

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

# White Masculinity: Jan Smuts, Race and the South African War<sup>1</sup>

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NO SINGLE FIGURE DID MORE to shape South Africa in the first fifty years of the twentieth century, or to establish it in the international imagination, than Jan Christiaan Smuts. Widely recognised in his day as an exceptional scholar, soldier, and scientist, he was also South Africa's most outstanding white statesman in the twentieth century, the equivalent in terms of international stature then to Mandela in our own time.<sup>2</sup> Yet, apart from Sir Keith Hancock's magisterial and elegant two-volume biography of Smuts published in the 1960s, a sequel by Kenneth Ingham in 1986 and a clutch of unpublished dissertations in South African universities, Smuts has been relatively neglected by professional historians since death.<sup>3</sup> From the late 1990s, however, as white South Africans once

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<sup>1</sup> There were several reasons for my choice of subject for the Raleigh Lecture. Two concern anniversaries: the year 2000 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Smuts's death and it was a century since the South African war. But there was also a more personal reason. The lecture arose out of the essay on Smuts that I was asked to write by the late Colin Matthew, a much loved and highly respected fellow of the British Academy and Editor of the *New Dictionary of National Biography*. Without that commission, I must admit, I would not have ventured on this exercise, not least because most of my career has been spent getting away from the great white men of South African history.

<sup>2</sup> For some of the discomfiting, if superficial, parallels, see Donal Lowry, 'Introduction: not just a "tea-time war"', in D. Lowry, ed., *The South African War reappraised* (Manchester, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> W. K. Hancock, *Smuts. 1. The Sanguine Years. 1870–1919* (Cambridge, 1962) and *Smuts. 2. The Fields of Force 1919–1950* (Cambridge, 1968); Kenneth Ingham, *Jan Christian Smuts. The Conscience of a South African* (1986).

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more faced the wider world, and with growing interest among scholars in the history of colonial nationalism, white identity, and science, this extraordinarily complex and multi-faceted individual has begun to attract renewed attention.<sup>4</sup> Rereading Hancock and the other biographies of Smuts in the context of this new literature and a more sophisticated understanding on race and gender, makes him a far more interesting and contradictory character than earlier historians have conceded.<sup>5</sup>

## I

Here the briefest of thumbnail sketches of Smuts's life must suffice, although it is difficult to be brief for it covers many of the major themes in South African, European, and Commonwealth history in the first half of this century. Born in 1870 amid the magnificent mountains of the south-western Cape where his forebears had farmed since the eighteenth century, Jan Christiaan Smuts entered school at the age of twelve and rapidly revealed his remarkable intellect. As a university student his academic interests included botany, English and German poetry, and Greek, as well as politics and philosophy. A scholarship took him to Cambridge in 1894 where he was the first candidate to achieve a distinction simultaneously in both parts of the law tripos. The famous British jurist, F. W. Maitland, declared Smuts the most outstanding student he had ever taught.

On his return to South Africa the following year, Smuts was soon caught up in the confrontation between Britain and the Transvaal Republic which culminated in the South African war. As Attorney General in President Kruger's Transvaal he played a prominent part in the negoti-

<sup>4</sup> Three powerful contributions which begin to transform our understanding of Smuts, and to which this essay is much indebted, are Saul Dubow, 'A commonwealth of science: the British Association in South Africa, 1905 and 1929', in S. Dubow, ed., *Science and society in southern Africa* (Manchester, 2000); Peder Johan Anker 'The ecology of nations. British imperial sciences of nature, 1895–1945', Ph.D. Harvard, published by University of Oslo (Centre for Development and the Environment), 1999; and Bill Schwarz, 'Reveries of race: The closing of the imperial moment', unpublished paper, London, 1998. I am grateful to Dr Schwarz for allowing me to quote from this fascinating paper, and to Dr Dubow for bringing Peder Anker's thesis to my attention.

<sup>5</sup> In thinking about the connections between race, civilization, and gender, I have found Robert Young, *Colonial Desire* (1995), and Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization. A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880–1917* (Chicago, 1995) useful. Bederman stresses the complex ways in which whiteness and manliness become connected in late nineteenth-century America.

ations before the war and framed the Republic's political and military strategy. After the capture of Pretoria in 1900, he joined the Boer commandos, leading his own troops on a thousand-mile odyssey into the Cape Colony in the following year. For a man who had a reputation for being frail as a child and who was so deeply steeped in book-learning, Smuts showed a remarkable aptitude for war. He emerged from the war, physically robust, with added authority among Afrikaners and a fearsome reputation among the British as their indomitable foe. He displayed his military and strategic skills again in World War I when he put down civil war in South Africa, helped capture South West Africa from the Germans and led the imperial troops in East Africa.

It was during war that Smuts discovered himself and his manhood. According to his long-time associate and admirer, the journalist Peter Beukes, to Smuts, 'not race or nationality, not learning or beliefs mattered, but manhood. Being a man, a whole man with all that implies in courage and character, dignity and freedom to follow his own inner conviction, was to him the epitome of all existence.'<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of his career, Smuts wrote an unpublished biography of Walt Whitman, drawn to the poet because, like Goethe, he represented 'a whole and sound piece of manhood . . . And it is to such men that we turn our attention more eagerly and closely, men who do not excel in this or that special quality or department, but who excel as *men*.'<sup>7</sup> At the end of his life, he was equally drawn to notions of manhood. According to W. S. Morrison, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Smuts's last words to him were 'Morrison, it is a great thing to be a man—a great thing.'<sup>8</sup>

There can be little doubt, however that, contrary to Beukes, for Smuts being a man meant being a white man for, as a number of recent writers have recently reminded us, the most salient feature of whiteness is its invisibility. Ruth Frankenberg, in a totally different context, puts it well: whiteness, she says, 'for all that it is an unmarked cultural category', generates 'norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and . . . ways of thinking about culture . . . [which] need to be examined and historicized.'<sup>9</sup> Manhood, like womanhood, has its social markers even if they are unspoken.

<sup>6</sup> P. Beukes, *The Holistic Smuts. A study in personality* (Cape Town and Pretoria, 1990), p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Smuts, *Walt Whitman. A study in the evolution of personality* (Detroit, 1973), p. 26, cited in Bill Schwarz, 'Reveries of race'.

<sup>8</sup> Beukes, *The Holistic Smuts*, p. 81. Morrison recorded this at the official unveiling of Smuts's statue in Parliament Square in 1956.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters. The social construction of whiteness* (Minnesota, 1997), p. 231. Frankenberg was writing about the racialised identity of white

For Smuts being a white man involved decisiveness, if not ruthlessness, and the preparedness to defend what he considered important to the death if need be. In complex ways—and what is fascinating is quite how complex and contradictory his concept of manhood was—Smuts's masculinity underpinned his paternalist racial beliefs, the high intellectual remoteness of his philosophy of 'holism', his love of nature and solitary contemplation on the tops of mountains and, as he himself acknowledged, his relationships with women. These he was capable of treating both as intellectual equals (as we shall see) and as inhabitants of a separate 'domestic' sphere, most notably in the case of his wife, Isie, herself no mean intellectual, who remained home on the farm through his various international journeyings, providing him with the security of family and familiarity. The white man as the 'hero' of civilisation, his notion of manhood above all gave him agency, agency in war and in peace.

