

An Excellent Military Biography of Jan Smuts's Role as Soldier-Statesman in Africa During the First World War

David Brock Katz, *General Jan Smuts and his First World War in Africa, 1914-1917*

Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2022

xxvi + 382 pp

ISBN 978-1-77619-230-4 (paperback); 978-1-77619-231-1 (eBook)

R290.00

David Katz's *General Jan Smuts and his First World War in Africa, 1914-1917* was first published as a hardcover book, by Casemate Publishers in the United States of America and Great Britain, in the first half of 2022. In August 2022, a paperback edition was published in South Africa by Jonathan Ball Publishers, making the book more affordable and thus also more accessible for South African readers. The book is based on the doctoral study, 'General J.C. Smuts and his First World War in Africa 1914-1917', which Katz completed in 2021 in the Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Military Science. Thanks to the book publication that has flowed from the dissertation, the original research findings, plus additional research work, has now been disseminated to a much wider audience.

More than a century after the conclusion of the Great (later First World) War in 1918, this first truly global (and most devastating) conflict still elicits debate in academic circles. It continues to fascinate historians, other researchers, as well as interested members of the public, and many books that deal with this conflict are still published. However, for various reasons, the Great War, and South Africa's participation, continue to be neglected in South Africa. At least two new books on the role played by South Africa's General JC ('Jan') Smuts have been published in the course of the past few years, namely Richard Steyn's *Jan Smuts: Unafraid of Greatness* (2015), and *Jan Smuts: Son of the Veld, Pilgrim of the World: A Reappraisal*, with Kobus du Pisani as chief editor (2019, an English translation of the original Afrikaans book that was published in 2017). However, Smuts as an important figure in the history of South Africa, is still not acknowledged as such by many South Africans.

David Katz has decided – for good reason – to author an in-depth study of Jan Smuts's role in the First World War. In the light of the large volume of archival sources available on Smuts's war-time work, Katz decided to limit the focus of his study to the general's role in Africa from the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, until his departure from Africa to take up a new wartime role in London in 1917.

How to cite this article: 'Book Reviews', *Historia* 67, 2, November 2022, 116-120.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-8392/2022/v67n2a5>

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The author has left no stone unturned in his efforts to piece together (and then analyse) Jan Smuts's role in Africa during the First World War. The elaborate source list (pp 343-368), includes books (official and semi-official histories, and regimental histories), chapters in books, journal articles, theses and dissertations, government publications, internet sources, newspapers, published primary documents and – most important of all – a large volume of archival sources. The archival sources consulted are housed in archive depots both in South Africa and in the United Kingdom. Katz has spared no effort to unearth, consult, and exploit a vast range of important archival documents, including material kept by the South African Department of Defence's Documentation Centre, the National Archives of South Africa, the National Archives (United Kingdom) and the Bodleian Archives in Oxford (UK). See also the no fewer than 1 494 endnotes (pp 265-342) which should ideally have been printed as footnotes, at the base of the respective pages.

After an elaborate and insightful Introduction (pp xv-xxvi), Katz structures his book on the basis of eight chapters, which include two chapters (Chapters 5 and 8) that were not part of his original doctoral dissertation. Each chapter is divided into sub-sections, which enhances the readability of the book. Chapter 1, 'Smuts Emerges: From Scholar to Intellectual: From Adversity to Reconciliation, 1870-1910', provides an overview of Smuts's life from birth until the formation of the Union of South Africa. This includes his role as state attorney of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR, or Transvaal) in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, and in the run-up to Union in 1910. Smuts's role in the years 1910 to 1914, in the years just before the First World War, is analysed in Chapter 2, including the formation of the Union Defence Forces (1912) and the 1913 and 1914 strikes.

'The German South West African Campaign and the Afrikaner Rebellion, 1914', is the topic of Chapter 3, which includes the Smuts plan for the conquest of the German colony; and the story of his campaign (that continued into 1915) is also dealt with in Chapter 4. The focus then shifts (in Chapter 5) to the German East African campaign, the war in what was then a German colony, later known as Tanganyika, and since 1964 as the independent Tanzania. In this chapter the emphasis is on the differences between British and German military doctrines, while attention is also paid to the battle for Salaita Hill (12 February 1916). Chapter 6 focuses on 'Smuts and the Kilimanjaro Operation in East Africa, March 1916', while the next chapter deals with 'Smuts and the Conquest of German East Africa, 1916-1917'. There, Smuts led a mixed-bag of South African and imperial troops against the legendary German commander Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and his Schutztruppen.

Almost eleven months after he took command of the Allied troops in East Africa, Smuts sailed from Dar es Salaam on 20 January 1917 to take up his new role as a member of the Imperial War Cabinet, and later as a member of the British War Cabinet. This then forms the topic of the book's Epilogue: 'Smuts on the World Stage, 1917-1919'. There is also an appendix, a chronology of the German South West Africa campaign and the Afrikaner Rebellion of 1914-1915. Ideally, a chronology of the campaign in German East Africa should also have been included.

