts. Once I am done making the local rebels pay the war indemnity, I will naturally have to leave Heilbron, for it will no longer be possible for me to live here. My practice there is, of course, purely out of necessity. Until then, I have given myself entirely, and I have thoroughly amused myself - vengeance is sweet, says the Lord - and then I will venture out into the world again.¹⁵⁸

The language is Biblical and heartfelt – certainly more Old Testament than New.

Reitz clearly feels very strongly about how he has been treated by his fellow Heilbron residents and exults in his opportunity to exercise revenge. In later life, in his second book, *Trekking On*, Reitz also describes his experience at the hands of his fellow Afrikaners in religious terms – “*They began to look on me, striving to uphold the new faith, as an apostate.*”¹⁵⁹ – but there is no inflammatory description of taking revenge or enforcing the war indemnity.

In one sense, the differences between the original manuscripts / journals / correspondence and the subsequent published books are to be expected. The original manuscript was written in the immediate aftermath of the war, when emotions were running high, and Reitz barely out of his teens, was sitting in bitter exile, far from his homeland and kin. Many of the letters referred to above were written immediately prior to or in the midst of the 1914 rebellion. The books were published when Reitz was much older, living in a united South Africa, having become a devoted disciple of the reconciliatory project (not to mention a leading South African politician). But are these

¹⁵⁸ Deney's Reitz to Bessie Reitz, translation by D Yuill, February 29, 1915, private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

¹⁵⁹ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 49.

textual differences deliberate decisions made in pursuit of a purposive goal of reconciliatory nation-building, or do they reflect an actual evolution of views on the part of Reitz?

The answer is surely a combination of both. His mentor, Jan Smuts, who writes the foreword to two of Reitz's books, became a devoted imperialist - serving in the Imperial War Council in both World Wars, being appointed a Field Marshall in the British Army and becoming known (admiringly by the British and derisively by certain of his Afrikaner countrymen) as "The Handyman of Empire".¹⁶⁰ The later public comments made by Reitz lauding the generosity and magnanimity of the British in the post-war period (as highlighted above), Reitz's willingness to command a British battalion on the Western Front and his appointment by Smuts to the post of British High Commissioner in 1943, certainly suggests that he underwent a similar conversion.

However, it is also apparent that a number of changes made to the text of *Commando* were deliberately made to avoid including any material which could rub salt in long-healed domestic wounds or antagonize the broader imperial audience at whom the book was, at least in part, aimed. In this regard it is of particular interest to note certain handwritten comments at the end of the original manuscript by Reitz's English-speaking wife Leila (who studied history at Cambridge),¹⁶¹ which are reproduced in an unabridged version of the text published in 2024 by Fransjohan Pretorius.¹⁶² In response to a proposed description of a meeting between Lord Kitchener and Jan Smuts, alluding to

¹⁶⁰ Saul Dubow, "Smuts, the United Nations and the Rhetoric of Race and Rights," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 1 (2008): 43–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009407084557>, 54.

¹⁶¹ Gouws, "Textual Trek," 195.

¹⁶² Deney Reitz, *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Anglo-Boer War*, ed. and annotated by Fransjohan Pretorius (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2024).

Kitchener's alcoholism, Leila Reitz had written in pencil – "I don't know whether I should leave this reference to K's drinking etc. for I agree with Winston Churchill that he, more than any man, was the sheet-anchor of his people in 1914-1915, which was years later – moreover he was a generous enemy. Ask Oom Jannie."¹⁶³ This quote demonstrates that Leila Reitz (perhaps not unsurprisingly given her English background and Cambridge education) shared her husband's positive view of the British and their magnanimous behavior.

Gouws highlights another interesting general comment made by Reitz's wife, suggesting the inclusion of additional corroboration of the large number of concentration camp deaths:

He [Smuts] might refer in his preface [to *Commando*] to Miss Fry's life of Miss Hobhouse to bear out your statement about the women and children (25,000). What would France or England have said if 25,000 women & children had perished in the great War? This is not sufficiently known even yet—it could be driven home now that all England is pro-Boer-& you & OJ [Oom Jannie – Smuts] being without bitterness are the people to do it. It might even ease Nationalist bitterness, which has a real foundation. It is also a great argument against war in the abstract and the war of the future ... in which civilians must suffer as never before.¹⁶⁴

As Gouws notes, Leila Reitz is making the nuanced point that reconciliation cannot be achieved by simply sweeping atrocities under the rug – an important part of any reconciliatory project is properly acknowledging the other side's grievances (in this case Afrikaner unhappiness about the treatment of their women and children in concentration camps).¹⁶⁵ She argues that Reitz and Smuts are best placed to highlight this to a broader

¹⁶³ Reitz, *Commando* (ed. and annotated by Fransjohan Pretorius), 270.

¹⁶⁴ Reitz, *Commando* (ed. and annotated by Fransjohan Pretorius), 278.

¹⁶⁵ This an interesting historical foreshadowing of a later, more substantial, reconciliatory project in South African history – the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the mid-1990s after the end of apartheid, whereby the perpetrators of crimes during the apartheid years were encouraged to fully

English and international audience, given that they are “without bitterness” (partially, undoubtedly, because neither of them had family who ended up in the concentration camps), and it could also serve the dual purpose of mollifying their more strident nationalist colleagues. Ultimately, her comment was not taken on board, but it does demonstrate that the final manuscript went through a very careful vetting process before publication and had a deliberate goal of building bridges between the two white races in South Africa.

From Reitz’s perspective, notwithstanding his embrace of the new South Africanism, the reality was that his relationship with his Afrikaner heritage remained complicated throughout his life. As noted above, Reitz came from Afrikaner royalty. He was the son of the State Secretary of the South African Republic, F.W. Reitz, the signatory of the Boer declaration of war in 1899, who had also been the president of the Orange Free State. He was educated at Grey College, a school for the Afrikaner elite in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State, and through his father he regularly met and interacted with many Afrikaner luminaries, including many of the top generals and President of the South African Republic and totemic Boer leader, Paul Kruger.¹⁶⁶ He also had an exemplary war record, having been one of the “bittereinders” who fought to the end of the war, and served on commando with future prime minister Jan Smuts.¹⁶⁷ However, as he became an increasingly public advocate for Smuts’ South Africanist philosophy, he also sought to distance himself to an extent from his Afrikaans roots. In

disclose their criminal acts in exchange for amnesty. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa.”, last modified February 14, 2025, last accessed March 31, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission-South-Africa>.

¹⁶⁶ Reitz, *Commando*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ For an overview of Reitz’s experiences on commando, see generally, Reitz, *Commando*.

later life, Reitz described himself as “a *South African first, and a Dutchman second*.”¹⁶⁸ and in 1943, writing on the domestic situation in South Africa for the *New York Times* “Again the Land of Good Hope” he described his Afrikaner brethren as follows: “*In South Africa, the Afrikaner people, to whom I belong, tend to make a fetish – a religion – of their race, their language and their traditions. For myself, I broke away from the juju and the voodooism on race worship long ago.*”¹⁶⁹ The use of the words “juju” and “voodooism” is telling – he is suggesting that there is something highly irrational about the excessive need of many Afrikaners to put their language and traditions on a pedestal. The reality, however, was that Reitz remained conflicted about his Afrikaans roots. A good example is this letter written by his wife Leila to the Imperial War Museum in Johannesburg South Africa after Reitz’s death (in response to a request from the museum for Reitz’s medals from the First World War):

I am ashamed that I have taken so long to answer your letter but the truth is my son is very against my sending the medals. He feels that the number of medals that there are would be almost an insult to his father’s record as there are so few. My husband was offered the D.S.O. in the first world war & refused – the reason being, I suppose, that his own father & indeed all his family were angry with him for going at all. Subsequently King George V sent for him and personally asked for him to accept it from them. By that time, [name unclear] caused an act to be passed forbidding titles. Very wrongly, I think, the King’s adviser told my husband he would have to write to General Hertzog asking permission. Now that Act was never meant to include medals won in warfare. Unfortunately that letter went to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Bodenstein, who was bitterly anti-British. I am quite sure that Dr Hertzog never saw the letter.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ "Reitz’s Romantic Career," *Rand Daily Mail*, October 20, 1944, Stellenbosch University Library, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

¹⁶⁹ Deney Reitz, "Again the Land of Good Hope."

¹⁷⁰ Leila Reitz to the Director of the South African War Museum, September 9, 1958, South African War Museum, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Notwithstanding his increasingly internationalist world perspective, it is clear that Reitz remained enough of an Afrikaner nationalist to feel uncomfortable about accepting a medal from a British king.

Another example of the ongoing internal tension between Reitz's South Africanist philosophy and his Afrikaner heritage is indicated by the fact that amongst his papers at his death was a half-finished handwritten manuscript biography of Paul Kruger, the first president of the South African Republic, and the Boer leader at the time of the declaration of war in 1899.¹⁷¹ His choice of subject was perhaps a surprising one – Kruger was, in many ways, the proto-Afrikaner nationalist and at the time of its writing, the early 1940s, the Afrikaner Nationalist party under DF Malan were the avowed political enemy of the governing South African Party, led by Smuts and Reitz. The hagiographic nature of the biography (entitled from “*Van Skaapwagter tot President*” – From Shepherd to President), also suggests that Reitz retained some sympathy for Kruger and the Afrikaner cause which he had so strongly championed. The choice to write it in English, however, is certainly not one Kruger would have approved of. It seems clear that although Reitz was “a *South African first, and a Dutchman second*,”¹⁷² the Dutchman was never very far below the surface.

Conclusion

The evolution of Reitz's political philosophies from the end of the South African War until his death during the Second World War provides a useful insight into some of the factors at play which encouraged many moderate Afrikaners to embrace the new

¹⁷¹ Deneys Reitz, *Von Skaapwagter tot President*.

¹⁷² “Reitz's romantic career,” *Rand Daily Mail*, October 20, 1944.

reconciliatory South Africanist philosophy of Smuts and Botha. A softening of Afrikaner hostility towards the British after the war due to their magnanimous treatment of the defeated Boers (whatever the motivations therefor), coupled with personal loyalty to Smuts and Botha, the bilingualism of many Afrikaners and a network of ties and interrelationships between the English-speaking and Afrikaans communities, made it easier for many Afrikaners to pragmatically accept a broader South African identity that included both language groups and also accepted the nation's place as part of the British Empire. Not only had the defeated Afrikaners been given back control of the country, their country was achieving a growing degree of autonomy from the British mothership as it receded from the giddy imperial heights which it had reached at the turn of the century and granted increasing independence to certain of its former colonies (primarily those that were white-controlled).

Reitz's life also shows that there was often a greater divide between nationalist and moderate Afrikaners, split over issues of class, language and identity, than there was between Afrikaner and English. However, even for those Afrikaners of a more nationalistic bent, legislative protection for Afrikaner language and cultural rights and increasing independence from Britain gave them a degree of comfort that Afrikaner rights would be protected in this new South African identity. Ultimately, these considerations became secondary to the one factor which united most white South Africans, both Afrikaner and English - the need to maintain white superiority. It is to this that we now turn in the next chapter.

Chapter III.

Race

*Take up the White Man's burden—
And reap his old reward*

- Rudyard Kipling, White Man's Burden¹⁷³

“You have only to sacrifice ‘the nigger’ and the game is easy.” This statement, eye-wateringly offensive even for its time, was made by Lord Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner to South Africa, and one of the primary architects of the Anglo-Boer War, in a letter written to a British friend in 1897.¹⁷⁴ To be fair to Milner, this oft-quoted statement is taken slightly out of context, by excluding the preceding sentence - “If I did not have some conscience about the treatment of blacks I personally could win over the Dutch in the Colony and indeed all the South African dominion without offending the English.” Milner was suggesting that whilst sacrificing Black political rights would have been the easy answer to achieving Britain’s goal of achieving a closer union with the Afrikaner republics, who were staunchly opposed to any form of political rights for non-

¹⁷³ This is from a poem written by British poet Rudyard Kipling in 1899, calling on America to colonize the Philippines and take up the “white man’s burden” of “civilizing” the indigenous population of the Philippines – *Wikipedia*, s.v. “The White Man’s Burden,” last modified January 25, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_White_Man%27s_Burden.

¹⁷⁴ Tom Lodge, *Speech to the AGM of the Johannesburg Black Sash in April 1978*, “Black Opposition: A Historical Perspective,” accessed November 9, 2024, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive-files/BSFeb79.0036.4843.020.004.Feb1979.13.pdf>; Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners* (Kindle ed.), Location 5668.

white South Africans, it was his (and by implication Britain's) concerns about the treatment of the non-white population of South Africa that prevented them from immediately adopting this morally-expedient approach. However, Milner's provocative pronouncement proved particularly prescient. Britain's leaders were ultimately quick to sacrifice the political rights of South Africa's majority non-white population in the interests of pursuing a union between the British South African colonies and the defeated Boer republics. As this chapter will demonstrate, the desire to maintain the political superiority of the minority European population in South Africa was very much a driving force in the post-war reconciliation between Boer and Briton and the formation of a burgeoning new South African identity that developed in the war's aftermath.

