

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE FORMATION OF THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The South Africa Act of 1909 formally created the political entity that is South Africa today. On 2 December 1909 by Royal Proclamation, the Union of South Africa was established and would come into existence on 31 May 1910.¹ This action marked the end of a long political procession that had started with the arrival of European settlers in the Cape, progressed to the gradual migration of these settlers into the interior, resulted in the declaration of independence in various forms and finally culminated in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 – 1902. This war resulted in the end of political independence for the two Afrikaner Republics and the beginning of the process of unification.

The participants in the movement to unification² were the politicians of the day. They varied in character and temperament, in ambition and in experience. Some were British and some were Boer. The historiography of this motion to Union is as varied and as staggered as the personalities that participated in it. It represented a bold step in the relationship between Britton and Boer and was a remarkable coming together of two nations.

¹ G.W. Eybers (ed), *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History, 1795 – 1910*, pp. 517 – 558.

² Known at times as “The Closer Union Movement”.

a. The Scope and Importance of this Study

This study is a historiography, an assessment of the historical writing, of the period from the end of the Anglo-Boer War to the passing of the South Africa Act and the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. I will only make use of published material.

Other than the bibliographical work *Closer Union Movement, 1902 – 1910*³ (Cape Town, 1952) there has been no attempt to assemble or complete a historiography of the period. While the work of J. van Heerden in *Closer Union Movement* is important it is not a historiography and so creates a need for a work of a more comprehensive nature. This mini-dissertation aims to fill the need for such a work. The two seminal works on bibliography in South African history, viz *A Bibliography of South African History, 1978 – 1989*⁴ and *South African History and Historians*⁵ list most of the sources. There has been little, if any, development and further research in this field since 1989. Since the Apartheid Government ended its rule the subject has become one of lesser historical interest. The one area that has been explored in some detail, particularly after the publication of L.M. Thompson's book on unification in 1960,⁶ has been that of black reaction and resistance to the formation of the Union. This subject area has, for example, been substantially researched and written on, in particular, by André Odendaal in his 1984 book, *Vukani Bantu! Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912*.⁷

In every sense the political landscape was forever changed with the formation of the Union. It moved South Africa – as a geographic entity – into the realm of an economic and political unit in which development could be marked. The history of the colonies to the end of the Anglo-Boer War had been marred by conflict and the constant drive of particularly the Afrikaners to escape in every possible way from the grip of the British overlords and their imperialism. For some Afrikaners the movement to union represented a means by which they would be able to break the hold of the British. This is well illustrated in a letter from Jan Smuts to John X. Merriman (dated 30 May 1904), where he clearly illustrates his own interest in the formation of a federation. Much

³ J. van Heerden, *Closer Union Movement 1902 – 1910, Bibliography*. U.C.T., 1952. Van Heerden compiled the bibliography as part of a project undertaken while doing a Diploma in Librarianship. It states in the Foreword that: "It must be clearly understood, however, that [this] is the work of [a] student ...[it] has not been edited or amended in any way."

⁴ B. J. Liebenberg *et al.* (eds), *A Bibliography of South African History 1978 – 1989*. Pretoria, 1992.

⁵ C.F.J. Muller *et al.* (eds), *South African History and Historians – A Bibliography*. Pretoria, 1979.

⁶ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*. London, 1960.

⁷ A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu! Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912*. Cape Town, 1984.

more importantly, he states: “You know, with the Boers, ‘United South Africa’ has always been a deeply felt political aspiration and it might profitably be substituted for the imperialism that imports Chinese, a foreign bureaucracy, and foreign standing army.”⁸ This drive to move toward a federation or union was gradually engineered by *inter alia* the three key statesmen, Smuts (Jan Smuts, deputy to Louis Botha in the Het Volk party of the Transvaal), Merriman (John Merriman, long time Cape parliamentarian and Cape Prime Minister at the time) and Steyn (Marthinus Steyn, formerly president of the Orange Free State). They, each in their own way, realised the inevitability and the endless possibilities that could arise from a carefully and well-constructed federation. Thus following the end of the Anglo-Boer War, each worked towards this ideal and in a sense ensured that they controlled the time-scale and course of events.⁹