For Smuts, the soldier, also undoubtedly saw himself as a man of peace and a lawgiver: that, too, was part of manhood. In May 1902, convinced that the alternative spelt the destruction of the Afrikaner people, Smuts persuaded the Boer commanders at Vereeniging to lay down their arms, and sign the peace treaty with the British which he had largely drafted with his future adversary, General J. B. M. Hertzog. Thereafter he played a major role in Transvaal politics securing its self-government from Britain in 1906. Four years later, espousing a policy of 'reconciliation' between Briton and Boer, he was *the* architect of South African unification. Like South Africa's later 'reconciliation', this was seen by many outside observers as 'a little miracle', inaugurating 'the new South Africa'. Crucially, at Vereeniging and again in 1910 it was Smuts's intervention that ensured that the issue of a franchise was *not* on the agenda for blacks outside the Cape Colony.

In both the Transvaal and Union, Smuts held several important ministerial posts under the premiership of his comrade-in-arms, Louis Botha; during this period he played the major role in establishing the Union's legislative and constitutional framework.<sup>10</sup> Despite his anti-capitalist rhetoric at the time of the war, this was dropped in the run-up to Union, as were his earlier threats to nationalise the mining industry; as

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women in contemporary California; nevertheless, her carefully nuanced study is useful in thinking about white identity more generally.

<sup>10</sup> We still know far too little about this, but see Martin Chanock, *The Making of South Africa's Legal Culture* (Cambridge, 2001).

Minister of Defence and of Mines in 1913–4 and as Prime Minister in 1922, he crushed white strikers, deporting miners' leaders illegally in 1914 and using the army and airforce against the workers in 1922.

It was not until 1919 when he succeeded Botha as Prime Minister and Minister of Native Affairs that Smuts gave his attention to 'native affairs' per se—pushing through the 1920 Native Affairs Act and the 1923 Urban Areas Act. Nevertheless, as Minister of Mines he introduced the legal colour bar in the workplace in the 1911 Mines and Works Act, describing it as a purely technical measure; nor was his one of the voices raised against the 1913 Native Lands Act which confined African land ownership to 7 per cent of the Union. These measures collectively helped establish the framework of the segregationist state in South Africa in the inter-war years.<sup>11</sup> They were defended by paternalist notions of trusteeship and segregated 'parallel institutions', for which one might read white supremacy, and were crucial in cementing the alliance between Smuts's English- and Afrikaans-speaking supporters, and thus for his vision of a broader white South African nationalism.

Yet Smuts's activities went far beyond the national. 'Colonial poacher, turned imperial gamekeeper' (in Tony Stockwell's words), he helped refashion the modern British Commonwealth, establishing the notion of Dominion status during and immediately after World War I, and assisting in the birth of the independent Irish state in 1921. Nor was his internationalism restricted to the British Commonwealth; as a member of the British war cabinet, he helped draft Britain's peace terms after World War I and was present at the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference, where he represented South Africa together with Botha. There he argued in vain for a magnanimous peace and opposed the punitive reparations imposed on Germany, recognising full well the threat they posed to international stability and fearing that they would 'hand her over . . . to the Bolsheviks'.<sup>12</sup> In 1918–19, he was largely responsible for establishing the framework of the League of Nations and the mandate system, while in 1945–6 he was a

<sup>11</sup> Hancock, *Smuts*, 2, pp. 122–4. According to Peter Kallaway, it was Smuts's intervention which transformed the rather more progressive urban areas legislation originally framed by F. S. Malan (the Cape liberal who was effectively in charge of native affairs between 1922 and 1924), with the result that 'whatever hope there may have been for a broad "liberal" policy towards the solution of industrial and race relations problems in South Africa's cities faded with it' (P. Kallaway, 'F. S. Malan, the Cape Liberal Tradition and South African Politics, 1908–1924', *Journal of African History*, XV, no. 1 (1974), p. 128).

<sup>12</sup> Smuts to Lloyd George, 26 Mar. 1919, and Smuts to L. S. Amery, 21 Mar. 1919, in K. Hancock and Jean van der Poel, eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, IV (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 84, 79 (henceforth *Smuts Papers*).

key participant in the creation of the United Nations Organisation, both suggesting and drafting its human rights charter.

Central to all of Smuts's activities was his conception of himself as scholar and philosopher. During the South African war he is said to have carried a copy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the New Testament in the original Greek in his knapsack; in the field in East Africa, he was an equally avid reader of the latest philosophical journals and books as his letters to his old tutor in Cambridge, H. J. Wolstenholme, attest. Between 1906 and 1911 in the midst of multiple ministerial responsibilities he wrote a philosophical treatise, 'An enquiry into the whole'. Based in part on his manuscript on Walt Whitman, it later formed the basis of his *Holism and Evolution* published in 1926. In this he attempted to synthesise Darwinian science and metaphysics. As Peder Johan Anker has recently shown, his understanding of holism and evolution underpinned his racialised political philosophy and inspired South African ecologists in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>13</sup> Highly regarded at the time, the book attracts few admirers today; nevertheless it paved the way for Smuts's presidency of the prestigious British Association for the Advancement of Science in its centenary year in 1931. In 1934 Smuts was installed as Rector of St Andrews University and in 1948 became Chancellor of Cambridge University.

Smuts was also, as Saul Dubow has noted, 'one of the most articulate and persuasive interwar champions of South African science' and, especially, of its role in the creation of a unified white nation.<sup>14</sup> Yet his domestic political life in the interwar years was far less successful than these philosophical endeavours or his international lustre would suggest. As Prime Minister, he was soon outflanked by the more extreme nationalism of Hertzog's Afrikaner National Party, and forced into an alliance with the party of mining capital with which he had become increasingly close during the war years. He lost power in 1924, after his government had bloodily suppressed black millenarians in the eastern Cape in 1921, and the Bondelswartz people in Namibia and the white mineworkers' strike on the Rand in the following year. Chafing in opposition, in 1933 he accepted office under Hertzog, despite their considerable differences, especially in relation to Britain and the Commonwealth connection. For many Smuts's finest hour came with the outbreak of World War II when

<sup>13</sup> Anker, 'The ecology of nations'.

<sup>14</sup> Saul Dubow, 'A commonwealth of science', pp. 80–1.

he persuaded parliament on a majority of thirteen votes to join Britain in the struggle against Nazism. Hertzog resigned and Smuts became Prime Minister. Despite his age, he rapidly built up the Union's defence forces, oversaw the despatch of South African troops to North Africa and the Middle East, visited the front on several occasions, and was Churchill's confidant on war strategy.

Whatever his wartime achievements, in 1948 Smuts lost the all-white South African elections to the revamped forces of Afrikaner nationalism under the slogan of apartheid. Confident of victory, he was profoundly shocked by the results. Not only had he underestimated the capacity of the Afrikaner nationalists; he had also failed to take the most elementary political precautions, by refusing to alter the rules of delimitation which greatly favoured rural constituencies. On the basis of one vote one value Smuts would have won a majority of some twenty seats; as it was he lost by a handful of seats.<sup>15</sup> He died two years later; his nationalist opponents remained in power until 1994.

For all his accomplishments, Smuts remains a curiously elusive if not evasive figure, as his soubriquet, 'slim [crafty] Jannie' suggests. Widely revered in his own time especially in Britain and the Commonwealth, in South Africa Smuts was reviled by Afrikaner nationalists as the 'handyman of empire', and by South Africa's white workers as a 'lackey of capitalism'; in the apartheid era he was largely forgotten. Outside South Africa, his explicit belief in white supremacy and refusal to accept South Africa's majority black population as fellow-citizens greatly tarnished his posthumous image. To a post-imperial generation, the speeches and writings which struck his contemporaries as profound frequently appear overblown or even banal, while his philosophy of holism seems less than persuasive. In 1966, A. J. P. Taylor concluded a critical review of the first four volumes of Smuts's papers, by asking in typically acerbic fashion, 'Was Smuts a citizen of Vanity Fair or the Kingdom of Heaven? Straining charity very far, one might say he had a foot in both camps. At any rate he was a master at making commonplaces look like wisdom.' For Taylor, Smuts was a 'weak Willie, symbolising all that was weak and fatuous in twentieth-century civilisation'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> B. Friedman, *Smuts. A Reappraisal* (1975), pp. 210–12; Hancock, *Smuts*, 2, pp. 505–6.