One of the key issues at the end of the war was the question of the non-white or "native" franchise – in the British Cape Colony, where all men who owned property to the value of twenty-five pounds or more were entitled to vote and eligible to stand for election to Parliament, regardless of skin color. British Natal also had a technically color-blind franchise, although the eligibility requirements for non-whites were so onerous as to make it almost impossible for them to vote. The two Boer republics, however, only allowed those of European descent to vote, a status quo that they were determined to maintain in any closer union.¹⁷⁵ The initial peace treaty that was to be signed at Vereeniging at the end of the war included a clause that extended the limited Cape Colony franchise to non-whites in the two republics; this clause was redrafted by Smuts to provide for a postponement of any decision on the Black franchise until after the Afrikaner republics had been granted self-government, a change that Milner accepted,

¹⁷⁵ Steyn, *Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness*, 297.

thereby affirming his earlier quote with which this chapter began.¹⁷⁶ The original wording of the proposed clause in the treaty had declared: “The Franchise will not be given to NATIVES in the Transvaal and the O.R.C. until after the introduction of SELF-GOVERNMENT”. In a handwritten note, Smuts proposed changing the wording to “The question regarding the franchise for natives will not be decided until after the introduction of self-government”. This was a subtle yet ultimately critical change, which effectively left the decision in the hands of the Afrikaner republics and thus postponed any possibility of an extension of the native franchise indefinitely.¹⁷⁷ A similar accommodation was made when the new Union was formed in 1910. When the South Africa Act (the legislation creating the new union) was passed in 1909, Smuts once again led the charge in resisting a national non-white franchise. As a compromise, only non-white residents in the Cape Colony were permitted to vote, but non-whites were forbidden from standing for the national Parliament. As a fig-leaf to non-white voters, four white Native representatives were appointed.¹⁷⁸ Ultimately, these British accommodations of Boer demands were to prove hugely consequential for the new country.

The White Man’s Burden

So what were Reitz’s views on the thorny racial issues that so bedeviled South Africa’s early (and subsequent) history? In the post-war years, as the Boer and British

¹⁷⁶ Steyn, *Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness*, 297; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 261.

¹⁷⁷ Giliomee et. al, *New History of South Africa*, 330.

¹⁷⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “South Africa Act,” accessed 9 November 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/South-Africa-Act>; Giliomee, Hermann, *The Afrikaner* (Kindle edition), 142.

clashed over the native franchise, Reitz was still a young man, spending his formative years around the Smuts' dining table. It appears that in matters of race, as in so many other areas, Reitz was strongly influenced by Smuts. This is apparent in *Commando*, where Reitz writes: - "These two men [Smuts and Botha] showed me that only on a basis of burying past quarrels and creating a united people out of the Dutch and English sections of the population, was there any hope for white men in South Africa."¹⁷⁹ The reference to "white men" is instructive, and reveals the racial considerations which underlay the reconciliatory philosophy of Smuts and co. In understanding Reitz's racial views, it is therefore helpful to begin by considering the views of Smuts and some of the racial debates that infused the discussions around the formation of the new Union.

The racial motivations which underpinned Smut's reconciliatory policies are apparent from some of his earliest postwar correspondence. In August 1902, a few short months after the war ended, he wrote to T. Lyndoch Graham, the attorney general of the Cape Province:

But what makes me pessimistic is the fact that so many are still aiming at the old policy of trying to crush the spirit or dominion of Africanderdom (whatever that may mean). The political vote, national sentiments, and language of the Dutch colonists must be eliminated, and they themselves transformed into full-blown 'Englishmen', in order that the racial pride of the opposite faction may be satiated to the full. That I say is a fatal policy—a policy which will make South Africa once more a black man's country.¹⁸⁰

There is a lot to unpack in this quote, but it certainly shines a new light on what motivated Smuts and Botha to so quickly embrace their erstwhile foes. The somewhat

¹⁷⁹ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 47.

¹⁸⁰ J. Smuts to T. Lyndoch Graham (nr 124), August 2, 1902, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume II, June 1902 – May 1910)*, 192.

dramatic use of the term “fatal” certainly suggests that they see the threat from their non-white countrymen as an existential one. Smuts also sees no irony in openly acknowledging that South Africa was once “a black man’s country,” or that it is the “civilized” Europeans who have taken it from them. Throughout his life, the high-minded philosophical elements of Smuts’ character (often evidenced in his public writings and his correspondence with his liberal friends and confidantes in England), tended to clash with the old-school paternalistic perspectives on racial matters with which he was raised. Consider, for example, a statement in a letter written by Smuts to Cape politician John X. Merriman in 1906:

I sympathize profoundly with the Native races of South Africa whose land it was long before we came here to force a policy of dispossession on them. And it ought to be the policy of all parties to do justice to the Natives and to take all wise and prudent measures for their civilization and improvement. But I don't believe in politics for them.¹⁸¹

A phrase often used in the literature to describe these paternalistic views is “trusteeship”. In his history of the Afrikaans people, Herman Giliomee explains how “Smuts clung to this idea of white trusteeship – which implied both white control over and responsibilities to Black people – until the end of his life.”¹⁸² However, Smuts wasn’t alone in these views amongst white South Africans at the time, both conservative and moderate. This was reflective of a school of thought, subsequently dubbed “scientific racism,” which reached its apogee in the first half of the century. At the heart of scientific racism was the

¹⁸¹ J. Smuts to J. X. Merriman (nr 288), March 13, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume II, June 1902 – May 1910)*, 288.

¹⁸² Giliomee, *The Afrikaners* (Kindle Edition), Location 6683; For Smuts’ views on the concept of trusteeship see Jan Smuts, "Address to the South African Institute of Race Relations," Cape Town, January 21, 1942 as published in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume VI, December 1934 – August 1945)*, 333.

belief (later debunked) that race was an inherently biological construct, and that different physical and mental characteristics could be attributed to different races. These beliefs were used to argue that the white races were inherently superior to the non-white races, and thus used to, *inter alia*, justify colonialism and racial segregation. In South Africa, as we will see in this chapter and the chapter to follow, the language of scientific racism is frequently used to justify racist policies, even if under the guise of seemingly benevolent paternalism.¹⁸³

Even those of supposedly more liberal inclination did not see non-white South Africans as potential equals. A good example of this is John X. Merriman, who served as prime minister of the Cape Colony from 1908 to 1910. A potential candidate for the first Prime Minister of the Union, Merriman conducted a voluminous correspondence with Smuts in the early 1900s, throughout which he consistently sought to persuade Smuts of the error of his ways and advocated for the extension of the non-white franchise in the Cape to the entire Union. For example, in a letter written in 1906, following his review of Smuts' proposed draft of a new constitution for the Transvaal (at a time when the former Boer republics were seeking self-government), we see Merriman gently chastising Smuts for not dealing with the question of "native rights." He writes: "What struck me at once in reading your admirable remarks on liberal principles was that they were open to the same objection in kind as the American Declaration of Independence, viz., that you ignore three-quarters of the population because they are coloured."¹⁸⁴ He is suggesting

¹⁸³Audrey Smedley, "Scientific Racism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed January 26, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/scientific-racism>.; On scientific racism in South Africa generally, see Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

¹⁸⁴J. X. Merriman to J. Smuts (nr 287), March 4, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 239.

that by ignoring the racial elephant in the room, Smuts is making the same fatal flaw as America's founding fathers – the key difference, of course, being that in South Africa, the persons whose rights were being ignored made up a significant majority of the population. However, a closer examination of Merriman's letters shows that his motivations were driven more by pragmatism than by any genuine belief in the rights of his fellow man. Consider, for example, a subsequent argument from the same letter:

Now taking myself as an example of those who are not negrophilists but at the same time believers in our Native policy, I do not like the Natives at all and I wish we had no black man in South Africa. But there they are, our lot is cast with them by an overruling Providence and the only question is how to shape our course so as to maintain the supremacy of our race and at the same time do our duty. Our policy [i.e. the non-white Cape franchise] you may say is unpleasant, it is derogatory to the pride of the European..... But it is a safety-valve and though it makes some noise and a nasty smell, it is the most reasonable guarantee against an explosion.¹⁸⁵

Here we see both paternalism and expediency, not to mention blatant racism. To Merriman's mind, the white man is clearly superior to the Black, and the franchise is a necessary evil, the only way of preventing an uprising of disgruntled Black South Africans, who vastly outnumbered their white counterparts. In a later letter written in 1908, he repeats the safety-valve analogy noting that he finds the native franchise "repellent" but suggesting that it is necessary to prevent political unrest and posed no real threat to "European political supremacy."¹⁸⁶

One also sees Smuts being gently remonstrated with by certain of his regular correspondents in England about his racial policies. In April 1906, for example, Smuts

¹⁸⁵ J. X. Merriman to J. Smuts (nr 54), March 4, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 240.

¹⁸⁶ J. X. Merriman to J. Smuts (nr 391), July 19, 1908, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 391.

received a letter from H. J. Wolstenholme, one of his Cambridge dons from when he studied there in the 1890s, with whom he maintained a regular correspondence.

Wolstenholme writes:

The Native question is I know a very thorny one, but I cannot help regretting that you do not see your way to the cautious and gradual granting of the franchise to such of the Natives as in education, etc. show themselves capable of exercising it. No class of subjects with any degree of intelligence, and ambition to raise its standard of living and to enjoy its rightful share in civilization, has ever obtained justice from a ruling class over whom they have no control or check by a share in the representation; and no such class will ever be content to remain in such subjection.¹⁸⁷

Whether or not this had any meaningful impact on his views, or his policies is difficult to say. Ultimately, however, for Smuts, any considerations of racial justice were secondary to his primary goal – union. Smuts’ position is perhaps best summed up from a letter written by him in 1908 to the UK Colonial Secretary’s office. He writes: “The political status of the Natives is no doubt a very important matter, but vastly more important to me is the union of South Africa, which if not carried now will probably remain in abeyance until another deluge has swept over South Africa”.¹⁸⁸ Smuts was very aware that any form of non-white franchise, even highly qualified, would have been a non-starter for most of his fellow Afrikaners. Whatever high-minded concerns he may have had about the treatment of Black South Africans, he was only too happy to kick the can down the road, to avoid jeopardizing Union.¹⁸⁹ He writes, “When I consider the political future of

¹⁸⁷ H. J. Wolstenholme to J. Smuts, April 20, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 259.

¹⁸⁸ J. Smuts to J. A. Hobson, July 13, 1908, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 441.

¹⁸⁹ For Smuts, political union was vital to ensure economic integration of South Africa’s four provinces and the economic success. In a letter to Merriman in 1908 he wrote: “Unless we have political union commercial union will become impossible and an intolerable situation will soon arise.” - J. Smuts to J. X. Merriman, September 23, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 523.

the Natives in South Africa I must say that I look into shadows and darkness; and then I feel inclined to shift the intolerable burden of solving that sphinx problem to the ampler shoulders and stronger brains of the future.”¹⁹⁰ As was often the case with Smuts, when it came to questions of race, pragmatism trumped principle. What also becomes apparent from considering contemporaneous sources is that he had a willing accomplice in this – the British government.

British Complicity

Prior to the war, British foreign secretary Joseph Chamberlain had proposed a reconsideration of the Black franchise in South Africa¹⁹¹ and during the war Black South Africans were promised enhanced voting rights as a quid pro quo for remaining neutral.¹⁹² Pre-war British proposals to support the Black South African franchise ultimately proved hollow, however - as noted above, at the peace negotiations Milner was quick to acquiesce in Smuts’ watering-down of the Black franchise protections in the Vereeniging peace treaty. Milner’s post-war administration also imposed harsh pass laws which required Black South Africans to carry passes with them at all times and severely curtailed their ability to move around South Africa.¹⁹³ Milner did, subsequently, establish a “South African Native Affairs Commission” which in 1905 proposed a country-wide

¹⁹⁰J. Smuts to J. X. Merriman, March 13, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers*(Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910), 88.

¹⁹¹ See Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners* (Kindle edition), Location 5665; See also Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold and War*.

¹⁹² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “South African War,” accessed December 4, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/South-African-War/Peace>.

¹⁹³ Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners* (Kindle edition), Location 5762; On pass laws generally, see *South African History Online*, “Pass Laws in South Africa 1800–199,” last modified 2019, accessed December 4, 2024, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/pass-laws-south-africa-1800-1994>.

colourblind qualified franchise, along with enhanced property rights and education rights for South Africans. Ultimately, however, none of this came to fruition.¹⁹⁴ After Milner left South Africa in 1905, he was replaced by Lord Selborne, ostensibly a liberal and a proponent of non-racial franchise.¹⁹⁵ However, Selborne's true views are apparent in a letter he wrote to Smuts in 1908:

The black man is absolutely incapable of rivalling the white man. If the white man is ever out-rivalled by the black man, it will be entirely the fault of the white man. No one can have any experience of the two races without feeling the intrinsic superiority of the white man. All history in addition proves it. A black man may emerge, from time to time, like Booker Washington in the United States of America or Khama in South Africa, who is centuries ahead of his fellow black men; but these exceptions only prove the rule, and it is my profound belief that the white man has nothing to fear from giving the black man the freest opportunities to evolve himself under the best conditions and free from any artificial impediments.¹⁹⁶

Selborne's primary argument for a non-racial franchise was therefore essentially that there was no risk in extending the franchise on a limited basis to non-white South Africans, as they were so patently inferior to white people – i.e. that there was no chance of this jeopardizing white supremacy. Here we see more of the scientific racism discussed earlier, although ironically used in this case to support the non-white franchise.

The then Undersecretary for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, himself a veteran of the South African War,¹⁹⁷ also played a key role in the ongoing negotiation between the

¹⁹⁴ SA Military History website, "Henry Campbell-Bannerman," accessed December 4, 2024, <https://samhistory.com/tag/henry-campbell-bannerman/#2017f93b-6168-475d-a4b3>.

¹⁹⁵ Steyn, *Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness*, 298

¹⁹⁶ Lord Selborne to J. Smuts, January 1908, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume 2)*, 364.

¹⁹⁷ Although Churchill's involvement in the war was primarily as a journalist, he was captured in a railway ambush early in the war, and his daring escape from a Pretoria prison, made him something of a celebrity at home in the United Kingdom, which then he parlayed into a political career after the war. Churchill, along with Reitz, was present at the Battle of Spionkop in 1900, as were future South African Prime Minister, Louis Botha, and Mahatma Gandhi (as a stretcher bearer).