Never before, and only again in the period 1990 – 1994, has such a huge and all encompassing political change occurred in South Africa. The change from the Apartheid Government to the Government of National Unity in 1994 is a worthy comparison and in many respects bears similarities to the period 1902 – 1910. While the transition to Union was one that was marked by a momentum to independence from direct imperial rule, the change in 1994 was one – that for the first time – unified all the people of South Africa. In a sense, a process that began with the end of the Anglo-Boer War came to its full realisation 92 years later. Thus, this period of the formation of the Union is all important. Particularly now, in the light of new research on the subject of black reaction and resistance, it is worthy of a comprehensive historiography. To understand the political and constitutional development of South Africa, it is essential to come to grips with how the entity that is a unified South Africa came about. A study of this nature brings into one manuscript all the relevant sources and publications that illustrate and document the process leading to unification and the subsequent interpretation thereof.

This mini-dissertation is not intended as a complete analysis of all the books in their various editions and impressions that relate, either specifically or broadly, to the subject of the formation of the Union between 1902 and 1910. While I do at times pay some attention to the publishing history, or to several editions of the same book, this is to track impressions and the changes of opinion towards the subject and not to give a full account of every change that may have occurred. This is a representation of what is available to the reader and researcher today and, as a

⁸ Smuts to Merriman, 30 May 1904, in W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume II, June 1902 – May 1910*, pp. 169 – 171.

⁹ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, pp. 70 & 71.

complete work, aims to give a picture of the literature and sources and not of the publishing history.

b. A Brief Comparison to the Canadian Union Movement

The procedure followed by the Canadian territories in their conclusion of the Dominion of Canada is an interesting parallel to the movement to closer union in South Africa. While other comparisons – Australia coming to mind first – are also worthy, the Canadian example is particularly pertinent because of the political history of the territory. Settled predominantly by the English and French, Canada, like South Africa, had to battle the rival interest of a population that claimed separate heritages. The early history of Canada, before the formation of Upper and Lower Canada, is one that tracked the development of colonial expansion. Independent groups formed Crown Colonies or separately independent states over which battles and wars would be waged to establish political control. The Constitutional Act of 1791¹⁰ established formally the constitutions of Upper and Lower Canada and the respective forms of government. These were separated from their three other colonies: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, which all gained a greater independence from direct rule. Moreover, it was a simple solution to the complex situation of loyalties – whether French or British. Upper Canada remained in all respects British while Lower Canada had only the Habeas Corpus Act and English Criminal Law adopted, the remaining mechanisms of government being entirely French. Furthermore, the religion and language of the French Canadians were left undisturbed.¹¹

The next critical step in the formation of modern Canada was the passing of the Union Bill of 1841.¹² Initiated in essence by Lord Durham, the unification of Upper and Lower Canada was brought about for several reasons. Principally it was to simplify administration and increase effective governance, but from an imperial point of view, the action would substantially nullify the threat of French Canadian independence in the long run. The Crown supported unification and thus, with relative ease, Canada came into existence.

¹⁰ Closer Union Society, *The Framework of Union*, p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 3 & 4.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 11.

During September 1864 three maritime colonies – New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island – agreed to meet at Charlotte Town for a conference to discuss the development of an inter-colonial railway network and, more substantially, a customs tariff. Canada had at this stage entered a period of coalition government and thus, upon hearing of the conference between the maritime colonies, opted to send eight delegates to argue in favour of a national union. After two days of rigorous debate, it was decided by the delegates of the maritime colonies to suspend the conference and meet later in Quebec to discuss the possibility of a national union.¹³ The delegates of the various governments met in Quebec on 10 October 1864 to begin discussions. Interestingly, the first motion before the delegates was that all proceedings were to be conducted in secret.¹⁴