<sup>16</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, 'The Great Equivocator', the *Observer*, 12 June 1966.

## II

At the heart of much criticism of Smuts is of course his attitude on matters of race. At one level, he was adept at mouthing the conventional wisdoms of the day, at another he actively refashioned his evolutionary philosophy to justify South Africa's racial policies. The result was a curiously coded form of racism. This enabled his protagonists to argue that it derived from deliberate Fabian tactics designed to erode the racial prejudices of his fellow South Africans in the interests of progressive change, and his detractors to allege it was simply a policy of drift or worse.<sup>17</sup> Yet if Smuts's utterances on race have for the most part the dispassionate tone of the philosopher, they are also frequently disrupted by a far more visceral racism which, together with his ruthlessness, directly contradicts his image as a man of moderation and liberal conviction. I believe that this conjuncture is best explained by the powerful role which racial fears played in his thought and the influence of notable radical and feminist women on his political consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

It is both striking and intriguing that in the first decades of the last century, Smuts's most intimate friends were undoubtedly liberal, if not radical, feminists and passivists like Olive Schreiner, Emily Hobhouse, and, especially, the Quaker sisters, Margaret Gillett and Alice Clark, members of a renowned anti-slavery family and granddaughters of Smuts's hero, John Bright.<sup>19</sup> During his sojourns in London both in 1905–6 and between 1917 and 1919, he spent every spare moment with Margaret and Alice; throughout their lives they corresponded frequently—sometimes as much as twice a week—to the utter irritation of Max Beloff who remarked in a characteristically splenetic review of the first four volumes of Smuts's published correspondence:

It remains a mystery why he [Smuts] should have found it necessary to write so often when so deeply engrossed in public affairs to individuals who seem neither to have shared his own outlook on the world nor seem themselves to have been in any way remarkable. But perhaps the great require an outlet in

<sup>17</sup> See for example Joan Trewelha Cameron, 'An analysis of Smuts's attitude towards Hertzog's "Native Bills" from 1926 to 1936', UNISA MA, 1982, for the first view, Hancock, *Smuts*, 2, p. 500, for the second I am most grateful to Dr Greg Cuthbertson and Mary Lynn Suttie at UNISA for drawing my attention to and sending me Joan Cameron's thesis.

<sup>18</sup> Schwarz, 'Reveries of race', notes both, but in the context of his exploration of Smuts in relation to his legacy to notions of race in post-war Britain.

<sup>19</sup> See Hancock, *Smuts*, 1, pp. 43–4. As Hancock says, 'the name of John Bright recurred like a refrain in his political writing'.



sentimentality to help them escape at moments from the burden of responsibility.<sup>20</sup>

But Beloff was wrong. Emily Hobhouse, Olive Schreiner, Margaret Gillett, and Alice Clark were formidable figures in their own right. Emily Hobhouse first met Smuts during her single-handed battle on behalf of the Boer women and children in the British concentration camps during the South African war and probably influenced Campbell Bannerman's famous 'methods of barbarism' speech on the South African war;<sup>21</sup> Olive Schreiner was South Africa's best-known novelist and one of its first and fieriest feminists.<sup>22</sup> Margaret Gillett and Alice Clark, born into a radical anti-slavery family, were ardent suffragists and internationalists; Margaret was to help found the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (which was later to become Oxfam), while Alice was a pioneering feminist historian, who wrote a still highly respected account of *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, for the completion of which Smuts claimed some credit.<sup>23</sup>

Smuts's political philosophy and understanding of, if not entrée into, European politics was I believe subtly influenced by these women and their circle, although this is rarely acknowledged. It was probably through Emily and her political networks that Smuts found his way to Campbell Bannerman in 1906, while in 1913 he may have agreed to meet Gandhi as a result of her insistence.<sup>24</sup> At least as important was his acceptance of female suffrage as a result of their urging: although he never accepted Olive Schreiner's demand for a non-racial franchise for all men and women in South Africa.<sup>25</sup> There can be little doubt that, while he never

<sup>20</sup> *The Listener*, 25 Aug 1966.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Koss, ed. and introd., *The Pro-Boers. An Anatomy of an Antiwar Movement* (Chicago and London 1973), p. xxxvii, footnote 42. Campbell Bannerman spent two hours with Hobhouse a few days before his famous speech to the National Reform Union on 14 June 1901.

<sup>22</sup> The best biography of Olive Schreiner is still probably that by Ruth First and Ann Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (1980).

<sup>23</sup> For the best, albeit brief, account of Alice Clark's life and political role, see Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days. Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London and New York, 1996), ch. 8, pp. 232–6 *et passim*. For Smuts's claim, see UCT microfilm: Smuts Private letters, Additional volume, 98, 1906–1933. No. 106, Alice Clark to Smuts, 10 Jan. 1920. Alice herself acknowledged the inspiration of Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour*.

<sup>24</sup> See Jennifer Hobhouse Balme, *To Love One's Enemies. The Work and Life of Emily Hobhouse. The work and life of Emily Hobhouse compiled from letters and writings, newspaper cuttings and official documents* (Cobble Hill, British Columbia, 1994), pp. 539–41.

<sup>25</sup> Olive Schreiner resigned from the South African Women's Enfranchisement League because it refused to extend its demand for the female vote to black women. Emily Hobhouse's speech for the unveiling of the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein in 1913, dedicated to the women and children who died in the South African War, notably saw the message of the monument as

accepted the pacifism of the Quakers, he valued the political advice he received from the Clark family, and perhaps especially from Alice, whom he referred to as his 'spiritual sister'.<sup>26</sup> A third sister, Dr Hilda Clark, with whom Smuts also corresponded, although less regularly, was an equally convinced feminist and internationalist. During and after World War I she helped organise Quaker medical and famine relief for Europe's civilian war victims, first in France, later in Vienna, while in 1936 she went to give medical assistance to civilians during the Spanish Civil War. It is interesting that despite his fierce anti-communism Smuts supported the republican side unhesitatingly during that war.<sup>27</sup>

His opposition to German reparations, his internationalism, his advocacy of the League of Nations, and his understanding of Irish demands were all enriched if not inspired by his conversations with them and, through them, their intellectual circle. Smuts's farewell address to the British people in July 1919 directly echoes impassioned letters he had received from Olive Schreiner at the beginning of that year, and it may well have been her and Alice Clark's arguments which led him to oppose Britain's decision to intervene in support of the White Army in Russia in 1919.<sup>28</sup>

This is not to say that their voices were sufficient to deter him from what he saw as expedient, especially in the South African context, where they called for a more inclusive non-racial South Africa and were disappointed by his preparedness to ally himself with what they still saw as the enemy, mining capital. Whatever his intellectual sympathies with the

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an inspiration to all South Africans to 'Be merciful towards the weak, the down-trodden, the stranger. Do not open your gates to those worst foes of freedom—tyranny and selfishness. Are not these the withholding from others in your control, the very liberties and rights which you have valued and won for yourselves.' Even more explicitly she recalled 'the many thousands of the dark race [who] perished also in the Concentration Camps' and exhorted women to remember Lincoln's words for 'the black' [*sic*]—'They will probably help you in some trying time to keep the jewel of liberty in the family of freedom.' (See First and Scott, *Olive Schreiner*, pp. 261–2 and R. van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse: Boer War Letters* [Cape Town and Pretoria, 1984], pp. 406–7.)