British and the Boers in the first decade of the twentieth century. Richard M. Langworth has suggested that Churchill was seen as something of a radical for the time, with fairly progressive views on race.¹⁹⁸ Certain of his public statements and correspondence does bear this out - in 1906, for example, he was recorded as saying in a speech in the House of Commons: "We will endeavour...to advance the principle of equal rights of civilized men irrespective of colour. We will not—at least I will pledge myself—hesitate to speak out when necessary if any plain case of cruelty of exploitation of the native for the sordid profit of the white man can be proved."¹⁹⁹

Then in 1907, in a letter to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Elgin, Churchill wrote that a condition of British support for a united South Africa should be a right "to be consulted effectively upon the native policy. I would not do anything for them without a sufficient return for the benefit of the native."²⁰⁰ However, as with other British politicians of the time, these high-minded statements did not result in any meaningful efforts to promote the political rights of Black South Africans. Churchill, like others, was quick to sacrifice the non-white franchise on the altar of white reconciliation. Thus, for example, in response to a question in the British parliament about the Treaty of Vereeniging and whether it guaranteed the Black franchise, he noted that the Afrikaners had a different view and responded that: "We must be bound ,by the interpretation which the other party places on it and it is undoubted that the Boers would regard it as a breach of that treaty if

¹⁹⁸ Richard M. Langworth, "'The Art of the Possible': Churchill, South Africa, and Apartheid," *Richard M. Langworth* (blog), June 4, 2020, <https://richardmlangworth.com>.

¹⁹⁹ Winston Churchill, Speech in the House of Commons, 28 February 1906, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 2, *Young Statesman 1901-1914* (Hillsdale, Mich.: Hillsdale College Press, 2007), 163.

²⁰⁰ Hillsdale College, "South Africa and Apartheid, 1910," *Churchill Project*, accessed December 4, 2024 <https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/south-africa-apartheid-1910/>.

the franchise were in the first instance extended to any persons who are not white.²⁰¹ In 1909, a delegation led by W.P. Schreiner (the former Cape Colony premier), including leaders from the Black and coloured communities, visited London to protest the proposed constitution of the new Union, and its lack of a nationwide universal franchise for all races. Dr. A. Abdurahman, a representative of South Africa's Coloured (mixed-race) community sought to make the argument that only "natives" were excluded from the vote, and as Coloured people were not "natives," they were entitled to the same rights as white people. Churchill's response was that the word "native" meant "native from any country other than a European country,"²⁰² and as such Coloureds were also prohibited from being granted the franchise before self-government was achieved. Shortly thereafter, Churchill was a member of the Asquith government which passed the South Africa Act of 1909, the legislation which formed the new Union of South Africa. As a compromise, the limited non-racial franchise in the Cape was retained, but it would be another 84 years before the dream of a universal non-racial franchise would be achieved.

In 1906, John X Merriman suggested that there was a deliberate policy on the part of the British government to promote white unity at the expense of Black political rights. He declared: "I gather that the policy of Milner and of those on whom his mantle has fallen is to unite the two white races in opposition to the Black. From their point of view this is Machiavellian in its astuteness."²⁰³ How deliberate this was can be debated –

²⁰¹ Richard Dowden, "Apartheid: Made in Britain – Richard Dowden Explains How Churchill, Rhodes, and Smuts Caused Black South Africans to Lose Their Rights," *The Independent*, April 16, 1994, accessed December 4, 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/apartheid-made-in-britain-richard-dowden-explains-how-churchill-rhodes-and-smuts-caused-black-south-africans-to-lose-their-rights-1370856.html>.

²⁰² Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners* (Kindle Edition), Location 6727.

²⁰³ J. X. Merriman to J. Smuts, March 4, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 239.

certainly, at least initially, Milner's preference was to promote English interests at the expense of Afrikaans' ones.²⁰⁴ Immigration from the mother country was encouraged (although with limited success), and English was mandated as the sole language of instruction in South African schools.²⁰⁵ It was only in later years, once Milner had left the country in 1905, that the program to create a new composite South African white identity (incorporating both Boer and Brit) gathered steam. South African historian Shula Marks has demonstrated how Milner's young Oxford-trained acolytes, the so-called Kindergarten, played an active role in this regard, particularly after his departure.²⁰⁶ In the Act of Union, both English and Dutch were recognized as official languages. What was ultimately important to Britain was to maintain strategically-located South Africa (which sat astride the sea routes to the East) as a loyal link in the imperial chain. If a British-dominated South Africa could not be achieved, then second prize was an independent but loyal member of the British Commonwealth. It soon became apparent, following the limited success of Milner's Anglicization plans, that this could not be achieved without bringing the Afrikaners, who formed a majority of the white population, on board. British policy after the departure of Milner is perhaps best summed up by a letter written in 1906 by Churchill to Smuts:

You will, I dare say, also have followed the course of affairs in the House of Commons, and the regular developments of Government policy which have taken place. From all this, I trust you will have concluded that it is the desire and intention of those who now advise the Sovereign to do their best to strike a fair and just balance between the Dutch and British races in South Africa, to secure either race from danger of oppression by the other, and then, while preserving at all risks and at all costs the authority of the

²⁰⁴ Dubow, *Colonial Nationalism*, 53-85; See also Dubow, "Imaging the new South Africa," 55.

²⁰⁵ Dubow, "Colonial Nationalism," 56.

²⁰⁶ Dubow, "Colonial Nationalism," 55-56.

British Crown, to leave South Africa as much master of its own fortunes as the Australian Commonwealth or the Dominion of Canada.²⁰⁷

Ultimately, South Africa, along with Australia, New Zealand and Canada were afforded Dominion status in 1926, and effectively granted independence from Britain, other than in respect of foreign affairs, although they remained members of the broader Commonwealth.²⁰⁸ It is telling, however, that the only countries within the British Empire that were afforded Dominion status were those that were majority-white, or, in the case of South Africa, white-ruled. No such status was afforded at the time to other colonies like India or Britain's Caribbean possessions. In this sense, there was a clear alignment between the racial views of the imperial mothership, which only seemed to believe that white-governed countries could be entrusted with a degree of self-government, and the paternalistic views which many white South Africans held towards the non-white population.

In this regard, it is perhaps helpful to consider the evolving situation in South Africa through the lens of a settler colonialism framework. Settler colonialism is differentiated from more traditional forms of colonialism by the fact that it is not just interested in the exploitation of local populations and the extraction of resources but also involves the establishment of a more permanent settler community in the colonised country, which governs the country but retains ties with the imperial coloniser. In their book on settler colonialism, Elkins and Petersen describe settler colonialism in the twentieth century as "marked by ongoing negotiation and struggle among four key

²⁰⁷ W. Churchill to J. Smuts, May 12, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Vol. II, June 1902-May 1910)*, 273.

²⁰⁸ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Dominion," last modified October 4, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dominion-British-Commonwealth>.

groups: an imperial metropole where sovereignty formally resides, a local administration charged with maintaining order and authority, an indigenous population significant enough in size and tenacity to make its presence felt, and an often demanding and well-connected settler community.”²⁰⁹ South Africa, in the first half of the twentieth century, ticks a number of these boxes. However, there are also key differences – whilst, in this case, there was clearly an imperial metropole (i.e. England), a well-established settler community and a large indigenous population, the settler community was itself, at least initially, divided along linguistic and class lines and not all were aligned with the imperial metropole. Indeed, at the beginning of the century, a significant portion of the local settler community, the Boers, were engaged in a war for independence against the metropole. Many Afrikaners at this time would have seen themselves more as an indigenous population than a settler community representing an imperial overlord – indeed, they have been called the “white tribe of Africa”²¹⁰ and by this time, there were remaining ties between the Afrikaners and Holland, the original imperial metropole. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, there was an evolution amongst many in the Afrikaner community in the early decades of the twentieth century, whereby they became increasingly willing to accept a concept of national identity centered around a united local white ruling class, comprising both English and Afrikaans speakers. They also became more willing to accept South Africa’s place as part of the broader British Empire, provided Afrikaner rights were protected. In a sense, therefore, South Africa ended a hybrid form of settler colonialism, whereby the local settler community ended up

²⁰⁹ Elkins and Pedersen, *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century* (Kindle edition), 4.

²¹⁰ A term popularized in the book about the Afrikaners, written by David Harrison - David Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

being a combination of two separate settler communities, one of which (the Afrikaners) was divorced from its original imperial metropole, but willingly accepted allegiance to a new imperial metropole as *quid pro quo* for a system that ensured the continuing dominance of the local settler community.

Central to this compromise, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, was the issue of race, which helped paper over some of the inherent linguistic, class and ethnic divisions between the different elements of South Africa's settler community. As Sai Englert has noted, "all settler classes, despite their internal social tensions and conflicts, depend on the Indigenous population's continued dispossession, as well as on the settler state to impose their dominance and distribute the colonial loot." As discussed above, the legislation passed by successive post-Union governments, including those of Botha, Smuts and Hertzog, were not only aimed at maintaining white supremacy, but were also aimed at ensuring a continuing supply of the cheap African labor which most sectors of the South African economy required, including the predominantly internationally-owned mines, South African industry and rural Afrikaans farmers.

In summary, as is apparent from the above, the reconciliatory policies espoused by Smuts and Botha which were so central to Reitz's own philosophy, were motivated in part by racial considerations, in that the unification of the two "white races" was the only way of ensuring the continuation of white supremacy in South Africa. As such, the new South African identity that was being formed was very much a white identity. The British government was certainly, if not an active co-conspirator in this program, a willing accomplice. Their initial public commitments to racial justice proved to be largely

superficial, and easily dissolvable in the pressures of post-war South African politics and the needs of Empire.

Reitz and Race

So where then did young Deneys Reitz stand on all of this? In the post-war years, as the new Union was being formed, Reitz was still a young man finding his way in the world. Many of these years were spent living under the Smuts' roof, undoubtedly being regularly exposed to Smuts' thoughts on racial matters, and ultimately, in this, as in so many areas, his views became closely aligned with those of Smuts. The first public expression of these views can be found in an article written in an Orange Free State newspaper in 1912, when he was a young lawyer practising in Heilbron. The article is written in Dutch and is simply entitled "Whites and Blacks in South Africa".²¹¹ In this article we see him grappling with echoes of Smuts' description of the "native question" as a sphinx problem by describing it as one of the most difficult issues that a contemporary white population has ever had to deal with:

To place the Kaffirs on equal footing with the whites, we dare not; to deprive them of all political and social rights, we may not; ...and therefore the white population of South Africa finds itself in the seemingly inescapable dilemma that they must either do justice and thereby bring their entire national existence to an end.

The choice of the words "may not" (my emphasis) suggests some of the benevolent paternalism that animated Smuts' thinking – the idea that there was an obligation to look after the "lesser races". We also see the same tussle that plagued Smuts

²¹¹Deneys Reitz, "Whites and Blacks in South Africa," *Vriende van die Volk*, March 15, 1912, newspaper cutting from private collection of Carl Reitz, Bergville, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa.

throughout his life – a recognition that an injustice was being perpetrated against the Black citizens of South Africa, counterbalanced by a fear that any concrete steps to remedy these injustices would, with mathematical inevitability (given the large disparity in population numbers) result in the end of white rule in South Africa. He goes on to claim: “The ardent desire of all is to keep South Africa a ‘white man's country’, but to ensure this ideal and at the same time not to commit injustice against the colored people is a task that, in this country especially, is one of extraordinary difficulty.”²¹²

Throughout Reitz’s life, in his public pronouncements and actions, and his private papers, we see a similar conflict playing itself out. In some ways he was very much a man of his time, with prejudices to match, who did not believe there to be genuine equality between Black and white. Yet later in life, he also showed a degree of empathy and self-awareness on racial matters that was unusual for the period, which suggests that his views may have evolved over the years. In the post-war years leading up to and following the formation of Union, he was a young man whose views were still evolving. It was during this period that the first building blocks of the racially discriminatory legislative framework that would eventually evolve into the apartheid state were put in place.²¹³

In 1913, the Botha government passed the Natives Land Act, which effectively prohibited Black South Africans from owning or renting property outside of certain designated reserves, which constituted a woefully inadequate 7% of the total land area (subsequently increased to a still completely inadequate 13% in 1936). In 1920, the

²¹² Reitz, "Whites and Blacks in South Africa".

²¹³ See generally *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Apartheid Legislation," last modified November 23, 2024, accessed December 4, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid_legislation.

Smuts government (of which Reitz was now a member), passed the Native Affairs Act, which set up tribal councils to administer the “native reserves,” further sidelining Black South Africans from participation in national governance processes. This was followed by the Urban Areas Act in 1923, which limited Black South Africans living and working in urban areas to specific designated areas (called townships), establishing a pattern of racial segregation in urban areas which persists to the current day (notwithstanding the repeal of the offending legislation in 1994). This was enforced through a strict system of pass laws, which required Black South Africans to carry passes with them, demonstrating their permission to be in certain areas. As described further below in this chapter, the 1920s saw discriminatory laws passed by the Hertzog government which, *inter alia*, restricted Black labour unions and reserved certain skilled jobs for white workers. Finally, significant pieces of legislation were passed in 1936/7 by the Fusion government led by Hertzog and Smuts, including the Representation of Natives Act, removing Black voters from the electoral roll in the Cape and instead giving Black voters the right to appoint a limited number of (white) representatives in Parliament. Reitz was a cabinet member, or a member of Parliament, when most of this legislation was passed, and generally voted in favour of them.