Following the meeting in Quebec the motions were put into place for the formation of the Dominion of Canada. It did not immediately take effect as each of the territories first discussed and then voted on entry into the Dominion. By 1869 the major territories in the form of Ontario and Quebec (formally Upper and Lower Canada), Nova Scotia and New Brunswick had joined to form the Dominion of Canada. They would be joined by Manitoba and North-West Territories in 1870, the Pacific Province of British Columbia in 1871 and lastly Prince Edward Island in 1873. Thus, the modern state of Canada had been formed.¹⁵

While there are many differences between the two movements to union, the similarities are essentially the following:

1. The political division along the lines of language.
2. A vast difference in financial contribution by the various parts.
3. The establishment of a customs union as a first move.
4. Individuals sought self-determination through unification – that is to say, a greater independence from the Crown through the formation of union.
5. Finally, unification through a negotiated convention.

¹³ For more detail on the events of the conference at Charlotte Town, and in particular the speech of Mr Brown which details extensively the argument in favour of national unity, see Closer Union Movement, *The Framework of Union*, pp. 18 – 20.

¹⁴ Exactly the same motion was carried by the delegates at the first meeting of the National Convention in Durban when discussion on a possible Union of South Africa began.

¹⁵ Closer Union Society, *The Framework of Union*, pp. 26 – 28.

c. Methodology

One possible approach with this historiographical analysis of the publications on the formation of the Union of South Africa is to use the different paradigms of South African historiography as a point of departure. In his inaugural lecture¹⁶ at the University of South Africa, F.A. van Jaarsveld laid out a summation of the schools approach to South African History. The lecture entitled *Interpretations and Trends in South African Historical Writing* sought to not only define what various positions were held by historians and major groups of the population but also what was revealed by their treatment of the past.¹⁷ In this lecture he clearly distinguishes between the writings of the “pre-scientific era” versus the writings of professional historians. He then sets out to define – in very broad brush strokes – how the eras are divided. In doing this he is also aware that one era may blend into another and that fixing of dates is not exact.¹⁸ Van Jaarsveld identifies several historiographical schools: Colonial, Imperial, Afrikaans, Professional, Liberal and Resistance.¹⁹

In many ways this lecture represents one of the first comprehensive studies – comprehensive only in respect of the fact that it covered the views of not only the white historians but also took into consideration the writings of the black historians – and forms a basis for future work in the field. Van Jaarsveld would go on to write numerous works on the subject of historiography, looking not only at the viewpoint of the Afrikaners but also at the developments on the global stage. A further major contribution on his part with regard to South African historical writing would be *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*²⁰ in which he looks at the South African past from the perspective of the question of guilt. Arguing that guilt – or the attributing of guilt – as a theme in historical writing is one of the most important mechanisms for interpretation.

In the 1970s the liberal-radical debate would take to the stage. The foremost book that encapsulates the debate is *The Burden of the Present, Liberal-Radical Controversy Over Southern African History*²¹ where H.M. Wright lays out the debate in comprehensive terms. Wright defines

¹⁶ Delivered on 23 March 1961.

¹⁷ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, p. 116.

¹⁸ See the example (F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, p. 117) where he argues that the split between the 19th and 20th century is not 1900, as some of the historians continued in the mould of the 19th century: specifically Theal and Cory.

¹⁹ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, pp. 116 – 156.

²⁰ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse Verlede*. Johannesburg, 1984.

²¹ H.M. Wright, *The Burden of the Present*. Cape Town, 1977.

the liberal view as one that is concerned with the relations between the Afrikaners, the Africans and the British from 1800.²² In the late 1960s and early 1970s there emerged a school of thought that worked and argued in opposition to the traditional liberal interpretations of South African history. The radicals – argues Wright – attack the liberal interpretation from various individual perspectives which are interrelated. Essentially the radicals’ most important characteristic is that they have in common their assault on the liberal school. Secondly they are identified by their principally economic structure of argument and historical interpretation. And lastly radicals have in common their frustration in the inability of the system at hand – *viz* liberalism versus apartheid – to bring about change. Wright makes the interesting point that most of the radical school historians were at the time operating from outside of South Africa.²³ An over-simplified but easy yardstick for the comparison is that the liberals are concerned with race relations (early liberals considered English and Boer as separate races) and the radicals are concerned with a class interpretation of history.