<sup>26</sup> Additional volume 98, no. 6, Smuts to Alice Clark, 1–3–1917. On his departure from Britain in 1919 he was to write, 'I wonder whether you will miss me. But our comradeship has been so close and you have had such an influence on me that my departure must leave a small vacant space in your life . . .' (Ibid. no. 97, 21 July 1919) Shortly before her death he wrote ' . . . indeed it would be impossible for you and me to be more to each other than we are. I keep thinking of you again and again.' (Ibid. no. 159, 12 April 1933.)

<sup>27</sup> Holton, *Suffrage Days*, pp. 213–22, 233.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Olive Schreiner to Smuts, 19 Nov. 1918 (*Smuts Papers*, IV, p. 21) and 30 June 1919 (Ibid. pp. 259–60), and Smuts's farewell statement to the UK on 18 July 1919 (Ibid. p. 274). For Alice's contribution to this speech, see A. Clark to Smuts, 26 April 1919 (Ibid. pp. 132–4).

ideas and idealism of his female interlocutors, he never let that interfere with more mundane political calculation. It was so much easier to strike up moral attitudes in Europe where he did not in the end have to stand for election than in South Africa, where he did. Smuts was always convinced himself and generally convinced his international admirers that South Africa was far safer in his own hands than in any one else's, however much he professed to despise the tedium of party politics. Nevertheless the presence of this external jury may well have acted as an important curb on a more straightforward racist discourse. The result was a set of contradictions, not only between Smuts as world statesman and his actions at home, but also in his discourses on race.

These contradictions did not escape his contemporaries, and here his women friends were most perceptive. Sarah Gertrude Millin, the novelist whose early biography of Smuts was based on extensive interviews with her subject in the 1930s, captured these well when she pointed to the contrast between Smuts's philosophy of holism, 'the very essence' of which was freedom, and his attitudes to issues of colour: by going against the principle of freedom, she maintained, he did 'violence to his deepest principle, he hurts his faith, he hurts himself. . . . It is a battle without end between his spirit and the day's compulsions—a lasting battle for his spirit.'<sup>29</sup>

Olive Schreiner also captured something both of the limitations and the attraction of his personality in a letter to her husband in January 1920:

. . . Janni [*sic*] has the most extraordinary faith in *words*. I wonder if he thinks they must represent *things*. He ought to have been a lawyer and nothing else. . . . But there is something about him that draws me intensely. It's his vitality and energy. I am sure I should love the devil if I knew him, because he'd be so absolutely alive.<sup>30</sup>

It was, however, Alice Clark (who probably understood him better than anyone else), who wrote most perceptively in a letter to Smuts himself on 11 January 1920:

<sup>29</sup> S. G. Millin, *General Smuts* (2 vols., 1936), II, p. 437. Cf. Smuts's speech on 17 Oct. 1934 when he was inaugurated as the Rector of St Andrews: 'The denial of free human rights must in the long run lead to a cataclysm. . . . to suppose that in the modern world you can dispense with freedom in human government, that you can govern without the consent of the governed, is to fly in the face of decent human nature as well as the facts of history. . . . Freedom is the most ineradicable craving of human nature. Without it peace, contentment and happiness, even manhood itself, are not possible. . . .' (in J. C. Smuts, *Plans for a Better World* [1942], p. 97).

<sup>30</sup> Olive Schreiner, London, to Cronwright Schreiner, 11 Jan. 1920, in S. C. Cronwright Schreiner, ed., *The Letters of Olive Schreiner, 1876–1920* (1924), p. 367. Italics in original.

There are people [she said] whose instincts are better than their conscious thoughts, but I don't think you are one of those. Yours is a character that develops and progresses. Your thoughts are therefore in advance or on a higher plane . . . than your subconscious emotions. To you, the conscious thought seems to be what you are. But to the others, the actions of the subconscious self are what you are judged by. Though you are right in thinking that your thought is your real self, they are also right because you have not unified your personality.<sup>31</sup>

This contradiction between his 'conscious thought' and his 'subconscious self' may partly explain the conundrum posed by a pseudonymous newspaper correspondent, Gallio, who wrote in January 1929:

The fact is that no one in politics has any effective conception of how to combine all the diverse populations of South Africa into a single unity, nor even whether such a combination should be sought. General Smuts must have some systematic ideas on the subject because he is a philosopher. But his ideas do not find any place in his programme. On the all important colour question he has never risen above the merest opportunism. . . . The result is that when he enters the political field, he leaves behind him the chief part of what differentiates him from his mole-like fellow-creatures. This third-class performance by a first-class mind is a curious and, from a public standpoint, distressing thing.<sup>32</sup>

In similar vein in 1975 Bernard Friedman, former member of parliament for Smuts's United Party and a founder of the South African Progressive Party, took Hancock to task for helping—as he put it—to 'sustain the legend of Smuts as the great Commonwealth statesman whose commanding stature in world affairs gave South Africa the prestige, if not the status, of a world power'.<sup>33</sup> According to Friedman, this legacy obscured Smuts's manifest failure to intervene with vision and leadership in South Africa when faced with suitable opportunities during his fifty-year career. 'As far as he was concerned, the Native Question was not a problem to be solved but an embarrassment to be shelved', wrote Friedman. 'In the field of Native affairs he was content to practise a cautious pragmatism, meeting emergent situations with temporising expedients.' Liberalism was in principle a fine doctrine; in practice it was 'for Whites only'.<sup>34</sup> As Smuts wrote in March 1906 to the liberal John X. Merriman, soon to be Prime Minister of the Cape Colony:

I am entirely with you on the Native Question. I sympathize profoundly with the Native races of South Africa whose land it was long before we came here to

<sup>31</sup> *Smuts Papers* (Cambridge, 1973), V, p. 34–5.

<sup>32</sup> Gallio, 'The Land of Lost Opportunities,' 30 Jan. 1929. (I am grateful to the late Baruch Hirson for the clipping; newspaper unknown.)

<sup>33</sup> Friedman, *Smuts*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 19, 21.

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. Perhaps at bottom I do not believe in politics at all as a means for the attainment of the highest ends; but certainly so far as the Natives are concerned, politics will . . . only have an unsettling influence. . . . When I consider the political future of 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 . . .<sup>35</sup>

Nor was this an isolated statement, either in its pious declarations of sympathy with Africans or its confession that on 'native policy' his mind was 'full of Cimmerian darkness'.<sup>36</sup>

Hancock was far too good an historian to miss Smuts's equivocation on questions of race, although he usually discusses in terms of his 'native policy', but he places little emphasis on this aspect of Smuts's life.<sup>37</sup> As early as 1892 in a juvenile essay Smuts recognised that the 'race struggle' was 'destined to assume a magnitude on the African continent such as the world has never seen', but constantly put off addressing it; similarly while Hancock appreciated that race was the most intractable political issue in South Africa he displayed little interest in the issue and no originality in its analysis except as it impinged on white South Africa and its place in the Commonwealth.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, like many of Smuts's contemporaries in this country, Hancock passes over both Smuts's racist assumptions and what can only be termed the racist eruptions in many of his speeches and writings in silence.