However, there were also indications in Deneys Reitz’s later public career that he harboured more liberal tendencies on matters of race. One commentator has characterised him as a “closet liberal”.²¹⁴ In particular, his short stint as Minister of Native Affairs from 1939 to 1942 saw a relaxation of the harsh pass laws and the publication of a report on

²¹⁴ Archie Henderson, "Deneys Reitz Rides Again," *Cape Argus*, January 4, 2000, quoting Reitz researcher Marius von Blerck.

native affairs which contained some very progressive policy prescriptions (although most of these were not ultimately implemented). Certainly, by the standards of the time, he had more empathetic attitudes to his non-white countrymen than many of his contemporaries. In his doctoral thesis on Reitz, Calitz gives the example of a parliamentary session in 1935, where the Further Exemption and Acquisition of Native Land Bill was being debated. In a heated discussion between Reitz and Dr N.J. van der Merwe, Reitz accused Dr van der Merwe of ignoring the needs of Black people, and stressed the need to treat them fairly.²¹⁵ Other examples of Reitz's open-mindedness on racial matters and willingness to recognize the injustice of the treatment of his Black fellow South Africans can be found in selected passages from his second autobiographical novel, *Trekking On*, published in 1933. For example, on his way into exile in 1902, his ship stopped off in Egypt, and he describes his encounter with the locals as follows:

Here a party of Egyptians came to see us. They said their country too was oppressed by the British, and they had come to offer us their fraternal sympathy. In South Africa we had always taken it for granted that aboriginals should be governed by whites, and our colour prejudices are so deep-rooted that we did not relish being claimed as fellow patriots in distress by natives, so the incident helped to open our eyes on a great problem.²¹⁶

Interestingly, this paragraph is not to be found in Reitz's description of the event in his original diaries, suggesting that his views on racial matters had evolved somewhat in the thirty years since his contemporaneous description of that encounter. Similarly, he describes his relationship with a local Madagascan during his time in exile as follows:

His name was Benoit Adrianomanana, and in spite of my inborn colour prejudice, we became great friends. He proved to be a man of liberal education who knew much more than I did. He gave me books to read by

²¹⁵ Calitz, *Krygsman*, 468.

²¹⁶ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 9.

good French authors, and in the months that followed I learned a great deal from one who would in South Africa have been denied the elementary rights of citizenship.²¹⁷

The underlined portion (my underlining), an acknowledgement of the injustice of South Africa's racially exclusionary legislative framework, did not appear in his original diaries. It may be that this indicates a general evolution in his views, but it is also possible that these additions were motivated in part by a desire to appear more open-minded to the English target market for his books.

A few years later, when Reitz was back serving in the cabinet as part of the Fusion Government, we see some of the political pragmatism which informed Smuts' views on race in a letter written by him in 1935 to his cousin Oliver Deneys Schreiner, a Cape-based liberal lawyer.²¹⁸ From the context it appears that Reitz is responding to criticisms from Schreiner that he has feet of clay on racial matters, and it is worth quoting at length as it encapsulates well Reitz's somewhat expedient political pragmatism on these matters. He begins by chastising Schreiner for criticizing the government's "native policy" whilst himself standing aloof from the fray:

I know you will not take offence if I say that I am always mildly resentful when I have these questionnaires on the native problem fired at me by those who stand aloof and criticise but do not assist... Oliver, old man, had you done what we who know and admire you wished you had done - had you taken part in the public life of this country, you would have realised by now how the native problem bristles with difficulties at every turn.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 26.

²¹⁸ Schreiner was described in later life as "the greatest Chief Justice South Africa never had" – *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Oliver Schreiner," last modified September 20, 2024, accessed December 4, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Schreiner. Schreiner's liberal politics meant that he was overlooked a number of times for the Chief Justice position during the apartheid era, notwithstanding that he was the standout jurist of his era.

²¹⁹ AntiquarianAuctions.com, "Fine Letter from Deneys Reitz to Justice Oliver Schreiner re the Native Problem," accessed December 4, 2024, <https://antiquarianauctions.com/lots/fine-letter-from-deneys-reitz-to-justice-oliver-schreiner-re-the-native-problem>.

He acknowledges that Schreiner may be correct in his criticisms of government racial policy and suggests that he was “a friend of the native” who has “suffered considerable political pains and penalties for [his] views”. However, he then goes on to make the time-honored argument of politicians everywhere, that idealism cannot trump political reality:

What you forget is that no man who does not take into account the political attitude of the South African public can hope to achieve much good as far as the native problem is concerned. It is not only a question of what high-thinking men believe should be done but of what high-thinking men are able to do in the face of conservative opinion which has to be converted before theories, however true in themselves, can be applied in practice....

To be fair to Reitz, during this time he was a member of the Fusion government, the coalition between Smuts’ South African Party and Hertzog’s more conservative National Party. Thus, he was constrained by the political realities of what was achievable within the bounds of this uneasy alliance.

The counterargument to Reitz’s appeal to political reality is provided by J.H. Hofmeyr, a liberal Afrikaner politician, and Reitz’s successor as Deputy Prime Minister under Smuts during the Second World War. In a Parliamentary speech in 1936 made during the debate on the bill to abolish the Cape Franchise, Hofmeyr (then a Cabinet Minister in the Fusion government) warned of the dangers of kicking the can down the road:

By this bill we are sowing the seeds of great potential conflict....This bill says that even the most educated native shall never have political equality with even the least educated and the least cultured white or coloured man. It says to these educated natives, you must be driven back upon your own people. But we drive them back in hostility and disgruntlement...The tide of reaction is still flowing forward. The puny breastworks that we put up must be swept away. I know perfectly well that I am speaking against the overwhelming majority of this house...I know my remarks will be

described as unrealistic...But these are matters on which the future must be left to judge.²²⁰

These were brave words to utter by a white South African politician, but Hofmeyr had always been a man of strong liberal views, notwithstanding that he was descended from Afrikaner royalty.²²¹ He was something of a child prodigy, having been a Rhodes Scholar to Oxford and the youngest chancellor of the Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg at the age of twenty four.²²² However, what is even more remarkable than his stirring words is the fact that a Cabinet Minister was allowed to speak so freely on the matter, and yet remain in the Cabinet (albeit that he resigned a few years later in a political protest.) Even more than this, he remained a close confidante of Smuts, who continued to defend him throughout his life, notwithstanding the fact that his liberal views created an easy target for Afrikaner nationalists looking to make political capital on racial issues. As noted above, Hofmeyr succeeded Reitz as Deputy Prime Minister under Smuts during the Second World War, and effectively ran the country when Smuts was away in England serving in the Imperial War Cabinet. This certainly suggests that his liberal views were not completely anathema to Smuts, and perhaps even suggests that Hofmeyr was a useful surrogate who could express some of the more liberal thoughts that Smuts perhaps harbored but couldn't politically say himself. Alan Paton, Hofmeyr's biographer, made the following very telling observation about why Smuts continued to retain Hofmeyr as his deputy - "[D]id [Smuts] know that not even his creative genius

²²⁰ "Hofmeyr: Champion of the Voiceless," *Natal Mercury*, April 25, 2013.

²²¹ His father was Jan Hofmeyr, a leader of the Afrikaner Bond in the Cape Province, and an early advocate for reconciliation between Afrikaner and English.

²²² The definitive biography of Hofmeyr's life was written by his close friend and author, Alan Paton - Alan Paton, *Hofmeyr* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

could split the rock from which he himself had been hewn? Did he let Hofmeyr speak on, unrebuked, because this man was his own conscience, unpraised because it was not politic?" The conflicted nature of Smuts' views on race is effectively demonstrated by his choice of deputies – both Afrikaners of a more liberal inclination, but one a political pragmatist, one a principled purist.

Following the break-up of the Fusion government in 1939 over the issue of entry into the Second World War on the side of Britain, Reitz's actions and public statements whilst serving as Minister of Native Affairs (and Deputy Prime Minister) in the new Smuts-led government suggest that his views on race had evolved since his early days. For example, when addressing the Natives Representative Council in his capacity as Minister in December 1942, shortly after the publication of the Atlantic Charter,²²³ Reitz expressed the view that the freedoms guaranteed in that charter should apply equally to African people.²²⁴ What made that statement particularly interesting was that one of the key freedoms recognized in that charter was the right of self-determination, the right of all people to choose their own form of government. Churchill, in particular, was concerned that the acknowledgement of this, albeit in a non-binding treaty, would encourage independence movements across the Empire, which ultimately proved prescient.²²⁵ In South Africa, the African National Congress explicitly acknowledged Reitz's statement in a report published by an especially established sub-committee at its

²²³A joint declaration by US President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister, Churchill of their plans for the post-war world published after a mid-Atlantic meeting on a US warship - U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "The Atlantic Conference & Charter, 1941," *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/atlantic-conf>

²²⁴ "Africans' Claims in South Africa," Report of the Atlantic Charter Committee of the African National Congress, unanimously adopted by the African National Congress annual conference on December 16, 1943, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/anc/1943/claims.htm>.

²²⁵ Office of the Historian, "The Atlantic Conference & Charter, 1941."

annual national conference in December 1943. The report included the following statement – “But in other parts of Africa where there are the peculiar circumstances of a political entrenched European minority ruling a majority African population the demands of the Africans for full citizenship rights and direct participation in all the councils of the state should be recognised. This is most urgent in the Union of South Africa.” This report was sent to Smuts and a meeting requested, which Smuts rejected on the basis that he was “not prepared to discuss proposals which are wildly impracticable”.²²⁶

It may be that Reitz was just speaking off the cuff and pandering to his audience – a recognition of a right to self-determination for Black South Africans was certainly not official South African government policy, and it was only three years since the government had stripped the Cape’s “native” population of its limited franchise rights.²²⁷ However, a more concrete example of Reitz’s more liberal outlook on racial matters was his publicly-expressed views on the hated pass laws. In 1941 in response to a parliamentary question about the number of arrests under the pass laws, Reitz expressed the view that “there was no greater cause of strained relations between African and European than the pass laws”.²²⁸ He declared that he would issue an order instructing that no passes should be demanded in the absence of obvious criminality and undertook to approach Smuts about abolishing the system completely. This never took place, but on Reitz’s watch there was a considerable relaxation of the pass laws. It may be that this was

²²⁶ "Africans' Claims in South Africa," Report of the Atlantic Charter Committee of the African National Congress.

²²⁷ By means of the Representation of Natives Act, 1936, referred to above. Smuts justified his support of this Bill by arguing for pragmatism over principle – “Of course, I could have died in the last ditch, so to say. I could have said “I fight to the bitter end for the Cape Native Franchise” but what would have been the result? It would not have been I that died, but the Natives, metaphorically speaking. – Steyn, *Jan Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness*, 306.

²²⁸ Calitz, *Krygsman*, 468.

not completely driven by altruism – the wartime economy was in great need of an increased supply of labor, particularly given the absence of a number of young (white) men fighting overseas, and a relaxation of the pass laws would help facilitate this. However, Reitz was certainly quite publicly unequivocal in his denunciation of the pass laws, describing it in Parliament as a “humiliating system”.²²⁹ Whilst he never appeared to ever really believe there was a genuine equality between Black and white (as we will see further below), he was certainly alive to the inherent unfairness of certain elements of the system, and willing to soften its more draconian elements, provided it didn’t jeopardize the white hold on power. In her autobiography “Union to Apartheid: A Trek to Isolation”²³⁰ Margaret Ballinger, one of the four white Native parliamentary representatives, is quite complimentary of Reitz’s time as Minister of Native Affairs, describing his policies as “a more modern and liberal approach to the administrative problems of our rapidly changing multi-racial society,” and she expresses disappointment that his time in this position was unceremoniously cut short. During Reitz’s ministry, a report was published by his department in 1942, entitled “Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Social, Health and Economic Conditions of Urban Natives”.²³¹ The chief author of the report was Douglas Smit, the Secretary of Native Affairs, but it presumably had Reitz’s sign-off. It included relatively progressive policy proposals such as the recognition of African trade unions, the extension of the old age

²²⁹ Calitz, *Krysgman*, 469.

²³⁰ Margaret Ballinger, *Union to Apartheid: A Trek to Isolation* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), https://archive.org/details/fromuniontoapart0000ball_w9p3.

²³¹ Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Social, Health and Economic Conditions of the Urban Natives, printed by the Government Printers, Pretoria, 1942, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/africa/article/abs/report-of-the-interdepartmental-committee-on-the-social-health-and-economic-conditions-of-urban-natives-printed-by-the-government-printers-pretoria-1942/E9F8E703E959FDCE80C460887BC3320B>.

pension scheme to Black African pensioners and the abolition of pass laws. However, as was often the case, high-minded principles did not translate into real-world impact when faced with the practical realities of South African racial politics and few of these measures were implemented. Reitz was shipped off to London in 1943, ostensibly for health reasons. It has been suggested, however, that he was shipped off because Smuts was concerned that his liberal views on matters of race might jeopardize their chances at the 1943 election.²³² Whether or not this was true is difficult to say, but his replacement, Piet van der Byl, was a hardcore segregationist.²³³

An examination of Reitz's personal papers during the time period when he was serving as Minister of Native Affairs shows a more mixed picture of Reitz's racial views. For example, on 30 September 1942, he wrote to his long-time confidante Connie Lomax, offering the following description of an official visit to certain tribal lands in Sekukuniland (present-day Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces in the north of South Africa):

It has been a hard but interesting time and I so wished you could have been with me – with your knowledge and sympathy for the natives I know you would have understood their viewpoint and their grievances. They are such children – magnifying small matters and overlooking the things that really count.²³⁴

Notwithstanding Reitz's comparatively enlightened turn as Minister of Native Affairs, it certainly seems that he had never lost his paternalistic view of his Black countrymen. His patriarchal perspective is also apparent from the text of a speech given

²³² Mouton, *Die Politieke Loopbaan van Margaret Ballinger*, 85.

²³³ Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005), 275.