Wright extends the schools approach and illustrates how the Settler School²⁴ fathered a liberal tradition and also the Afrikaner interpretation of South African history. Essentially every school is related somehow to another and they are not spawned independently.²⁵

By the late 1980s the liberal versus radical debate had subsided somewhat and the first relatively comprehensive historiographies that review South African history in broader terms are published. They are the works of Christopher Saunders²⁶ and Kenneth Smith.²⁷ The former pays attention to

²² Extended he defines it as: “The Afrikaners, from a variety of influences early in their history, had developed by 1800 an unusual degree of cultural and social exclusiveness and a core of anti-progressive racial attitudes. In the Africans on their Eastern frontier they met a far larger population and a far more resistant culture than those of the first non-European societies they had met, the [Khoikhoi] and the [San]. By 1800 the long series of frontier wars, that along with trade and cultural interaction characterized nineteenth-century European-African relations generally, had already begun. Britain arrived to stay in 1806 with a new growing industrial society and with the new and dynamic economic, political, and social ideas of a rapidly changing Europe.” (pp. 8 & 9.) Over the few pages that follow this outline he details the progress culminating in: “Liberals have maintained that the integrative impact of the economic development and the cultural interpenetration that have taken place since 1800 directly conflicts with the, to them, illogical and unrealistic policy of present-day apartheid.” (p. 12.) H.M. Wright, *The Burden of the Present*. Cape Town, 1977.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 13.

²⁴ As with the definition of van Jaarsveld (see Inaugural Lecture at UNISA 23 March 1961) the Settler school comprised all European – British and Dutch – that settled in South Africa. He extends the argument to an Imperial School.

²⁵ H.M. Wright, *The Burden of the Present*, p. 5.

²⁶ C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*. Cape Town, 1988.

²⁷ K. Smith, *The Changing Past*. Johannesburg, 1988.

the historians' use of race as a mechanism for interpretation and Smith aims rather to give a more comprehensive, albeit short, overview of the trends that emerge in the writing of South African history. Suffice it to say that these two books together with Van Jaarsveld's work have cemented the schools approach as one that is broadly used for interpretation.²⁸

Despite the merits of employing the schools approach as a method of analysis for this study, there are various pitfalls that should be taken into account. The first, and perhaps the most important, would be the problem of division and allocation. These are in part two separate issues but remain related. By division I mean that it is often – if not always – impossible to divide one period from another or to divide one school from another. One could argue, for example, that the most extreme end of the liberal school matches in some respects the very conservative of the radical school. And while it is possible to refine and create definitions in finer and finer cuts, the characteristics of a modern historian is just such that you will inevitably run into the problem of allocation. By allocation I mean that while some historians such as L.M. Thompson is regarded by most historians as a liberal, in certain respects it is difficult to attach a label to others, such as S.B. Spies. In some cases certain historians strike one as being able to even qualify for more than one category. H.J. van Aswegen, for example, can both be regarded as part of the Afrikaner School and the Liberal School.²⁹

The key to the schools approach is to identify the dominant ideology or influence in a particular historian's work. Once this is achieved the historiographer is tasked with grouping the historians. The fewer the number of historians involved in a period, or school, the easier it is to achieve definition. Perhaps it is a matter of influence, a progression of argument, a result of conclusions. For the historiographer the problem then becomes that it is nearly impossible to absorb everything that is written; therefore he must generalise to achieve his end. Historians, particularly since the advent of the scientific age in history (since adopting the scientific discipline in their approach as Van Jaarsveld terms it³⁰) undergo mutations where they migrate from one "school" to another. This makes it harder to track and allocate them to specific ideologies. Since the analyses of Van Jaarsveld, Smith, Saunders and Wright, postmodernism has taken root in historical study, and this too should now be taken into consideration.