For all their shared 'blindness' on race questions it seems to me that it in fact proceeded from different sources, different identifications as white men. Despite its deep embeddedness in European imperialism and settler colonialism, whiteness in Australia or Britain was not the same as whiteness

<sup>35</sup> Smuts to J. X. Merriman, 13 Mar. 1906, in *Smuts Papers*, II, p. 242. See also Smuts to J. A. Hobson, 13 July 1908, in *ibid.* pp. 440–1.

<sup>36</sup> *Smuts Papers*, II, Smuts to J. X. Merriman, 2 Oct. 1908, p. 526.

<sup>37</sup> See Saul Dubow and Shula Marks, 'Patriotism of place and race: Keith Hancock on South Africa' in D. A. Low, ed., *Keith Hancock: the Legacies of an Historian* (Melbourne, 2001). Hancock was not alone in this blindness. Christopher Fyfe has also written on the silence in African history and imperial history of the importance of a white skin as the badge of authority for colonial rulers: race, he argues, 'was an essential tool of government which underpinned colonial rule', yet African historians have been generally unwilling to take account of the importance of race in upholding colonial authority ('Race, Empire and Decolonization in Africa', in S. McGrath *et al.*, eds., *Rewriting African History* [Edinburgh, 1997], p. 22).

<sup>38</sup> 'The conditions of future South African literature', in *Smuts Papers*, I (Cambridge, 1966), p. 46.

in South Africa.<sup>39</sup> In Hancock, the Australian, this blindness arose because he was temperamentally disposed to think of South Africa—and almost believed it to be—like *his* Australia a ‘white man’s country’.<sup>40</sup> Writing at a time when, as C. E. Carrington remarks, ‘the white man was master and all white men’s values prevailed’,<sup>41</sup> his was a failure of imagination and an easy over-identification with settler South Africa. As we shall see, white racial dominion was by no means as assured in South Africa at the turn of the last century.

In Smuts, these silences seem to derive from a far more active process, a combination of repressed fear and the major contradiction between his identity as a white South African man, and his self-perception as a liberal citizen of the world, a contradiction he explicitly recognised. Thus in 1947 he was to write to the South African born Lady Daphne Moore, artist and wife of the then Governor of Ceylon, another of his many close woman confidantes:

On one side I am a human and a humanist, and the author of the preamble to the Charter. On the other I am a South African European, proud of our heritage and proud of the clean European society we have built up in South Africa, and which I am determined not to see lost in the black pool of Africa.<sup>42</sup>

The language is uncomfortably close to that of the leader of the National Party, D. F. Malan, during the 1948 election. At a meeting in Paarl on 20 April 1948 he demanded to know whether ‘the European race’ would be able to and wish ‘to maintain its rule, its purity and its civilization, or will it float along until it vanishes without honour in the black sea of South Africa’s non-European population?’<sup>43</sup>

### III

To note Smuts’s blinkered vision on race is hardly original. In general, however, it has been ascribed by his biographers like Kenneth Ingham to

<sup>39</sup> As Bill Schwarz puts it, in Britain whiteness ‘was largely unspoken . . . it worked silently, through many displacements. Smuts however was born into a culture in which the divide between black and white was spoken incessantly; he lived his life as a white man in a way that Churchill, for example was not required to do . . .’ (‘Reveries of race’, p. 14).

<sup>40</sup> *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (1937), vol. I, p. 237; Hancock, *Argument of Empire* (Harmondsworth, 1943), p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> C. E. Carrington, *The Liquidation of the British Empire* (1966), p. 66 cited in Fyfe, ‘Race, Imperialism and Decolonization’, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> *Smuts Papers*, VII (Cambridge, 1973), p. 126. Smuts to Lady Daphne Moore, 2 Mar. 1947.

<sup>43</sup> Hancock, *Smuts*, 2, p. 500.

'instinct' and the natural proclivities of the Afrikaner—whatever that means;<sup>44</sup> or to the general temper of the times—racism was, after all, the 'common sense' in contemporary Europe and America let alone in South Africa; or to Smuts's political opportunism and the exigencies of white politics in the Transvaal and later South Africa where, it is alleged, no politician could have carried the white, let alone the Afrikaner, population on even the limited Cape liberal policy of 'equal rights for all civilized men'; or to his preoccupations with Europe and his boredom with the 'triviality' of South African politics. It would, of course, be foolish to deny these arguments. Most contain at least an element of truth. There can be little doubt that Smuts himself frequently maintained his equivocations on matters of race were dictated by his white constituency; in South Africa as in the United States, white (male) democracy was the enemy of black freedom, as de Tocqueville noted in 1835.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, while taking us some way, these explanations either block further explanation by taking as given that which needs to be explained or they underplay the intensity of Smuts's own racism and its centrality not simply to what was conventionally entitled 'native policy' but far more widely to the whole range of his policies: his support for Rhodes in 1895; his preparedness to make peace in 1902; his attitudes to 'reconciliation' between the 'white races' and the need for unification of the South African colonies in 1910; his ruthlessness in crushing strikes by white workers not only because they threatened the profitability of the mining industry but also lest they lead to black uprisings; his refusal to bow to India's demands on behalf of its rightless citizens in South Africa;<sup>46</sup> his white immigration policies before and after the Second World War;<sup>47</sup> his prevarications on 'native policy' in the 1930s when he

<sup>44</sup> According to Ingham, with Smuts, 'logic went overboard when the native question was under discussion. Human considerations pushed him in one direction, instinct in another.' (*Smuts*, p. 167). Ingham uses the term 'instinct' or 'innate' usually in combination with Afrikaner prejudice at least half a dozen times in his biography. What this formulation patently ignores are the equally prejudiced eyes of many English-speakers, within and outside South Africa; and the (admittedly small) number of Afrikaners who did not share his prejudice.

<sup>45</sup> See George M. Frederickson, 'Race and Empire in Liberal Thought: the Legacy of de Tocqueville' in his *The Comparative Imagination. On the History of Racism, Nationalism and Social Movements* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997), pp. 98–116.

<sup>46</sup> In rejecting Indian demands for equal rights in South Africa at Commonwealth conferences in the early 1920s, Smuts repeated again and again 'that equal rights for Indians in South Africa would lead to equal rights for Natives, and that would mean the end of South Africa. "We are up against a stone wall and we cannot get over it", he lamented', (Hancock, *Smuts*, 2, p. 149).

<sup>47</sup> Sally Peberdy, 'White immigration to South Africa, 1902–1948' Unpublished Ph.D., Queen's University, Kingston, 1999.

entered Hertzog's cabinet in the new United Party;<sup>48</sup> and his complete failure to understand why 'colour' 'queered' his 'poor pitch everywhere' after 1945.<sup>49</sup> Although it is not possible to elaborate on these arguments here, in each instance Smuts himself acknowledged the centrality of race.

In a recent comment, Saul Dubow has remarked, 'only by taking the intellectual discourse of scientific racism seriously is it possible to fully comprehend its strength and appeal'.<sup>50</sup> Supporting this view, Peder Johan Anker has argued that Smuts's racial attitudes and repressive policies were underpinned by his philosophy of holism, especially in its ecological and evolutionary forms. According to Anker, Smuts sincerely endeavoured to 'let scientific knowledge guide his political decisions', and these 'were fully consistent with his holistic philosophy of science'.<sup>51</sup> He illustrates this well with an analysis of Smuts's 1929 Rhodes lectures in Oxford in which he advocated the expansion of white settlement in the climatically suitable highlands of East Africa, because black and white communities represented separate 'wholes' and could and should therefore live in separate ecological 'bio-regions'.