²³⁴ Deney's Reitz to Connie Lomax, September 30, 1942, private collection of Koos Bekker, Babylonstoren Wine Farm, Western Cape, South Africa.

by Reitz to a British audience in 1943/44, presumably whilst he was serving as High Commissioner in London.²³⁵ Reitz's Eurocentric view of South African history, not at all unusual for the times, is apparent from the very first lines: "in the year 1652, the Dutch decided to build a port and to plant a garrison below Table Mountain. That decision marked the beginning of our South African History." To many white South Africans, history began only when the sailing ships of the Dutch East India Company docked in Cape Town harbor for the first time, to find what Reitz describes as an uninhabited land, "save for a few wandering Hottentots and Bushmen." He thus echoes a common trope adopted by colonial apologists everywhere to legitimize their ancestors' imperial activities – the idea that they took over a "terra nullius"²³⁶ or "nobody's land". He then makes it emphatically clear that (his empathetic view of the plight of Black South Africans notwithstanding) he in no way sees them as equal to whites, and goes as far to suggest that there is a scientific basis for this –

the Native population ... [has] fine qualities, but [is] intellectually, socially and politically almost wholly undeveloped. I am not an anthropologist and therefore not qualified to say whether our native tribes will ever be capable of evolving up to European standards. Indeed the balance of scientific evidence appears to lean towards the contrary opinion.

As discussed above, this belief in the biological superiority of the white race was not unusual for the time. Like Smuts, however, Reitz sees this as creating a paternal obligation of "trusteeship" - one he describes in the speech as being like "the feudal barons towards their serfs." He acknowledges that the treatment of them "may not seem

²³⁵ Deney's Reitz, undated and untitled speech on racial matters in South Africa, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Western Cape, South Africa.

²³⁶ Englert, *Settler Colonialism*, 82; *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Terra Nullius," last modified January 29, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terra_nullius.

ideal by modern standards but every European and every thinking Native will agree that to confer these complex civic rights upon a people who as yet are incapable of exercising them, would spell disaster.”²³⁷

Conclusion

It is apparent from this speech, given by Reitz towards the end of his life, that notwithstanding the apparent evolution and softening of his racial views that his latter-day public actions and pronouncements would suggest, he remained, like Smuts, fundamentally conflicted on matters of race. Possessed of sufficient self-awareness and empathy to acknowledge the inherent injustice in the treatment of South Africa’s Black population, he nevertheless was not willing to accept any steps to address this injustice that would jeopardize white rule in South Africa. Consider the somewhat apocalyptic language with which he concludes his speech – “If we give eight or nine million untutored and inexperienced Natives the vote, our work of three centuries [i.e. referring back to the first Dutch landing in the Cape] would be swept away, and South Africa would lapse back into savagery and darkness, in which both whites and natives would be involved in common ruin.” In essence, it appears that Reitz’s views had not fundamentally changed since the views expressed in that first newspaper article published back in 1912 – that the most important goal was to keep South Africa as a “white man’s country.” As we have seen, it was this guiding principle that played such an important role in forming South African identity in the early years of the new Union, and one of the key reasons Afrikaner and English South Africans were so quick to reconcile after the

²³⁷ Deneys Reitz, Undated and untitled speech on racial matters in South Africa.

end of the South African War. As we will see in the next chapter, it also played an important role in aligning the interests of white South African women with their white male counterparts.

Chapter IV.

Leila Reitz and the Role of Women in the Formation of South African Identity in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

“I regard [Leila Wright] as a person of very unusual capacity”

– Testimonial - Alan Gardner, Historical
Lecturer Newnham College,
Cambridge.²³⁸

Leila Wright, the future Mrs. Deneys Reitz, was certainly unusual for her time. With history degrees from the South African College²³⁹ and Cambridge University, she was highly educated in a period when female students at tertiary institutions were rare. English, outspoken and feminist, she certainly did not conform to the stereotype of the traditional Afrikaner political wife. She was also an unusually public female figure for the period - not only South Africa's first female parliamentarian (as a member of the same political party as her husband and Jan Smuts), she was also a driving force in the South African suffragette and birth control movements in the 1920s and 1930s. At a time when female voices in the historical record were thin on the ground, Leila Reitz's voice was unusually prominent and as such is a fertile ground to obtain further insight into the role played by women in the development of the new South African identity in the first few decades of the Union. She stands in striking contrast with another woman who

²³⁸ Testimonial for Leila Reitz from Alan Gardner, Historical Lecturer of Newnham College, Cambridge, private collection of Michael Reitz, Tokai, Western Cape, South Africa, undated (but presumably from 1913 / 1914, after Leila Reitz had completed her degree).

²³⁹ Now the University of Cape Town.

played a prominent role in Reitz's life and the politics of the day - Sibella Marghareta Krige (known to all as "Isie" and later "Ouma Smuts"), wife of Jan Smuts. A conservative Afrikaans housewife, somewhat old-fashioned in her views, Isie was in many ways an exemplar of a more traditional form of Afrikaner "womanhood". Yet these two women, born in different generations and from opposite sides of the linguistic divide, both ultimately ended up on the same side of the political fence, as committed supporters of their husbands' reconciliatory worldview.

How did this come about? The reconciliatory camp ultimately included both older-more-traditional Afrikaner women like Isie Smuts, and younger, more progressive, English-speaking South Africans like Leila Reitz. Their motivations were complex and varied, but as this chapter will seek to demonstrate, race (and a shared belief in the overriding importance of white racial solidarity) was one key factor that unified these disparate strands of South African womanhood and ultimately led to an alignment of their interests and those of their male counterparts. For many Afrikaner women, a belief in the importance of white unity to ensure continued white supremacy ultimately led them to accept reconciliation with the English as the lesser of two evils. A racial agenda also underlay the granting of the right to vote to South African women, which was seen by many Afrikaner nationalists, both male and female, as a means of diluting the limited non-white vote in the Cape Province. The suffragette movement was initially dominated by pro-British, English-speaking middle-class women like Leila Reitz, but as will be demonstrated, it was only once their interests became aligned with their Afrikaner counterparts that success was achieved. Although Leila Reitz was certainly socially liberal for her time, many of the causes which she advocated, such as the expansion of the

female vote, and the need for an improved social net and increased birth control, ultimately aligned with the political goals of the more conservative nationalist Afrikaner right wing. Chief among these goals was the effort to ensure continued white domination of South African politics. Finally, this chapter will also look to consider the role played by certain prominent British women with South African connections and will argue that they played an important role in facilitating and encouraging reconciliation.

Die “Volksmoeder” (Mother of the People)

When General Kitchener was appointed in 1900 as Lord Roberts’ successor as overall commander of the British forces, the general view was that the war was almost as good as won, and all that was left was to mop up the few bittereinders left out in the field. Instead, two more years of grueling guerilla warfare lay ahead. To combat the mobile Boer commandos and their hit-and-run tactics, Kitchener set up a countrywide system of fences and armed blockhouses. As a further discouragement to the Boer forces, a brutal program of farm-burning was initiated and Boer women and children were herded into concentration camps. Ultimately more than 27,000 women and children would die in these camps of disease and malnutrition.²⁴⁰ In many cases, however, this did not have the desired effect. A number of women chose instead to go on the run with their families, travelling in female-only troupes, and in many cases became some of the fiercest advocates of continuing the war.²⁴¹ As Kitchener was later to observe – “There is no

²⁴⁰ On the concentration camps generally, see *South African History Online*, “Women and Children in White Concentration Camps during the Anglo-Boer War, 1900-1902,” accessed January 9, 2025, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/women-and-children-white-concentration-camps-during-anglo-boer-war-1900-1902>.

²⁴¹ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 136.

doubt the women are keeping up the war and are far more bitter than the men.”²⁴² This is obviously something difficult to prove empirically, but given that Afrikaner women arguably bore the brunt of some of the war’s worst excesses, including the burning of their homesteads and incarceration in the concentration camps, it would not be surprising if they were. In any event this idea became an important part of the mythology of Afrikaner womanhood – the idea of the noble Afrikaner housewife and mother, stoically raising the family and looking after the farm whilst her husband was away fighting, bravely resisting and suffering through the British depravities of farm-burning and concentration camps as their contributions to the war-efforts, bittereinders in their own right. Elsabe Brink discusses the idealized form of womanhood ascribed to Afrikaner women, where the woman was not only required to be the lynchpin of the home front, but also served a broader symbolic role as a “central unifying force within Afrikanerdom.” Brink calls this the “volksmoeder” or “mother of the people”.²⁴³ This mythology was firmly embraced by the Afrikaner nationalist movement and culminated in the 1913 opening of a Women’s Monument in Bloemfontein, a memorial for the victims of the British concentration camps. As Herman Giliomee notes this was one of the few war memorials dedicated solely to female non-combatants.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 136.

²⁴³ Elsabe Brink, "Man-Made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the Volksmoeder," in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Cheryl Walker (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 273–292.

²⁴⁴ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, 135.

Ouma Smuts

Isie Smuts conformed in many ways to this mythical ideal of Afrikaner womanhood, but the evolution of her views and role in the formative years of the Union demonstrates the evolving nature of South African identity during this period. Isie was only twenty-nine when the first shots of the South African War were fired.²⁴⁵ She spent most of the war alone in informal confinement at her sister's home in Natal. In 1900 her young son died whilst her husband was away on commando and although she did not end up in a concentration camp like so many other Boer women and children, she retained a great bitterness towards the British.²⁴⁶ However, over time she softened, and became more aligned with her husband's more reconciliatory views. As previously noted, it was Isie that wrote to Deneys Reitz in exile in Madagascar, convincing him that life under the British was not so bad, and that he should consider returning.²⁴⁷ Whilst electioneering on her husband's behalf in the 1924 election, she stated at a public meeting – "It is a good

²⁴⁵ For an overview of Isie Smuts life, one can read Tom Macdonald's somewhat hagiographic autobiography, written and published during her lifetime - Tom Macdonald, *Ouma Smuts: The First Lady of South Africa* (London: Hurst & Blackett, Limited, 1946). See also, *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Isie Smuts," last modified January 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isie_Smuts.

²⁴⁶ Immediately prior to the South African War, an anti-British book entitled *Eene eeuw van onrecht* (A century of wrong) (F.W. Reitz, *Een Eeuw van Onrecht* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1906)) was published in Dutch, ostensibly in the name of Deneys Reitz's father, F.W. Reitz, the then state secretary of the South African Republic. It has long been suspected that Jan Smuts was the real author of the inflammatory tract, and Isie Smuts's biographer, suggests that it was her who then translated the work into English (in which she was proficient) (F.W. Reitz, *A Century of Wrong* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906). Her participation in the translation of this work which highlighted in great detail the various manners in which the Afrikaners had been maltreated by the British in South Africa (including lines describing the war on the Afrikaans republics as an "infanticide") is an indication of the extent of Isie's early bitterness towards the British - MacDonald, *Ouma Smuts*, 33.

²⁴⁷ MacDonald, *Ouma Smuts*, 114.

thing to be a friend of the British, because they have been magnanimous in the long run.”²⁴⁸ Here we also see that Isie shared her husband’s view of British magnanimity.

By the time of the Second World War, she had become known as “Ouma” (Grandmother) Smuts and played the role of mother to a nation at war, supporting her husband, travelling with him to see the troops, and preparing gifts and parcels for the servicemen of the South African Defence Force (mostly white and linguistically mixed). She was therefore fulfilling the ideal of the “volksmoeder” but not quite in the narrow ethnic sense in which Elsabe Brink considered it. Instead, as Suryakanthie Chetty notes in her article “Mothering the Nation: The Public Life of Isie Smuts,” she had now become matriarch to a national family aligned more with her husband’s reconciliatory philosophy, a broader church that included a place for both Afrikaner and English South Africans.²⁴⁹

However, there was no place for South Africa’s non-white inhabitants at the main family table. Here she was a mother in a different sense – sharing the views of her husband and others that the non-white races were like children, in need of maternal care and supervision.²⁵⁰ Trevor MacDonald, Isie Smuts’ biographer (who interviewed her in her later years) notes how she fully supported her husband’s goal of making ‘the Union of South Africa ... the mother of white civilization in the continent’.²⁵¹ Thus, Isie Smuts’ motherly role aligned closely with and supported the political goals of her husband and Reitz – a reconciliation of the two main white ethnic groups in South Africa, with the

²⁴⁸ MacDonald, *Ouma Smuts*, 54.

²⁴⁹ Suryakanthie Chetty, “Mothering the ‘Nation’: The Public Life of Isie ‘Ouma’ Smuts, 1899-1945,” *African Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (2015): 37-57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17532523.2015.1130189>, 56.

²⁵⁰ MacDonald, *Ouma Smuts*, 120. As highlighted below, one sees similar maternalistic language coming through in the South African suffragette movement.

²⁵¹ MacDonald, *Ouma Smuts*, 79.

ultimate goal of ensuring the domination of the white population in South Africa, and ultimately a precedent for the African continent as a whole.

Leila Reitz

Leila Reitz was a young girl of fifteen at the end of the South African War. Born to a middle-class English-speaking family in Cape Town in 1887, she was by all accounts, an academically-gifted child and obtained an arts degree from the South African College (subsequently the University of Cape Town) and in 1910, the year of Union, was awarded a scholarship to study history at Cambridge University in England. In 1914 she returned to South Africa to lecture history at the University of Cape Town and in 1919 she first met Deneys Reitz, fresh off the boat from war in Europe, whom she married the following year (the year in which Reitz was first elected to Parliament). Although only fourteen years younger than Isie Smuts, she came of age in a very different world. Having grown up in Cape Town in an English family, far from the war front, she would have had very limited experience of the bitterness of the Anglo-Boer war years and likely carried little of the historical baggage that Isie Smuts would have had to bear. She was in her early twenties at the time of Union and came of age in a united South Africa. Her strong support of her husband's early political career, and her decision to run for Parliament as a member of the South African Party of Smuts and her husband in 1934 suggests that she was strongly supportive of the party's reconciliatory policies. By all accounts, she had a formidable intellect and was a highly effective campaigner and politician. The various feminist and other social causes she championed also suggests she was someone with a liberal worldview and a strong moral conscience.

However, she also shared the somewhat paternalistic views of the non-white races in South Africa that were common for the time. As this chapter will seek to consider further, certain of the feminist issues in respect of which she campaigned in her political career were also informed, in part, by racial motivations similar to those which informed the reconciliatory policies of Smuts and Reitz – i.e. the need to support and maintain white rule in South Africa.