²⁸ Smith in the introduction of *The Changing Past* points to the fact that he follows the "pattern of historical "schools" as outlined by van Jaarsveld and Thompson." K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, p. 6.

²⁹ H.J. van Aswegen & P. Kapp, *Verandering en Vernuwning in Geskiedenisbeskouing*, p. 69.

³⁰ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History*, p. 116.

There are flaws in every system and in every approach. In the schools approach they are varied and as the body of historical writing increases it becomes harder and harder to allocate and divide history and historians.

The primary benefit, however, of a schools approach to history is that one is able to isolate the trends and identify the historians that have participated in a period of writing. Nowhere is it stipulated that a particular writer or historian is compelled to be allocated to only one school, or that in their writing they are to pursue only one trend. The reality of historical writing is that every historian is influenced and many evolve over their lifespan. For the writing of a historiography it is essential to identify trends and to group influences or else a study of this nature would be little more than a bibliography.

In many respects and particularly until the end of Apartheid, historical writing easily divides into the schools approach. One can largely isolate the characteristics of particular historians and place them within a school. This study is one that has a very tight time frame – 1902 to 1910 – and because of the nature of the subject, the political, constitutional and social circumstances are clearly defined. A clearly defined model, and the schools approach in appearance fits this brief, can be used for, and as, a tool of analysis. This subject relates well to a tightly constructed model like the schools approach.

I have outlined at this stage the approach that has been in general use for a method of analysis in South African historiography. For this study from time to time, I will employ the schools approach but only as a method to analyse my own findings. In the main, the method that I will adopt will be the division of the historiography into three categories: Contemporaries, Amateurs and Professionals.

In the category “**Contemporaries**” I will look at the work of the men who were involved, the ego documents that they have left, and the work of journalists and commentators. I will identify – as far as is possible and plausible – the biases and perspectives of each contributor and attempt to isolate the specific trajectory of the contribution. To this category will also belong the minutes of the National Convention³¹ and any other first hand accounts of the time.

³¹ G.R. Hofmeyr (ed.), *Minutes of Proceedings with Annexures (selected) of the South African National Convention, 1908 - 1909*. Cape Town, 1911.

The Convention Minutes can be a cause for some confusion. It is explained in full later in the text. Succinctly put, they did not exist until publication as there were no official minutes kept. The published minutes are a reconstruction of individual and personal notes taken at the Convention.

The “**Amateurs**” is perhaps the most difficult category to define. This section will handle any work that has not been compiled by a professional historian excluding contemporary works of the time.

The “**Professionals**” pertains specifically to the work of the professional historians. The range of work includes master’s theses to full length histories of South Africa. Essentially professional historians are those who have formal training in the subject and who occupy themselves more or less full-time in the writing of it. This is the category in which one can most usefully employ the schools approach. However, for thoroughness I will attempt to identify the characteristics of the work and gauge the level of success in dealing with the subject. I will also endeavour to isolate specific biases whether individual or part of the broader group, to give a historiographical interpretation of the work that is as accurate as possible.

E.H. Carr in his formidable book *What is History*³² argues that facts only speak when the historian calls on them to do so.³³ The argument then progresses in the assessment of fact and the use that the historian finds in facts and what the fact, in turn, lends to history. In order to understand the context of the writing, to understand the historiography of a period, it is critical to gain a sense of the writer in his time. This means that biographical information where it is available and pertinent will be used. My assessment will also sometimes use the schools approach to contextualise the writing.

Thus, my first line of analysis will be to gain perspective on the person.³⁴ Secondly, I will assess the characteristics of the work in the broadest sense – whether it is an ego document, an official document, a source publication or a history of whatever nature.