Yet this ostensibly ecological analysis is followed by what can only be described as the most hoary of settler nostrums: that 'the easiest, most natural and obvious way to civilize the African native is to give him decent white employment. White employment is his best school; the gospel of labour is the most salutary gospel for him . . . even more from the native point of view, the policy of African settlement [i.e. by whites] is imperatively necessary'.<sup>52</sup> For all his scientific sophistication, much of Smuts's thinking on race would seem to draw on forms of nineteenth-

<sup>48</sup> It was widely believed that Smuts refrained from opposing Hertzog because, in the deteriorating international situation, he wanted to ensure that he would be able to take South Africa in on the British side in a European war. This is debateable. Although Smuts followed global events with considerable anxiety in the 1930s, up to the end of 1938 he still hoped that peace could be safeguarded. Friedman argues his silences were probably dictated by mundane domestic political calculations: a vote against Hertzog on colour issues would have split the UP and left him 'in the wilderness' with a diminished following. See Friedman, *Smuts*, 128–42 and Cameron, 'An analysis of Smuts's attitude towards Hertzog's "Native Bills"' for the contrasting views.

<sup>49</sup> Smuts wrote this well-known phrase in a letter to Margaret Gillett from New York, 17 Nov. 1946 (*Smuts Papers*, VII [Cambridge, 1973], p. 110).

<sup>50</sup> Saul Dubow, 'Christopher Fyfe: A Comment', in McGrath *et al.*, *Rewriting African History*, p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> See Anker, 'The ecology of nations'. The quotation is on p. 175. This paragraph has been deeply influenced by Dr Anker's thesis.

<sup>52</sup> J. C. Smuts, *Africa and Some World Problems* (Oxford, 1930), pp. 47–9. These were lectures delivered to the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Edinburgh, the Rhodes Memorial Lectures delivered in Oxford, and a speech to the League of Nations Union in the Guildhall, all delivered in Nov. 1929.



century 'colonial knowledge' which missionaries and settlers constructed to legitimise the colonisation of Africa. This in turn seemed to rest on the notion of 'the masterful Western [male] subject as a repository and arbiter of civilisation', rather than on Darwinian explanations of racial difference.<sup>53</sup>

Even more striking is the way in which this highly intellectual man, who had his finger on the pulse of scientific advance in the first half of the twentieth century, was also liable to erupt into a far more overtly racist discourse. Even in lectures, designed for his Oxford audience, the sense of menace escapes into the text:

From time immemorial [Smuts proclaimed] the natives of Africa have been subject to a stern, even a ruthless discipline, and their social system has rested on the despotic authority of their chiefs. If this system breaks down and tribal discipline disappears, native society will be resolved into its human atoms, with possibilities of universal Bolshevism and chaos which no friend of the natives, or the orderly civilization of this continent, could contemplate with equanimity.<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding Anker's fascinating analysis of scientific philosophy at the heart of Smuts's politics, the contradiction remains between his essentially optimistic scientific vision, his liberal internationalism, his self-confidence in his manly prowess—and his almost visceral racial fears. As Bill Schwarz has noted, 'His was a culture which lived in a kind of permanent emergency, peculiarly attuned to apprehensions of its own destruction.'<sup>55</sup>

These apprehensions punctuate his correspondence and speeches from the 1890s to the late 1940s. They were already evident in his political debut in 1895 when he went to Kimberley to defend Rhodes against his detractors, when he talked of the position of about half a million whites 'at the southern corner of a vast continent, peopled by over 10,000,000 barbarians', whose responsibility it was to 'lift up' 'that vast dead-weight of immemorial barbarism and animal savagery to the light and blessing of ordered civilisation. Unless the white race closes its ranks in this country,' he concluded, echoing Rhodes, 'its position will soon become untenable in the face of that overwhelming majority of prolific barbarism.'<sup>56</sup>

And while there are those who would argue that by the late 1940s Smuts's views on race had softened and that he was preparing a new,

<sup>53</sup> Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians. Missionary Narrative and African textual response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1996), p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Smuts, *Africa and Some World Problems*, p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> Schwarz, 'Reveries of Race', p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> *Smuts Papers*, I, pp. 82–3, Verbatim Report of Speech in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 30 Oct. 1895.

more inclusive 'native policy' the evidence for this is at best tenuous. From the United Nations in October 1946, for example, he was to write to Margaret Gillett, complaining of the international dislike of South Africa's 'colour bars and its racial outlook':

South Africa is a little epic of European civilization on a dark continent. India is threatening this noble experiment with her vast millions. . . . All along the east coast of Africa from Mombasa to Durban, and ultimately to Cape Town they are invading, infiltrating, penetrating in all sorts of devious ways to reverse the role which we have thought our destiny . . .<sup>57</sup>

If much of this may be ascribed to Smuts's childhood experiences as the son of a landowner on a farm in the western Cape—about which we know remarkably little in fact—the really formative event seems to have been the South African war, an event which was deeply etched on Smuts's consciousness, and which made it almost impossible for him to transcend these earlier experiences. The profound meaning of the war in crystallising Smuts's racial *angst* can, I think, be seen in the emotionally charged letter which he wrote to the British pro-Boer journalist W. T. Stead in January 1902. In it he bitterly castigated Britain's 'baneful policy' of employing 'Natives and Coloured people as armed combatants . . . not in small insignificant numbers, but in thousands. . . .' Armed by the British, he continued, 'these . . . fiends' had 'committed horrible atrocities on fugitive or peaceful women and children . . . the world will be surprised to find that almost as many women and children have perished at the hands of barbarians in this war, by the connivance or general instigation of British officers, as were done to death by Dingaan and Moselekatze at the dawn of the Republics in South Africa . . .'<sup>58</sup>

It is difficult in a short extract to capture the almost hysterical language used by Smuts in this outburst. And while he was undoubtedly exaggerating for Stead's benefit—and it is interesting that he thought such a letter would appeal to British readers—there can be little doubt that what he wrote was deeply felt. For thirty passionate pages he pronounced on how shocking it was 'to employ armed barbarians under white officers in a war between two white Christian peoples', both in view of the 'numerical disproportion of the two peoples engaged in this struggle' and 'from the point of view of South African history and public policy'. What really endangered 'the continued existence of the white community as the ruling class in South Africa', Smuts maintained, was the involvement, by

<sup>57</sup> *Smuts Papers*, VII, p. 101, Smuts, New York, to M. C. Gillett, 27 Oct. 1946.

<sup>58</sup> *Smuts Papers*, I, p. 482, Smuts to W. T. Stead, 4 Jan. 1902.

Britain, of the 'coloured races' in a dispute between whites, thus allowing them to 'become the arbiter in disputes between . . . [them] and in the long run the predominating factor or "casting vote" in South Africa'.