Leila Reitz's time spent studying in the United Kingdom presumably provided her additional insight into the English world view. This can be seen, for example, in her commentary on Deneys Reitz's first draft of *Commando* (as discussed in the second chapter), which was aimed at making the book more palatable to the potential British reading public. In fact, many of the more moderate or reconciliatory Afrikaner leaders had English-speaking wives or strong British connections. In addition to the Reitzes, this included Boer General Louis Botha (whose wife Annie Emmett was of Irish descent),²⁵² two former presidents of the Orange Free State (Marthinus Steyn²⁵³ and Abraham Fischer²⁵⁴) and one earlier president the South African Republic (T.F. Burgers²⁵⁵) (who all had Scottish or English wives). This suggests that the linguistic divide was a fairly porous and fluid one, and that there was a considerable amount of cross-pollination between the two linguistic groups in South Africa's small and incestuous white

²⁵² *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Annie Botha," last modified January 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie_Botha. Annie, who spent the South African War in Pretoria, was used as messenger to set up peace negotiations in 1901 between her husband, then the overall commander of the Boer forces, and Lord Kitchener, the commander of the British forces.

²⁵³ Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners* (Kindle edition), Location 5286.

²⁵⁴ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Abraham Fischer," last modified January 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Fischer.

²⁵⁵ "Could a Future King of the Bavenda Have Grown Up in the House of a ZAR President?" *Zoutpansberger*, May 23, 2016, https://zoutpansberger.co.za/articles/history_streets/36964/2016-05-23/could-a-future-king-of-the-bavenda-have-grown-up-in-the-house-of-a-zar-president.

population. Whilst in most cases the wives of these leaders are fairly silent in the historical record, and it is difficult to say to what extent they may have influenced their husbands' political views, it is not difficult to imagine that having a spouse from the other side of the linguistic fence helped enhance their reconciliatory perspective.

Smuts' Pen Pals

Although Smuts' wife, Isie, was Afrikaans, some of his closest confidantes were liberal English women, often young, with whom he maintained a prolific correspondence. South African historian Shula Marks has suggested that Smuts' views on a variety of international matters, including his opposition to German reparations after World War 1 and his support for a League of Nations, were "enriched, if not inspired by his conversation with [these women], and by extension, their intellectual circles."²⁵⁶ However, it also appears from his correspondence that these connections also may have informed his domestic political views or at least curbed his more retrograde views. One of his regular female correspondents in the post-Boer War years was Emily Hobhouse, the pro-Boer crusader and pacifist. Hobhouse first exposed the horrors of the British concentration camps to a shocked Britain in the early 1900s, arguably a contributing factor to the replacement of the Conservative government responsible for the prosecution of the war in 1906 by a Liberal government under Henry Campbell-Bannerman.²⁵⁷ It was Hobhouse who introduced Smuts to Campbell-Bannerman, leading to their famous meeting in 1906 (discussed in the first chapter) which, in the view of Smuts, led directly

²⁵⁶ Shula Marks, "White Masculinity: Jan Smuts, Race and the South African War," Raleigh Lecture on History, British Academy, London, November 2, 2000.

²⁵⁷ Steyn, *Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness*, 70.

to the granting of self-government to the defeated Boer republics.²⁵⁸ Hobhouse was asked to give the opening speech at the unveiling of the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein in 1913, and she used the occasion to, *inter alia*, encourage Afrikaners to forgive their erstwhile English foes. Her plea for Afrikaner and English reconciliation is likely to have resonated with the attendees - as the Boer heroine who had brought the horrors of the camps to the world's attention, she was arguably the one Englishwoman who would have had the credibility to make such a plea. The esteem in which Miss Hobhouse was held by the Afrikaners is demonstrated by the fact that upon her death her body was transferred to South Africa and buried at the Women's Monument. It is also what gave her the ear of Smuts and other prominent Afrikaner leaders, and she wasn't afraid to make her views clear to them. Interestingly, Hobhouse also used her speech to remind the Afrikaners of the number of Africans who had died in the concentration camps – "Does not justice bid us remember to-day how many thousands of the dark race perished also in Concentration Camps in a quarrel that was not theirs?"²⁵⁹ In this request she was ultimately less successful – for many years, the Anglo-Boer War was considered a "white man's war," and it is only recently that the fact that numerous Black South Africans participated and suffered in the war has been properly acknowledged.²⁶⁰

Hobhouse was also strongly pacifist and anti-imperialist in her views, and in later years she was critical of Smuts' decision to enter World War One on the British side. She

²⁵⁸ Steyn, *Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness*, 73-4

²⁵⁹ Emily Hobhouse, "Women's Day" (speech, Unveiling of Women's Memorial, Bloemfontein, South Africa, December 16, 1913), accessed December 29, 2024, <https://speakingwhilefemale.co/global-hobhouse/>.

²⁶⁰ Peter Warwick, "Myth of a White Man's War," in *Black People and the South African War 1899-1902*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6-27.

wrote to him in October 1914, declaring— “Ah! dear Oom [Uncle], dear Oom—What are you all about ? I can't write much for I feel too strongly, but oh! don't you see you are driving your people too hard along that ' Imperial' Road?[they are] called upon to invade a country against which they have no quarrel to uphold a country which only fourteen years ago was treating them as the Germans are now treating Belgium.”²⁶¹ As subsequent events demonstrate, she was not particularly successful in persuading Smuts to change his mind on his decision to enter the war on the British side, but in the same letter, she also implores Smuts to treat the Afrikaner rebel leaders in the 1914 rebellion mercifully – “I cannot bear to think that dear de Wet and Beyers and Kemp will meet a rebel's death... I write in a hurry to implore you if these men are captured to ask General Botha to consider these facts and not to shoot them unless in open fight. They are brave, good men. Keep them in prison if you will till the end but do not execute them, do not, do not, do not.” There is no record of Smuts’ response to this letter, and it is not clear that Hobhouse’s letter would have had any meaningful influence on a decision which would not, in any event, have been Smuts’ alone to make. Yet the Botha government did ultimately decide to pardon almost all the rebels, other than Jopie Fourie (who become something of a martyr to the cause). Hobhouse is nevertheless a striking example of one of the strong female English voices that played a key role in the formation of the new post-war South African dispensation, both as an informal and well-connected conduit between the Boers and the Liberal British government, and as someone who took

²⁶¹ E. Hobhouse to J. Smuts, October 29, 1914, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume III, June 1910 to November 1918)*, 602

advantage of her privileged platform with the Boers to become a strong advocate for reconciliation.

Some of Smuts' most regular correspondents throughout much of his life were three English sisters, the Clarks, members of a highly liberal Quaker family with strong pacifist and feminist beliefs. Margaret Clark had been Emily Hobhouse's secretary and had travelled with her to the concentration camps, and she had first met Smuts on the return trip to England. Her strong anti-imperial views and pro-Boer sympathies would certainly have endeared her to Smuts, and they established a life-long friendship. These sisters provided an interesting counterpoint to Smuts' more conservative views, however, particularly on matters of war, gender and race. For example, in a 1909 letter we see Margaret Gillet (the middle sister of the three and Smuts' most regular correspondent) gently chiding Smuts on the lack of protection for women and Black rights in the new South African Act of Union (which Smuts was primarily responsible for drafting) – “Well, I wishsome big things had been different in your Act of Union, but perhaps some of those things you will be able to alter. I have a great belief in Afrikaners not wishing to leave women outside their own liberty, and also in their being too great to perpetuate the foolish words about [only persons of European descent being eligible for membership of Parliament.]”²⁶² This mild chastisement ultimately had little influence on the political result, which saw women and non-whites (outside of the Cape) excluded from the national franchise in the Act of Union. As always, on questions of race, Smuts had little appetite for high-minded principle in the face of the political realities of what

²⁶² M. C. Gillet to J. Smuts, August 1909, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers* (Volume 11, June 1902-May 1910), 446.

was perceived to be possible. (In later years, he was to come around on the issue of women's suffrage).²⁶³ Nevertheless, the fact that Smuts maintained a life-long correspondence with this family certainly suggests that he wasn't completely unreceptive to their views. Many of his letters to them deal with the so-called "native question," and in these we frequently see Smuts seeking to justify his domestic position to his more liberal international friends. For example, after voting in favor of a trio of bills put forward by the Hertzog-led Fusion government in 1936/7, which included additional restrictions on Black South Africans in urban areas and ended the Cape non-white franchise,²⁶⁴ Smuts wrote to Margaret Gillet as follows –

We passed through the house yesterday the bill dealing with Natives in urban areas - the last of the Hertzog trio. There has been much opposition to it in certain quarters, but on the whole the bill is better than appears. I voted for certain amendments which were carried.... It is most difficult to know how to deal with [the natives] and one easily slips into measures which appear harsh and retrogressive. My view however is that some of the more severe clauses cannot be carried out as they are impracticable, and that the law will be administered in a milder and fairer form than many people think. The Native affairs department is on the whole wiser than the legislators of this country. And it is in this administration that the real crux lies. I write this because you may be unduly upset by what appears in the press that reaches you, or by Native views in South Africa. A fair administration of this bill when it becomes law might prove a boon rather than the opposite to Native development.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ In 1906 Smuts wrote to John X Merriman – "I note what you say of Botha's speeches in regard to the suffrage for women [Botha had proposed extending the vote to women]. I quite share your views on the matter and so I believe do the great majority of South African women. I do not however understand Botha seriously to advocate this measure. Like Campbell-Bannerman he is merely coquetting with what appears to be a harmless delusion."- J. Smuts to J. X. Merriman, November 12, 1906, in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers (Volume 11, June 1902-May 1910)*, 322. By 1930, he was happy to vote in favor of the Women's Enfranchisement Act.

²⁶⁴ *South African History Online*, "Apartheid Legislation 1850s-1970s," last modified March 31, 2011, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s>.

²⁶⁵ MC Gillet to J Smuts, 15 May 1937 (nr 180) in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers, (Volume VI, December 1934 – August 1945)*, 414.

Did Smuts genuinely believe that it might prove a boon or was he merely telling his liberal friend what she wanted to hear? It is of course difficult to say with any certainty what Smuts genuinely believed, but one gets the sense that he is trying to convince himself as much as Margaret Clark. It is any event not a particularly convincing argument that a draconian law won't be that bad because it is likely to be enforced in a more reasonable manner – it is hard to imagine that a man as astute as Smuts and fully aware of South Africa's historical treatment of the non-white population, genuinely believed this.

In any event, this did not stop him continuing to defend his position on racial matters to his liberal friend. In 1943, on the eve of a mid-war election in a letter to Margaret Gillet, he justified his reticence on extending African rights by explaining that any attempt to do so would let the Nationalists in, which would be an even greater setback to their rights. He argued, "The danger is that by appearing pro-Native, I may run the risk to lose the general election next year, and thus hand the Natives over to the other extreme."²⁶⁶ The ultimate hollowness of this claim is seen by its repetition five years later in another letter to Margaret Gillet with a similar logic, in which he claimed "I shall do as much of the right thing as possible, but always keep before me the paramount necessity of winning the election! ... What will it profit this country if justice is done to the underdog and the whole caboodle then, including the underdog, is handed over to the Wreckers."²⁶⁷ Although it is questionable, therefore, whether these friendships had any

²⁶⁶ MC Gillet to J Smuts, 13 January 1943 in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers. Volume (Volume VI, December 1934 – August 1945)*, 408.

²⁶⁷ MC Gillet to J Smuts, 1 February 1947 in Hancock and Van Der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers. (Volume VI, December 1934 – August 1945)*, 121.

direct material impact on Smuts' domestic racial policies, it seems clear that their opinion and his international reputation as a high-minded statesman mattered very much to him, and that these relationships may well have influenced his domestic actions.

It remains striking that a martial man like Smuts, with somewhat conservative views on questions of race and gender, chose to establish and maintain such close relationships with liberal English women. This speaks to some of the inherent contradictions in Smuts' character.²⁶⁸ It has been suggested that Smuts maintained these friendships to buttress his 'image as a liberal crusader from the provinces'.²⁶⁹ Given the sheer volume of his correspondence over the years with the Clark sisters, Emily Hobhouse and other liberal friends, this seems unlikely. What seems more probable is that Smuts was genuinely conflicted – liking to think of himself as a liberal, cosmopolitan man of the world, and thus enjoying these friendships but unable to completely divorce himself from his background and his conservative beliefs on matters such as race. Perhaps, like his future deputy Hofmeyr, he maintained these friendships because they gave a voice to a part of himself that the exigencies of South African politics did not allow him to express?

Another woman who communicated periodically with Smuts was Olive Schreiner, an early crusader for women's and "native" rights, and the author of the world-renowned book, *The Story of an African Farm*, often seen as one of the first feminist novels.²⁷⁰ She

²⁶⁸ Shula Marks, "White Masculinity: Jan Smuts, Race and the South African War," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001): 199–223, 206–207.

Gravett, Willem H. "Jan Christian Smuts (1870–1950) in Context: An Answer to Mazower and Morefield." *The Round Table* 106, no. 3 (2017): 261–277.