³² E.H. Carr, *What is History*. London, 1964.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

³⁴ “The question which comes first – society or the individual – is like the question about the hen and the egg. Whether you treat it as logical or as a historical question, you can make no statement about it, one way or the other, which does not have to be corrected by an opposite, and equally

Thirdly, I will assess the sources employed in the writing. This may vary in relevance and, depending on the nature of the work, may be more or less important.

I will then comment on the key strengths and weaknesses of the work, assessing the relative value that the work renders the subject. In terms of the historical perspective this would be the most substantial commentary.

Lastly, in my concluding paragraph, I will assess the historical contribution of the work, looking particularly at whether it adds to the subject field or whether it makes for good reading as a work that employs the major sources to form a synthesis.

It is appropriate, here, for a moment to reflect on objectivity and subjectivity in historical writing. To be objective – or to strive towards objectivity – is to stand independent of one’s own emotional and personal bias. Conversely, subjectivity arises from prejudice or emotion. And because history is written by an observer (or subject) who actively engages the object from the distance of time through documents, the writing reveals the bias of the historian. It stands to reason that objectivity is unattainable. However, there is a distinct difference between avoidable subjectivity and unavoidable subjectivity. Avoidable subjectivity is found in emotion and prejudice, unavoidable subjectivity resides in a particular philosophy or view of the time, from which it is nearly impossible to extricate oneself. It is perhaps somewhat cynical to conclude that all historical work is subjective, which it evidently is; however, the distinction of unavoidable subjectivity at least represents an attempt at objectivity and thus it is reasonable and fair to declare such a work objective.³⁵

d. General Comment

Keeping in mind that this serves as a historiography, I will give to works of greater importance a greater amount of attention and attempt to, as far as possible, give an even-handed assessment. South African history is wrought with differing views of the past and ideologies that crowd the

³⁵ one-sided, statement. Society and the individual are inseparable; they are necessary and complimentary to each other, not opposites.” E.H. Carr, *What is History*, p. 31.
See F.A. van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner’s Interpretation of South African History*, pp. 166 – 172.

subject. Now more than ever, historians evade contentious issues and those who do participate in the study of such material are often branded conservative or right-wing. The history of formation of the Union of South Africa is a history of English and Afrikaner in South Africa. It is the history of a republican element seeking independence from an imperial power. This writing is largely white political and constitutional history. It is not a subject fraught with the complications of black and white, but rather one that will bring greater tension to the realm of colour politics. The reaction of the black population, however, is crucial in the broader understanding, of the formation of the Union, and of the larger history of South Africa.

The factors listed above make it extremely hard to move away from the demarcations of white politics. The principal players in this realm of history are at the time all political. The constitutional nature of the subject implies constitutional or radical reform as the basis for analysis. 1948 (the victory of Malan's Nationalist Party and start of formal Apartheid), 1961 (the formation of the Republic of South Africa) and 1994 (the creation of the government of national unity and election of the African National Congress to power) are the obvious demarcations. Although this study is about the formation of the Union in 1910, I will at times have to employ these dates because they represent the consequence of the formation of the Union of South Africa.

2. A SHORT HISTORY OF UNIONISM, 1902 – 1910

a. Introduction

The Anglo-Boer War (1899 – 1902) determined the fate of British supremacy in southern Africa. Britain, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, had the ambition to establish its dominance in southern and central Africa.³⁶ The war and the treaty that followed caused Britain to depart from this ambition. In the void arose the opportunity for the Boer Republics to establish themselves once again as self-governing and in the sometime future independent.

Despite the efforts of Lord Milner to scuttle the ambitions of the Boers, the Treaty of Vereeniging set the course to self-government. Combined with the change of power in Westminster, from Tory to Liberal, the future of the colonies in southern Africa seemed determined. Milner left, in his wake, the diligent and bright young men called his Kindergarten. From their ranks Lionel Curtis would emerge to draft the later titled “Selborne Memorandum” which would set the debate in favour of closer union – a topic already much discussed³⁷ – in the corridors of the various colonial governments.³⁸

The Selborne Memorandum is circulated only in January 1907 and by 1909 the South Africa Act is passed through the various colonial parliaments and lastly given royal ascent on 20 September 1909.³⁹ The Union of South Africa is formed a mere eight years after the Anglo-Boer War. The key aspects in the progress towards the unification are:

- The Peace
- Milner’s Ambitions and Actions
- Responsible Government

³⁶ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa 1902 – 1910*, p. 1.