The book includes 24 excellent maps, nine apt photographs and four other illustrations, as well as ten tables and three figures. The text is well written, and Katz has succeeded in what he sets out to achieve: to evaluate the underlying motivation for South Africa's involvement in the First World War, to examine Smuts's role in the shaping of South African war aims and to provide an assessment of his roles in Africa prior to the war and while the war raged. In Africa, Smuts was a prominent statesman, cabinet minister, and field commander. However, Katz challenges some of the myths about his role by revisiting and (as objectively as possible) examining the vast volume of archival sources available. He sheds new light on the generalship of Jan Smuts during the German South West African and German East African campaigns, and on Smuts as statesman-general at the grand-strategic, strategic and operational levels of war. Katz has indeed been able to capture the essence of Smuts the general/warrior in this meticulously researched military biography. This is a long-overdue reassessment of Smuts's generalship, and of his role in furthering the strategic aims of South Africa and the British Empire at the time of World War I.

Jan Christiaan Smuts is usually thought of in terms of his role as prime minister from 1919 to 1924, and as prime minister (and later also field marshal) during the Second World War of 1939 to 1945. He is also remembered as the man whose loss at the polls in 1948 brought the National Party, with its discriminatory policy of apartheid, to power. In his well-researched and thought-provoking book, *General Jan Smuts and his First World War in Africa, 1914-1917*, David Katz sheds new light on a lesser-known, but fascinating and controversial phase in the life and career of the enigmatic Smuts, a phase that brought Smuts onto the world stage. This excellent book makes an invaluable contribution to South African military and First World War historiography and is highly recommended.

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Reassessing the Role of Black Consciousness in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

Ian Macqueen, *Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements under Apartheid*

University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2018

268 pp

ISBN 978-1-86914-388-6

R375.00 (paperback)

Prior to the appearance of *Black Consciousness and the Progressive Movement under Apartheid*, much of what was written on the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) relied on the limited archive, interpretation, and misleading notions about the BCM. That literature restricted itself to an inquiry into the ideological and organisational struggle. In part, this literature distorts the concept of 'black consciousness' as a black organisation that was against multiracialism. In a deft analysis, Ian Macqueen adds valuable new material by presenting the BCM from a different angle. He undertakes the unenviable task of deciphering a body of historical literature fraught with inaccuracies, distortions and biases. He untangles the confusion that misleads many scholars and the general public about the role of the BCM.

Macqueen achieves his objective by pursuing a meticulous study of unexplored archives which reveal how both the BCM and white activists maintained an anti-apartheid dialogue that featured significantly in shared spaces, such as the offices in Beatrice Street, Durban, and in different urban spaces of South Africa. Yet until this study was published, no monograph had yet provided an analysis of how the birth of the BCM inspired the beginning of the 'real dialogue' between black and white activists in the 1970s. This dialogue also points out three important historical factors. Firstly, the symbiotic relationship between black and white activists. Secondly, the intimate interrelationship between black and white Christians. Finally, Macqueen also examines the significance of non-racial progressive spaces, such as Diakonia House, and other spaces in various South African cities.

More importantly, Macqueen has performed a great service for all those who are interested in the BCM, Christian movements and the liberation struggle by unearthing new archival material in this monograph. He uses both oral histories and archival material to challenge scholars to rethink what can and cannot be known about the BCM. This archive has forced the popular narrative to shift in dramatic ways by showing the BCM's conditional cooperation with whites only if they endorsed the anti-apartheid struggle.

To illustrate his point, Macqueen covers a variety of complex topics in different chapters and does so proficiently by presenting a diverse historical understanding of the BCM and its relationship with radical Christian movements, trade unionism, feminism

and student radicalism in the 1970s. By focusing on the BCM's complex relations and interactions with other individuals (including white liberals), Macqueen reveals that the movement was neither elitist, anti-white, nor separatist. In addition, he unravels how salient anti-apartheid small organisations, such as the radical black and white Christians and other movements became inspirational towards the formation of the BCM in the 1970s. More than anything else, Macqueen shows how white liberals such as Richard Turner forged bonds of deep friendship and mutual recognition with black people. This motivated others for whom a revulsion against social injustice was motivation enough to engage in the struggle.

The book captures the common intent of all small anti-apartheid organisations. It raises the level of awareness among the current young, radicalised generation, particularly those who advocate the ideological stance of economic freedom and the 'Fees Must Fall' movement. The monograph enriches our understanding that black and white students, academics, trade unionists and non-academics were all driving forces behind the formation of the BCM's resistance to oppressive conditions. In the book, there is also a separate section dedicated to black theology where the author engages constructively with the links between theology and resistance. In my opinion, this is a scholarly account that connects the BCM and theology and carries the theological dialogue further in each case.

In this monograph, the reader is given the benefit of every insight and every possible approach to the critical scrutiny of the BCM's connection to black theology in the twentieth century. However, there is a weakness in this otherwise strong work which ought to be noted. In his engagement with black theology, Macqueen does not provide a sufficiently broad historical context, nor does he offer analysis beyond the period under review and therefore does not take us back to the genesis of black theology and resistance, in particular to the body of literature that presents the relationship between black consciousness and Ethiopianism. This misses the important insight that the Ethiopian secessionist movements of the 19th century were the forerunners of the black theology movement of the late 1960s. Even so, it is to be acknowledged that Macqueen's book *Black Consciousness* provides a sound basis for raising broader questions regarding connections between the BCM's theology and the black struggle against colonialism of the previous century. It also opens up debate on race relations and its connection to the struggle against apartheid, ideology and process in varying black experiences, and also on the scope of radicalism. This monograph is a sound contribution to the historiography, one which should be read by anyone who desires to make sense of the black and white experience under apartheid.

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