²⁷⁰ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "The Story of an African Farm," last modified January 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Story_of_an_African_Farm.

came from a well-known family of Cape liberals and was Deneys Reitz's great-aunt as well as the aunt of the liberal justice, Oliver Schreiner, that we see criticizing Reitz in Chapter II for his feet of clay on racial matters. Schreiner is a particularly interesting character during this period. Not only was she a world-famous novelist but she was a close friend and confidante of a number of key figures during the period on either side of the political spectrum including Smuts, Cecil John Rhodes and Emily Hobhouse. As discussed further below, she was a significant role player in both the international and South African suffragette movement. In the build-up to the South African War, she was a prominent defender of the Afrikaner republics and she wrote a lengthy plea for peace, entitled "The South African Question by an English South African."²⁷¹ As part of this she stressed the growing unity between Afrikaner and English - "Time, the great healer of all differences, is blending us into a great mutual people, and love is moving faster than time. It is no growing hatred between Dutch and English South African born men and women that calls for war."²⁷² She was also a close friend and correspondent of Isie Smuts, a classmate of hers at school in Stellenbosch. Initially, they were bonded by her support for the Boer cause during the South African War and kept up a regular correspondence in the post-war period, notwithstanding their growing political differences, particularly on questions of race. Through Isie, she also sought to indirectly influence her husband's political views. In 1912, she wrote to Isie - "You don't know how much I care about your husband, and how I have hoped for his really great career in South Africa. No other South African has his brilliant intellect, his charm, his unwearied

²⁷¹ Olive Schreiner, *The South African Question* (Chicago: C.H. Sergel, 1899), <https://www.loc.gov/item/99003849/> (Library of Congress).

²⁷² Schreiner, *The South African Question*, 99.

power of labor. But what I ask myself is ‘Does he always see far enough?’”; in another she included a tongue-in-cheek message for Isie to pass on to him - “Give my love to Neef [Nephew] Jan. Tell him to take care of my Indians and Natives for me while I’m away!”²⁷³

In the lead-up to Union, she also appealed to some of the key role players more directly to include a universal franchise for all races in the Act of Union, using a combination of an appeal to their better angels and dire predictions of the consequences of kicking the can down the road. To F.S. Malan, a liberal Afrikaner and a future cabinet minister in Louis Botha’s government, she wrote in 1909 - “My dear friend, draw yourself sometimes apart from the noise and greed of the political world about you, and look at these matters by the light of that deeper spiritual instinct that is within you.”²⁷⁴ To Smuts in 1908, she implored: “Our duty stretches as far as our power of benefiting our fellow creatures goes. It doesn’t end till that ends. And from the man of wide powers, from him much is expected.”²⁷⁵ She also addressed a letter to the National Convention which had met in Durban in 1909 to discuss the framework of Union:

The idea that a man born in this country, possibly endowed with many gifts and highly cultured, should in this, his native land, be refused any form of civic or political right on the ground that he is descended from a race with a civilisation, it may be, much older than our own, is one which must be abhorrent to every liberalised mind. I believe that an attempt to

²⁷³ "Isie Smuts (née Krige)," *Olive Schreiner Letters Online*, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?view=personae&entry=74>.

²⁷⁴ "Entry 45: Francois Stephanus Malan," *Olive Schreiner Letters Online*, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?view=personae&entry=45>.

²⁷⁵ "Entry 73: Jan Smuts," *Olive Schreiner Letters Online*, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?view=personae&entry=73>.

base our national life on distinctions of race and colour, as such, will, after the lapse of many years, prove fatal to us.²⁷⁶

Yet none of Schreiner's appeals proved effective – the maintenance of the limited native franchise in the Cape Colony in the Act of Union was as much as Smuts, Malan and others were willing to make a stand for. Eleven years later, as the first Smuts administration was getting underway with the imposition of a number of new restrictive racial policies, Schreiner was still a lone voice in the wilderness. Writing to Smuts in October 1920, she predicted ominously:

The next few years are going to determine the whole future of South Africa in 30 or 40 years time. As we sow we shall reap. We may crush the mass of our fellows in South Africa today, as Russia did for generations, but today the serf is in the Palace and where is the Czar?... This is the 20th century; the past is past never to return, even in South Africa. The day of princes, and Bosses, is gone forever: one must meet the incoming tide and rise on it, or be swept away forever.

Schreiner died shortly after this letter was sent, although her words proved prescient if a little premature (it being a full seventy-five years before white supremacy was swept away in the incoming democratic tide). With her passing went one of the few white South African voices in the national conversation advocating for Black African political rights. Schreiner was also one of the few voices that saw the fight for women's suffrage as part and parcel of the broader battle for a universal suffrage for all races. As we will see below, this wasn't always the case in the South African suffragette movement.

²⁷⁶ "Henry Campbell-Bannerman." *The Observation Post*. Accessed January 9, 2025. <https://samihistory.com/tag/henry-campbell-bannerman/>.

The Fight for Women's Suffrage

Olive Schreiner played a key role in the rise of the women's suffrage movement in South Africa in the early years of the twentieth century. As British academic, Helen Dampier, has demonstrated, Schreiner was an important link between suffrage networks in South Africa and the international suffragette movement, in particular in the United Kingdom.²⁷⁷ The South African suffragette movement had its origins in the South African temperance movement in the latter years of the nineteenth century and in 1902, the Women's Enfranchisement League, the first movement focused solely on the campaign for the female franchise, was founded in Durban.²⁷⁸ Schreiner founded the Cape branch of this movement in 1907, and as Dampier shows, she played a very active role in this movement, including corresponding extensively with both local and international suffragettes.²⁷⁹ The WEL subsequently became incorporated into a broader national movement, the national Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU), which was founded in 1911. The WEAU was ostensibly non-racial, in the sense that its goal initially was to establish the women's franchise on the same basis as men (including replicating the Cape's non-racial franchise). However, its membership was exclusively white, and Schreiner, objecting to its limited racial focus, resigned her

²⁷⁷ Dampier, "'Going on with Our Little Movement in the Hum Drum-Way.'" Dampier was one of the primary collaborators on the Olive Schreiner Letter Project which has made a substantial collection of her letters available online at <https://www.oliveschreiner.org>.

²⁷⁸ For an overview of the South African suffragette movement in the first part of the twentieth century, see generally Cheryl Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement: The Politics of Gender, Race and Class," in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, ed. Rebecca K. Shankar, Chapter 13 (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1990), 313-345.

²⁷⁹ Dampier, "Going on with our Little Movement," 341.

membership.²⁸⁰ Language also proved an obstacle to achieving the association's goals – its membership was initially heavily white, English-speaking and middle-class, with a strong imperial bent.²⁸¹

There was thus no overarching women's suffrage movement – the fight for women's rights was governed by the same linguistic and racial divisions that plagued South Africa as a whole. Afrikaner women did not initially support the idea of women voting and were alienated by the pro-imperialist views of the suffragette movement;²⁸² for Black women, the fight for greater women's rights took second place to the greater battle for African political rights generally.²⁸³ Subsequent scholarship has shown, however, that after the First World War the pro-imperialist sentiment of the movement was toned down, and a more active effort made to recruit Afrikaner women to the cause.²⁸⁴

However, as South African academic Cheryl Walker has shown in her work on the women's suffrage movement in South Africa, the factor that really gave impetus to the South African suffragette movement was the adoption of its goals by the Afrikaner nationalists, including the women. In 1923, the women's branch of the Afrikaner

²⁸⁰ Veronica-Sue Belling, *Recovering the Lives of South African Jewish Women During the Migration Years, c1880–1939* (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 2013), 159, <https://open.uct.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/29184443-0547-4f38-a6bc-6c4008cf1d72/content>.

²⁸¹ Deborah Gaitskell, "The Imperial Tie."

²⁸² Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: A Concise History* (Kindle edition), 138. See generally, Gaitskell, *The Imperial Tie*.

²⁸³ Giliomee cites the following observation from Schreiner, following a conversation she had had with an African woman who was stoically accepting of her second-class status in traditional African society: 'Women of no race or class would ever rise in a revolt or attempt to bring about a revolutionary adjustment to their situation in their community while the community's welfare requires their submission. That stance would only end when changing conditions in a society made women's tacit acquiescence of discrimination against them no longer necessary or desirable. – Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: A Concise History* (Kindle edition), 143.

²⁸⁴ Gaitskell, *The Imperial Tie*, 22

nationalist party, die Vroue Nasionale Party, reversed their opposition to the women's vote and began advocating for it on the basis that it would enable them "te sorg dat die beste manne aan die hoof van sake kom (ensure that the best men will be placed at the head of affairs)." "Best men" in this case presumably meant white men who supported the Afrikaner nationalist ideology of the National Party. This quote provides a telling indication of where the priorities of this particular section of Afrikaner womanhood lay – certainly this was no full-throated rallying cry for female equality. In 1924, Hertzog's Nationalist Party came into power, and the extension of the franchise to white females was seen as a means of achieving their long-cherished goal of diluting the non-white franchise in the Cape (which was constitutionally entrenched by the requirement of a two-thirds majority to change it) – described by one commentator as "a flank attack on the fortress of the Cape franchise".²⁸⁵ As Walker highlights, the WEAU became an accomplice in this goal, willing to sacrifice their limited commitment to a non-racial women's franchise in the Cape, in the interest of achieving the vote for white women. In 1926, Lady Rose Innes, wife of the Union's Chief Justice James Rose-Innes (a noted liberal who founded the Non-Racial Franchise Association), stated "we know in our hearts we shall not get all that we ask, but we are very anxious for the half-loaf. The other may come."²⁸⁶ Although the language is more euphemistic, the sentiment is not very different from that expressed by Lord Milner – to paraphrase his cynical observation which opened the second chapter: "sacrifice the [Black female voter] and the game is easy."²⁸⁷ Needless to say, the "other half of the loaf" never came – in 1930 the Women

²⁸⁵ Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," 314.

²⁸⁶ Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," 314.

²⁸⁷ See opening paragraph of Chapter 3 – Race.

Enfranchisement Act was passed, but it limited the franchise to white women of eighteen or older and gave white women the right to sit in Parliament.²⁸⁸ That bill was followed a year later by the Franchise Law Amendments Act which removed some of the property and education qualifications which applied to the male vote in certain provinces – the net result of this legislative double-whammy was to effectively double the size of the white electorate and dilute the already limited non-white vote even further.²⁸⁹ It is worth noting that both bills passed with the support of the two main political parties, including the South African Party of Smuts and Reitz, then in opposition, which certainly suggests that they had no material objection from their side to its de facto dilutionary impact on the non-white vote. Within a couple of years, as a result, *inter alia*, of the economic consequences of the Great Depression, the National Party and the South African Party would join forces to form the United Party in the so-called “Fusion Government.”²⁹⁰ Two years later, in 1936, that Parliament was to pass a trio of bills, which, *inter alia*, segregated rural areas, restricted African influx into urban areas and completely eradicated the watered-down remnants of the non-white vote in the Cape Province and replaced it with a paternalistic system of granting non-white South Africans four white representatives in Parliament.²⁹¹ As the quid pro quo for getting back into power, Smuts

²⁸⁸ As Walker shows the effect of this legislation was to reduce Black voters from 20 per cent of the Cape electorate in 1929 to 11 percent and 5 percent nationally. Walker, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement,” 314.

²⁸⁹ *Wikipedia*, “Elections in South Africa,” last modified December 29, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_South_Africa.

²⁹⁰ *South African History Online*, “Hertzog and Smuts Form a Coalition,” last modified March 16, 2011, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/hertzog-and-smuts-form-coalition>; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “United Party,” accessed January 9, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Party>.

²⁹¹ *South African History Online*, “Apartheid Legislation 1850s-1970s,” last modified March 31, 2011, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/hertzog-and-smuts-form-coalition>.

and his South African Party colleagues had agreed to sacrifice the Cape non-white franchise.²⁹²

It is during this tumultuous political period that Leila Reitz first entered the fray. Her political career and public statements help shed some light on the interplay during this time between issues of gender, national identity and race. By all accounts, Leila Reitz was as much of a political animal as her husband, if not more so.²⁹³ At the time of the passing of the Women's Enfranchisement Act, a journalist for a national paper, the *Rand Daily Mail*, described her as "...one of those politically-minded women, who whilst not wanting to go into Parliament, will have the greatest difficulty in keeping outside."²⁹⁴ In the same article, the journalist describes her initial forays into politics, electioneering on behalf of her husband in his first election in 1920, noting: "I remember how she went down to Port Elizabeth, where her husband at that time was an unknown politician, and through her fearlessness, both of speech and action, terrified the opponents of the South African Party and mauled her husband's enemy....she was the real victor in that rather difficult fight."²⁹⁵ Later in that decade she was active in the suffragette movement and one of the key role players in the passing of the Woman's Enfranchisement Act.²⁹⁶ Indeed, she was the first beneficiary of this landmark legislation, being elected as the first

²⁹² *South African History Online*, "Hertzog and Smuts Form a Coalition."

²⁹³ Reitz, No Outspan, 204 - "My wife, who is more politically-minded than I am...."

²⁹⁴ Arthur G. Barlow, "The New Regiment of Women: Mrs. Deneys Reitz, Potential Politician," *Rand Daily Mail*, November 15, 1930, Stellenbosch University Library, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

²⁹⁵ Barlow, "The New Regiment of Women" *Rand Daily Mail*.

²⁹⁶ Afrikaner Geskiedenis Editorial Team, "Leila Reitz (1887–1959)," *Afrikaner Geskiedenis*, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://afrikanergeskiedenis.co.za/leila-reitz-1887-1959/>; Anna Cunningham, *Deneys and Leila Reitz*, pamphlet (Parktown and Westcliff Heritage Trust, Parktown Collection, Brenthurst Library, Ref. no. 92/218 (27)).

female Member of Parliament in 1933, presumably with some help from the newly-expanded electorate.

In addition to her involvement with the suffragette cause, she was a principled champion of various social issues, including expansion of the social safety net, improved birth control and increased marital protections for women. In 1934, she unsuccessfully promoted legislation in Parliament which improved protections for juvenile offenders of all races. She declared, “I want to make it clear to the House that if we do not bring in a comprehensive measure such as I have outlined, we shall fall very short indeed not only of what other countries have achieved, but certainly of what must be done in this country.”²⁹⁷ In one sense, therefore, she shared the more enlightened social views of her husband, if not more so. However, what is also clear from her public record and passionate advocacy is that she also shared his paternalistic views of the inherent superiority of the white races, and that certain of the causes that she championed were also motivated in part by the need to protect the privileged position of whites in South African society.