Dark indeed is that shadow! [he proclaimed] When armed Natives and Coloured boys, trained and commanded by English officers, . . . [pursue] the fugitive Boer and try to pay off old scores by insulting his wife and children on their [lonely] farms; when the Boer women in the Cape Colony have to cook for and serve the brutal Coloured scouts, . . . , and are forced to listen to their filthy talk; when they hear these Coloured soldiers of the King boast that after the war the latter will be the owners of the [Boer] farms . . . and will marry [their] widows . . . ; when, to escape violation and nameless insults at the hands of their former servants, now wearing the British uniform, Boer women and girls seek refuge in the mountains of the native land, as I have seen them do—a wound is given to South Africa which Time itself will not heal.<sup>59</sup>

For Smuts, British war policy portended 'an eventual *débâcle* of society' in which the white population would 'have to bow before a Native constabulary and soldiery'. This 'Frankenstein Monster' was, he asserted, far worse than 'the utter desolation of South Africa and the unprecedented sufferings of the whole Boer people in field and prison camps', and 'would soon cause South Africa to relapse into barbarism'.<sup>60</sup>

One's initial instinct is to dismiss this letter as propaganda premised on paranoia; the Manichean opposites of civilisation and savagery are only too familiar to students of nineteenth-century racist discourse, and there is no evidence that white women were raped or even molested by 'the coloured races' on any scale during the war, despite lurid articles in the press and the taunting of masters and especially mistresses by former labourers.<sup>61</sup> Indeed the handful of women who had been captured by Linchwe's Kgatla people in the eastern Transvaal after the Battle of Derdepoort in November 1899, an episode at the heart of many of the more blood-curdling rumours, all remarked on the kind treatment they had received from the chief and his followers!<sup>62</sup> Looking at the evidence one is forcefully reminded of Norman Etherington's astrigent comment

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 486.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. pp. 494–6.

<sup>61</sup> See 'The Cruelty of the English towards Women and Children', report of J. L. van der Merwe (who fought under de la Rey in western Transvaal, formerly Mining Commissioner at Johannesburg) who included a letter from the Women's Laager, District of Potchefstroom, 5 Jan. 1901 to the President of the Great Congress in Worcester, 6 Dec. 1900, in *Official Reports of General J. H. de la Rey and General J. C. Smuts together with other documents relating to the war in South Africa*, transl. from the Dutch (1902), pp. 27–8.

<sup>62</sup> CO 417/292 24285, Affidavit by Lieut. W. B. Surmon PN encl. in Milner to Chamberlain 9–7–00; also affidavit by W. H. Surmon, Asst and Magistrate for Bechuanaland Protectorate,

on the so-called 'black peril' scare in Natal in 1870: 'during the rape crisis' he says, 'everyone was scared and practically no-one was raped'. One cannot, however, leave the matter there. As Etherington continues:

fear of losing control was a constant undercurrent in the thinking of the settler minority. This substratum of anxiety rose to the surface in the form of a moral panic whenever disturbances in the economy or the body politic were severe enough to unsettle the mask of composure worn by the face of public authority. In a patriarchal society, where women were part and parcel of the property to be defended against threats from below, fear of rape was a special concern of white males. . . .<sup>63</sup>

Turn of the century South Africa was undoubtedly undergoing one of its recurrent 'crises of control', provoked in this instance as much by the conflict between Boer and Briton as between black and white; and fears of the effect the war would have on 'the native mind', were rampant. The sense of crisis was perhaps heightened by the militancy of Afrikaner women whose courage and commitment during the war frequently outran that of the men, as Helen Bradford has recently cogently argued.<sup>64</sup> As so often, anxieties about sexual subversion mirrored apprehensions of political disintegration and loss of property and partly resulted from a redefining of racial and gender boundaries.<sup>65</sup>

This apocalypse lay behind Smuts's conviction that the future of the Afrikaner people was threatened and that peace was essential if they were to survive. White masculinity in general and Smuts's in particular were at stake in the inability of the Boers either to defend their women and children—or, indeed, to control them. Behind Smuts's fears there *was* a

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both at Sefetile BP 12 May 1900. For an account of the Kgatla participation in the war, see Bernard Mbenga, 'The Bakgatla's role in the South African War and its impact on the Pilansberg, 1899–1903' in G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh and M. Suttie, eds., *Rethinking the South African War* (Cleveland, forthcoming), and R. F. Morton, 'Linchwe and the Kgatla Campaign in the South African War, 1899–1902', *Journal of African Studies*, 26, 2 (1985).

<sup>63</sup> N. Etherington, 'The Black Rape Scare of the 1870s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 1 (1988). Ann Stoler makes much the same point about rape scares in colonies of white settlement more generally: 'the rhetoric of sexual assault and the measures used to prevent it had virtually no correlation with the incidence of rape of European women by men of color. Just the contrary: there was often no evidence, *ex post facto* or at the time, that rapes were committed or that rape attempts were made . . .' ('Making empire respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th-century colonial cultures', in F. Cooper and A. Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule*. Special issue of *American Ethnologist*, 16, 4 [1989], p. 641).

<sup>64</sup> 'Gentlemen and Boers: Afrikaner nationalism, gender and colonial warfare in the South African War', paper presented to the 'Rethinking the South African War' conference, held at the University of South Africa, Aug., 1998.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Stoler, 'Making empire respectable', pp. 640–1.

harsh reality: rural destruction and the suffering and mortality of women and children in the concentration camps had dire demographic implications, while the Boer commandos were increasingly demoralised. However determined the generals, their support was dwindling, while they were also losing control over black people in the countryside.<sup>66</sup>

Pioneering monographs, by Peter Warwick and Bill Nasson, and more recently a handful of case studies in particular arenas of the war, have shown that black people undoubtedly participated in the war.<sup>67</sup> Despite the rhetoric of the time, it is no longer possible to see this as a 'white man's war'. By 1902, Generals de Wet and Pretorius were claiming that they were fighting a virtually all-black army.<sup>68</sup> And while this was probably an exaggeration, recent estimates put the number of blacks assisting the British war effort at between 100,000 and 120,000, some 30,000 of whom were armed.<sup>69</sup> Despite their rhetoric, the Afrikaners also made use of, and on occasion armed, blacks during the war: up to 14,000 African and Coloured auxiliaries accompanied the Boer commandoes, whether willingly or unwillingly, and constituted some 20 per cent of their manpower, releasing an equivalent number of Afrikaner soldiers for armed combat.<sup>70</sup> Nor was this all. In many areas, Africans and Coloureds took the opportunity of the 'white man's war' to wage their own struggle against their landowners and overlords, whether by collaborating with the imperial forces, refusing to pay tax or labour tribute, raiding Boer farms on their own account, or taking their erstwhile masters to court. In the northern Cape and in the Transvaal large areas were virtually under black control.

Much of Smuts's letter to Stead was probably based on rumour and

<sup>66</sup> The best account of this is in Jeremy Krikler, *Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below: The Agrarian Transvaal at the Turn of the Century* (Oxford, 1993).

<sup>67</sup> The literature has grown apace since Peter Warwick and Bill Nasson's pioneering studies, respectively *Black People and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Cambridge, 1983), and *Abraham Esau's War. A Black South African War in the Cape 1899–1902* (Cambridge, 1991). See also Fransjohan Pretorius, *Life on Commando* and Jeremy Krikler, *Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below*, and the articles in Greg Cuthbertson, *et al.*, *Rethinking the South African War*.

<sup>68</sup> John Higginson, 'Hell in small places: agrarian elites and collective violence in the western Transvaal, 1900–1907', unpublished paper, 1998. I am grateful to Professor Higginson for giving me a copy of this paper.