³⁷ The subject of the formation of a union or federation – perhaps borne out of the successful federation of the United States, or more pertinently Canada – dates to the 1850s. As a result of the Sand River Convention (1852) and the Bloemfontein Convention (1854) the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) and Orange Free State were recognised as independent states. Soon after this, however, various attempts were made to create closer cooperation between some of the colonies and the Boer Republics from the British side in the person of Sir George Grey (see B. Williams, *The Selborne Memorandum*, pp. ix & x.) but also from the Boer side in the Free State who debated federation with either the Cape Colony or with the ZAR (see G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa from 1795 – 1872*, p. 187.). Also see for a broader summary of events E.A. Walker, *Britain and South Africa*, pp. 22 – 24.

³⁸ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa 1902 – 1910*, p. 63.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. xiv & xv.

- The Selborne Memorandum
- The National Convention
- The South Africa Act
- The Formation of the Union
- Reactions to the Formation of the Union.

This chapter paints in miniature the history of this rather rapid movement from warring colonies to a unified state.

b. The Peace

The first definitive step in the march towards union starts with the negotiation of the Treaty of Vereeniging. On 11 April 1902 a train rolled into Pretoria Station. On board were the key Boer leaders under the leadership of Schalk Burger,⁴⁰ arriving to seek peace with Lord Kitchener.⁴¹ At this particular juncture in the war, the Boer soldiers, many of whom would willingly have fought to their deaths, were growing increasingly weary of the drawn-out fight for independence. The first few months of 1902 had proved particularly brutal and gradually the tide turned towards a negotiated peace. Thus, on 12 April 1902 the Boer leaders met British command for the second time to see if peace was an option.⁴² The first had been the previous year in Middelburg.

Initially the peace negotiations did not really progress as quickly as might have seemed possible. This is particularly well illustrated in a telegram to Joseph Chamberlain from Milner: “Three-fourths of the representatives want to give in, but no one wants to take the lead in that direction. Each is manoeuvring to put someone else in the front place, and if they finally decide to give in,

⁴⁰ Acting President of the ZAR following the departure of Paul Kruger to Europe.

⁴¹ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, pp. 550 & 551. Incidentally, on page 551 he says that Jan Smuts was also on the train. It is probable from correspondence that Smuts only heard of the move to peace late in April and would only go to Vereeniging in the first week of May. See Vereeniging Notes (*4 May Kroonstad*) in W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel, (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume 1, June 1886 – May 1902*, pp. 514 – 518.

⁴² “But we may not sacrifice the Afrikander people for that independence. As soon as we are convinced that, humanly speaking, there is no reasonable chance to retain our independence as Republics, it clearly becomes our duty to stop the struggle in order that we may not perhaps sacrifice our people and our future for a mere idea, which cannot be realised.” From a speech made by Smuts at Vereeniging on 30 May 1902. W. K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume 1, June 1886 – May 1902*, pp. 530 & 531.

they will make it appear as if it was under pressure from the burghers in the field.”⁴³ The main problem was that the Boers wanted to negotiate a settlement that left them with their independence intact, and this in turn centred on the Boer Republics not recognising the annexation by Britain. When it became apparent to the Boers that they would not have peace without giving up their independence,⁴⁴ they argued that they could not do this without the consent of their men in the field. The leaders called a conference at Vereeniging where these matters could be discussed and voted on.⁴⁵

Hancock gives an excellent account of what he calls the third act at Vereeniging, where Smuts (summoned to Vereeniging only on 24 April and arriving only in the first week of May) along with Hertzog played the roles of being lawyers. The first question that needed to be resolved was whether the representatives had it within their power to make up their own minds (Botha’s position), or whether they were to act only on a mandate of their men (Steyn’s position). The question was settled by the “lawyers” and it was decided to go with Botha’s position.⁴⁶