Leila Reitz’s views on the Women’s Enfranchisement Act and universal women suffrage are not immediately apparent from the public record. However, her decision to run for parliament as a member of the South African Party, and the fact that she served as a key member of its executive, both as the head of its women’s branch and a member of its executive committee, suggests that she was broadly aligned with its views, including

²⁹⁷ "Op-ed: Women in the Historic Battle for Children's Rights," *University of Pretoria*, August 8, 2018, https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-law/news/post_2709577-op-ed-women-in-the-historic-battle-for-childrens-rights.

its support of the Woman's Enfranchisement Act (notwithstanding its exclusion of non-white women).

Birth Control and the Poor-White Problem

Leila Reitz's paternalistic (maternalistic?) views on issues of race are more explicitly apparent from her public advocacy on two other key social issues of the day – birth control and the so-called “poor-white problem”. The “poor-white problem”²⁹⁸ was a significant issue in South African politics of the 1920s and 1930s.²⁹⁹ It was particularly prevalent amongst rural Afrikaners, many of whom had been forced from their farms following the Anglo-Boer War, and who now lived in parlous circumstances in the South African cities, competing with an increasingly urbanized Black African labour force for wage-paying jobs (all of which was exacerbated by the advent of the Great Depression). The primary concern was the risk of social-levelling between the two races, undercutting arguments in favor of white supremacy and increasing the risks of racial intermingling and miscegenation. This culminated in a comprehensive, five-volume report being published under the auspices of the US-based Carnegie Foundation on “The Poor White Problem in South Africa”.³⁰⁰ Its recommendations included expanding the social net (including pensions) for poor white families and reserving certain types of skilled work for whites. It has been suggested that its recommendations formed the basis for the more

²⁹⁸ See defined terms above.

²⁹⁹ See Fourie, “The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century”: Lessons for Poverty Today,” *Working Paper*, Department of Economics and Bureau for Economic Research, University of Stellenbosch, 4-5 for a general overview of the “poor white problem” in the 1920s in South Africa.

³⁰⁰ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa,” last modified January 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnegie_Commission_of_Investigation_on_the_Poor_White_Question_in_South_Africa.

formalized segregationist policies which followed after the Second World War.³⁰¹ The Carnegie Report ultimately contained an inherent contradiction – whilst seeking to maintain and promote white superiority, by acknowledging the existence of a poor-white problem, and the fact that there was a danger of social levelling between white and Black, it arguably undercut the argument by the adherents of scientific racism that the white race was somehow innately superior to the Black.

A year after the Carnegie Report was published, Leila Reitz made her maiden speech in Parliament, where she said:

[Poor white families] constitute a danger to the moral life of this country, a danger to themselves, a danger to our social order, our national character, and, in the end, a danger to our white civilization itself". Poor (white) people must be "lifted" up to save "our white civilization"³⁰²

The expansion of the social net that she was proposing was very much focused on "uplifting" the poorer sections of the white population in the interests of maintaining the purported superiority of "white civilization." No equivalent proposal was made for non-whites. Similar concerns are apparent from her advocacy for improving access to birth control for women. Canadian academic Suzanne Klausen has convincingly demonstrated the racial considerations which informed the South African birth control movement. Klausen notes how the focus was not so much on restricting the size of the non-white population, as one might expect, but rather on improving the "quality" of the white population. The genesis of this, Klausen argues, can be found in the conclusions of the

³⁰¹ Columbia University Libraries, "Special Feature | South Africa | First Inquiry into Poverty," *Carnegie Corporation Oral History Project*, accessed February 16, 2025, https://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/oral_hist/carnegie/special-features/.

³⁰² Jeremy Seekings, "The Social Question in Pre-apartheid South Africa: Race, Religion and the State," in *One Hundred Years of Social Protection*, ed. L. Leisering, Global Dynamics of Social Policy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54959-6_6.

Carnegie Report, which included the following eye-opening statement about poor white families: “Poor families tend to be markedly larger than more prosperous ones, and the children of the former more often show lack of intelligence ... This fact has bearings on the quality of our future European population.”³⁰³ Klausen makes the interesting observation that improved contraception was not one of the proposed solutions put forward by the Carnegie Commission, presumably due to the fact that certain of the commissioners were office bearers of the conservative Dutch Reformed Church, which had initiated the study, who were formally opposed to any form of birth control.³⁰⁴ However, a socially-liberal feminist like Leila Reitz presumably had no such qualms and she became a passionate advocate for birth control. Klausen’s presentation begins with the following quote made by Leila Reitz at a national birth-control conference in 1936: “There was the problem of the Native population. A white healthy life is of great value in this country.”³⁰⁵ In a 1937 parliamentary debate on the issue, Reitz elaborated further on the point:

We all know that the problem always at the back of the minds of everyone in this country is how to maintain...our white civilization. Some look at the problem from the liberal point of view, and others look at it from the repressive point of view, but our aims are the same: to protect our white civilization and to give our white children that quality that will make them, shall I say, the aristocrats of this country. If we do not remain the aristocrats of this country our white civilization is doomed. This country is

³⁰³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Report of the Carnegie Commission*, vol. 3 (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia-Drukkerij, 1932), p xxiv, accessed January 9, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/poorwhiteproblem0003cam/page/n37/mode/2up> as cited in Klausen, “The Uncertain Future,” 23.

³⁰⁴ Klausen, “The Uncertain Future,” 24.

³⁰⁵ Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa (PPASA), “Minutes of the Second Meeting of the South African National Council for Birth Control,” October 6–7, 1936 as cited in Klausen, “The Uncertain Future,” 1.

especially interested not only in the quantity of the children that will grow up, but also in their quality.³⁰⁶

This is certainly an illuminating quote and it merits a further deep-dive. For starters, it makes it expressly clear that the primary problem that the South African political elite was focused on was the need to “maintain white civilization”. The use of the term “aristocrats” is also interesting, with all its implications of the establishment of a permanent ruling overclass (in this case based on skin colour rather than inherited privilege, although in South Africa those two things were inextricably intertwined). Reitz certainly didn’t share Olive Schreiner’s view that the day of “princes and bosses” had gone forever!

However, it is her suggestion that the aim of the two main political camps in South Africa, the “liberal” and the “repressive,” was the same – to “protect our white civilization” – that best perhaps sums up white South African identity politics of the period. Reitz presumably saw herself, and the South African Party which she and her husband represented, as sitting in the more liberal camp, but ultimately white racial solidarity was the overarching consideration which brought these two disparate camps together. Although Leila Reitz was certainly socially liberal for her time, many of the causes which she advocated, such as the expansion of the female vote, and the need for an improved social net and increased birth control, ultimately aligned with the political goals of the more conservative nationalist Afrikaner right wing, chief of which was to ensure continued white domination of South African politics.

³⁰⁶ *Debates of the House of Assembly*, (Pretoria: Union of South Africa, January 8 to May 17, 1937, 2471–72, as cited in Klausen, “Uncertain Future,” 20-21.

Conclusion

As is clear from the above, there were a number of women with connections to the moderate faction, whether through marriage, friendship or otherwise, who played a role in advancing its reconciliatory agenda, albeit with a variety of different motivations. The one common motivation that the above chapter highlights is once again the question of race, and it appears that many women, from both ends of the political spectrum, shared the belief of their male counterparts in the importance of white racial unity. In particular, it was racial motivations and a desire to maximize the white vote that ultimately caused an alignment of interests between the primarily middle-class English-speaking leaders of the suffragette movement and Afrikaner nationalists, both male and female, and guaranteed the eventual success of the campaign for the female vote in 1930. It was also racial concerns, and particularly a concern around the growing poor-white problem in the late 1920s and early 1930s that drove the campaign for improved birth control. Race remained the common thread tying the gender and identity politics of this period together.

Chapter V.

Conclusion

When the Anglo-Boer War ended in 1902, South Africa did not exist, either as a political concept or as a geographic entity, and young Deneys Reitz was an embittered young Afrikaner heading into exile from the country of his birth. However, a mere forty years later, he was describing himself as a “South African first, and a Dutchman second.”³⁰⁷ This thesis has sought to consider the reasons for this evolution and what this tells us about the development of a new South African identity in the first half of the twentieth century, in particular as it relates to the more moderate Afrikaner faction of which Reitz was a member. Reitz’s personal journey is obviously unique to him and his own individual circumstances, and one wants to be careful about making over-generalizations about all Afrikaners from one man’s life story. Yet a consideration of Reitz’s journey from Boer guerilla fighter to South African statesman and Anglophile nevertheless provides some useful insights into the complex and multi-faceted factors which resulted in many Afrikaners (particularly those of less nationalistic inclination) choosing to adopt a new South African identity defined broadly to include all white South Africans, whether Afrikaans or English. It was also an identity that accepted or at least grudgingly acknowledged South Africa’s status as a dominion of the British Empire.

For Reitz himself, his early adoption of South Africanism seemed driven initially by his personal loyalty towards Jan Smuts and Louis Botha, who were the most fervent initial proponents of reconciliation. Smuts and Botha’s support of reconciliation, in turn,

³⁰⁷ “Reitz’s romantic career,” *Rand Daily Mail*..

was driven by a combination of factors, including an appreciation for the magnanimous post-war treatment of the Afrikaners by the British and a pragmatic recognition that the new country, under its Afrikaner leadership, would be more likely to flourish economically and be more secure within the British Empire than without. Having served under Smuts on commando and spent the post-war period living in the Smuts household, Reitz's devotion to Smuts bordered on hero worship. His decision to go into exile notwithstanding, Reitz's animus towards the British did not appear to be particularly deep-seated, and he was quick to adopt Smuts' reconciliatory philosophy as his own and align himself with the more moderate Afrikaner faction under the leadership of Smuts and Botha. However, this decision, as well as his later decisions to fight against his fellow Afrikaners in the 1914 Rebellion and serve in the Union Defence Force and British Army during World War One seemed more driven by personal loyalties and internal Afrikaner politics than any particularly pro-British loyalties. From Reitz's diaries and personal letters, we get a real sense of the bitter divisions that existed in Afrikanerdom during the early years of Union, around issues of language, class, Afrikaner political rights and South Africa's place within the British Empire.

However, from this time, we also see an evolution of Reitz's views towards the British, culminating in his genuine affection for the British and appreciation for being part of the British Empire late in life. In a sense, Reitz was predisposed to this – he was equally as comfortable in English as in Afrikaans, he had an English-speaking wife and he moved in circles where he interacted regularly with other British and English-speaking South Africans.

Reitz is perhaps something of an outlier in this regard. However, over time, we see more and more Afrikaners, even those who did not necessarily share Reitz and Smuts' Anglophilia, willing to pragmatically accept a trade-off which involved accepting this new broader South African identity, in exchange for the benefits of being part of the broader imperial whole. This is best understood against the background of Britain's imperial retreat, which gathered steam after the First World War. As South Africa and other white-controlled colonies were afforded an increasing amount of autonomy to decide their own affairs, this created a receptive environment for many Afrikaners to accept this trade-off. The loosening of the imperial apron strings, coupled with increased domestic protection for Afrikaner cultural rights and white political and labor rights, gave Afrikaners comfort that they would remain masters of their own destiny.

As this thesis has shown, a key factor that underpinned this trade-off was race. In a world where scientific racism was still prevalent, many genuinely believed in the biological superiority of white people and the importance of maintaining white minority rule in a Black majority country. Even those of a more liberal inclination, such as Deneys and Leila Reitz, did not believe that genuine racial equality was a possibility. The need for white racial unity became the primary concern which papered over differences in language, class and gender within the white South African population. This was particularly the case in the 1920s and 1930s, amid growing fears of increased Black urbanization and threats to white jobs, and concerns around a burgeoning "poor-white" problem. This ultimately led to the formation by the 1930s of a disparate coalition of moderate Afrikaner and English, male and female, worker and employer, which coalesced around this idea that maintaining "white civilization" was the most important

consideration. However, this coalition did not long survive Reitz's death in 1943. In 1948, Smuts' United Party, a coalition of moderate Afrikaners and English-speakers, was narrowly defeated by an Afrikaner nationalist party, the Gesuiwerde (Purified) National Party under the leadership of D.F. Malan. The Nationalists campaigned on the threat of the "swart gevaar" and following the election they put in place a formalized system of legal segregation - "apartheid".³⁰⁸ Within thirteen years, South Africa had withdrawn from the British Commonwealth and formed a republic. After its electoral defeat, the United Party was never to be a force in South African politics again. "South Africanism" was no more.

The United Party's defeat can be explained in part by an electoral system which favored Nationalist-leaning rural constituencies and complacency on the part of Smuts.³⁰⁹ However, at the heart of their defeat lay the age-old issue of race. Mass Black migration into the cities during the war years and increasing Black labor militancy allowed Nationalists to campaign on the threat of the "swart gevaar" and accuse Smuts of lax racial policies and being more focused on British imperial interests than those of his homeland.³¹⁰ It is beyond the ambit of this thesis to explore the reasons for this sea change in South African politics. However, what it does highlight, is the fact that for many moderate Afrikaners, South Africanism was inherently transactional rather than ideological - many moderate Afrikaners did not necessarily share Smuts and Reitz's genuine belief in the importance of reconciliation and the need for alignment with

³⁰⁸ Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy*, 5th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 99-102.

³⁰⁹ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "1948 South African General Election," last modified February 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_South_African_general_election.

³¹⁰ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 102.

Britain. Ultimately, by the 1940s, in a world where Britain was a fading power and domestic racial concerns were on the rise, a political platform centered around Afrikaner nationalistic interests and guaranteed legislative protection of the racial hierarchy proved to have greater appeal to many Afrikaners than nebulous notions of reconciliation. Ultimately, it was to be another forty-six years before reconciliation and a new, much more racially inclusive, form of South Africanism was back on the table.

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