<sup>69</sup> Fransjohan Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902* (Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg, 1999), p. 267; and B. Nasson, *The South African War 1899–1902* (1999), p. 282 who tentatively suggests the higher figure, citing Andre Wessels, *Die Militêre Rol van Swart Mense, Bruin Mense en Indiers tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog (1899–1902)* (Bloemfontein, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Pretorius, *Life on Commando*, pp. 294–8 puts the numbers at between 7,000 and 12,000; Nasson, *The South African War 1899–1902*, p. 282, has the higher figure.

hearsay, as terrified settlers projected many of their fears onto an African population whom they had earlier expropriated and exploited, and whose women had been raped and assaulted by white men.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Smuts himself served in the two arenas of war which probably saw the greatest involvement of armed black troops and the greatest destruction of white authority: the western Transvaal and the northern Cape. When he arrived to join de la Rey's commando in the Pilansberg area in November 1900, for example, he found most of the farms deserted. White farmers and their families had fled after the battle of Derdepoort. Raid and counter-raid followed and in the last two years of the war the Kgatla retook land that had been taken from them in the previous forty years and came to control the entire western Transvaal.<sup>72</sup> In the northern Cape, too, where Smuts spent the last months of the war, the British had handed over to armed Coloured and black contingents the defence of the entire area between the Cape Town–Kimberley railway and the Atlantic; there commando leaders raided African herds while Africans, whether armed or unarmed, who were suspected of assisting the British were shot, often without trial; in the last months of the war many of the Boer generals, including Smuts, were becoming nervous of the possible repercussions.<sup>73</sup>

During the war Smuts felt his entire social world beginning to crack, and this catastrophic vision seems to have haunted him for most of the rest of his life, although he rarely spoke again of his experiences during the South African war; in the published version of the diary he wrote during 1903 and 1906 of his odyssey into the Cape Colony, for example, there are only faint echoes of the language used and accusations made in his letter to Stead.<sup>74</sup> Smuts's later silence was probably politic, as an incident in 1932 suggests. Early that year, the then Prime Minister, J. B. M. Hertzog, stated in the South African House of Assembly that the British had armed Africans during the war. When this was hotly disputed by some members of Smuts's opposition party, who clearly suffered from the form of collective amnesia South Africans are prone to, Hertzog retorted,

<sup>71</sup> Nasson writes of commando leaders in the northern Cape like Smuts, Kritzinger, Olivier, and Hertzog appearing as 'the cutting edge of a form of racial power based on the expropriation of Cape peasants, migrants and other workers, and on a shrill rhetoric of racial superiority' (Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War*, p. 114).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Warwick, *Black People*, pp. 179–80. Warwick maintains that 'Throughout the northern and western Transvaal Boer land was seized and occupied by black people, new homesteads built and fresh gardens established.'

<sup>73</sup> Pretorius, 'Boer attitudes', p. 109.

<sup>74</sup> See S. B. Spies and Gail Natrass, eds., *Jan Smuts. Memoirs of the Boer War* (Johannesburg, 1994), pp. 62, 106. Smuts wrote this memoir between 1903 and 1906.

'Ask your leader' while Havenga called out: 'I was shot to pieces by natives.' 'Speaking with passionate emphasis', the Prime Minister, declared that once and for all he would 'nail to the counter the lie that natives had not been used against the Boers', and ending 'in a high pitch of anger', he declared that 'it was "a scandal" that "you dare after all these years to deny it."' "I can only regard such denials," he concluded, "'as an insult to the Dutch-speaking section.'" Through all this furore Smuts sat silent. According to the *Cape Times* the opposition 'showed a restraint and a moderation under high provocation which deserves to be placed on permanent record'. Restraint and moderation aside, the need to keep his English-speaking supporters on board no doubt dictated Smuts's silence, though he may also have believed that the less said in front of the African population the better.<sup>75</sup>

#### IV

In his immensely stimulating account of black participation in the South African War in the Cape Colony, Bill Nasson has remarked on the war's 'contribution to how and why dominated and dominant South Africans have become what they are'.<sup>76</sup> Although the searing impact of their losses in the concentration camps on twentieth-century Afrikaner nationalism has been much remarked (though never systematically probed), there have been few detailed explorations of the ways in which the war shaped the consciousness of black and white South Africans. This is a notoriously difficult area to research, but in Smuts's case there appear to be some clues. Although he rarely alluded openly to the fears aroused in his mind during the war by the vision of Africans and Coloureds under arms, and the challenge they posed, albeit briefly, to Boer hegemony, these fears nonetheless erupted into subsequent texts. Thus in June 1917, during his sojourn in Britain when he had already—uniquely—been coopted into the British war cabinet, an article in the *Daily Mail*, based on his famous speech in the Savoy Hotel, asked:

<sup>75</sup> *Cape Times*, 19 Mar. 1932. This clipping was sent to the Minister at the Dominions Office from the Office of the Representative of the UK in Cape Town, with a covering note: 'As far as I can find out there is no evidence whatsoever to justify such an extraordinary statement but you will observe that the PM's remarks were endorsed by Mr Havenga. . . . You will also observe that no steps have been taken by the opposition to dispute this statement.' (DO 35/460/7 1932, Boer War: alleged use of armed natives by the British.)

<sup>76</sup> Nasson, *Abram Esau's War*, p. 169.

Why is General Smuts anxious about the future of Equatorial Africa? BECAUSE THE WAR HAS BROUGHT THE SURPRISING REVELATION THAT THE AFRICAN NEGROES CAN BE TRANSFORMED INTO SOME OF THE FINEST FIGHTING MATERIAL IN THE WORLD . . . by means of naval bases on both sides of Africa [the Germans] will command the sea routes to the East and to Australasia AND THEIR MAIN INSTRUMENTS WILL BE HORDES OF BLACK TROOPS TRAINED AND EQUIPPED IN TROPICAL AFRICA.<sup>77</sup>

In October 1923 he reverted to the theme. In a 'message from South Africa to the parent peoples of Europe' also delivered at the Savoy Hotel, he contrasted the songs of victory in 1918 with the vision of disaster on all sides but half a dozen years later as France marched into the Ruhr, and alluded once again to 'the black hordes of Africa' who had 'been called in to redress the moral and political balance of this mother-continent of civilization. . . . Can we [he concluded] continue much longer on this march to destruction, this pilgrimage, this crusade of suicide on which Europe has started?'<sup>78</sup>

By the 1920s Smuts was becoming more guarded in his pronouncements on matters of race. His more conscious ideas were being influenced by anthropology, and he emerged as an exponent of trusteeship and segregation. These were of course the commonplaces of the day in British colonial circles—and Bill Schwarz has recently argued that the reason for Smuts's popularity in Britain was that he in fact provided the rationale for an essentially racist but liberal sounding colonial policy in the interwar years. As we have seen, these commonplaces were evident also in the series of lectures he gave in Oxford in 1929 entitled *Africa and Some World Problems*. What is interesting about these more explicitly racist passages is the way they are embedded so to speak in texts which are in other ways so bland, as though at key moments Smuts's fears surface in ways he is unable to control, or address.

At the end of the letter which Smuts wrote to Stead and which I have already quoted so extensively, Smuts remarked,

The war between the white races will run its course and pass away and may, if followed by a statesmanlike settlement, one day only be remembered as a great thunderstorm, which purified the atmosphere of the sub-continent. But the native question will never pass away; it will become more difficult as time

<sup>77</sup> Lovate Fraser, 'Black armies: the German dream', *Daily Mail*, 4 June 1917 (emphasis in original), cited in W. R. Louis, *Germany's Lost Colonies, 1914–19* [Oxford, 1967], pp. 85–6.) This was based on Smuts's Savoy Hotel speech in 1917.

<sup>78</sup> *Smuts Papers*, V, Speech at the Savoy Hotel, 23–10–1923, p. 196.



goes on, and the day may come when the evils and horrors of this war will appear as nothing in comparison with its after effects produced on the Native mind.<sup>79</sup>

In the event it was the after-effects produced on Smuts's mind which were perhaps of greater moment.

<sup>79</sup> *Smuts Papers*, I, p. 485.