The British camp was divided in its approach to the negotiation as illustrated in a letter to Chamberlain where Milner says: “My great difficulty is Lord Kitchener. He is extremely adroit in his management of negotiations, but he does not care what he gives away.”⁴⁷ Following Milner’s presentation of Kitchener’s willingness to concede too much to the Boers, Chamberlain sends word to Kitchener that the Boer strengths are much reduced and that they would surely be forced to accept far more onerous terms. Chamberlain argues that in the interest of expediency and to avoid further bloodshed, HM government would accept “a general surrender on the lines of the offer.”⁴⁸ Milner, however, would not budge in his lack of generosity to the Boers and is further convinced of his position when he receives the following news in a letter from Lady Edward Cecil: “Lord Salisbury is saying openly to gossips that K.⁴⁹ would make any peace to get out of the country...”⁵⁰

⁴³ Extract from a telegram, Lord Milner to Chamberlain in C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers, Volume II, South Africa 1899 – 1905*, pp. 336 & 337.

⁴⁴ See Document 175, Vereeniging Resolution in W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel, (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume 1, June 1886 – May 1902*, pp. 522 – 524.

⁴⁵ L.M. Thompson, *The Compromise of Union*, p. 329. in M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*.

⁴⁶ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, I. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, p. 156.

⁴⁷ Extract from a telegram, Lord Milner to Chamberlain in C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers, Volume II, South Africa 1899 – 1905*, p. 337.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 337.

⁴⁹ Lord Kitchener.

⁵⁰ C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers, Volume II, South Africa 1899 – 1905*, p. 342.

The Boers had in the meanwhile drafted a document for consideration. The divided opinion between the South African Republic and the Orange Free State proved problematic. General De Wet was adamant that the Free State position was a matter of faith⁵¹, and moreover that they were unified in that their independence was everything. Botha, supported by Smuts, argued that independence seemed pointless if they no longer had a nation. The peace was a necessity. Reitz proposed the compromise in which the republics would hold firm on their internal affairs and aim to become a British protectorate.⁵²

Smuts and Hertzog were instructed to draft a proposal that could be used as a point of departure. On day three of the assembly⁵³ De la Rey changed sides with respect to the Reitz proposal. With this action he broke from the Free State position and moved to favour Botha's position. The Boer camp assembled a commission with all the required powers to negotiate – on condition that they returned any agreement for ratification.⁵⁴

The delegation comprising Hertzog, Smuts, Botha, De la Rey and De Wet met Kitchener and Milner on 19 May 1902 at Melrose House in Pretoria. Armed with the Herzog-Smuts draft the negotiations began. Although Kitchener, and to an extent Chamberlain,⁵⁵ would have conceded to some of the Boer proposals (as an example the equality of Dutch to English) Milner was intent on holding firm on his position and delivering the peace that would best suit his view of South Africa. At this point Smuts met alone with Kitchener and Milner. The proceedings are not recorded but an undated entry in his notebook⁵⁶ suggests that Smuts discussed the acceptance of British terms in view of gaining independence at a future date. Nonetheless, nothing came of it; and when all parties met again to continue the negotiations, the process was as belligerent and stagnant as before. The process was beset with emotion and no progress was being made.⁵⁷

⁵¹ “‘I have nothing to do with facts’, exclaimed General De Wet. ‘The entire war is a matter of faith.’” W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, p. 157.

⁵² *Ibid*, pp. 156 & 157.

⁵³ 17 May 1902.

⁵⁴ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, pp. 157.

⁵⁵ See M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 330.

⁵⁶ See W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume I, June 1886 – May 1902*, p. 518. “Within two years responsible self-government...”

⁵⁷ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, pp. 158.

The ingenious contribution of Kitchener to resolve the stalemate was to remove all military elements from the negotiations and instead leave it to the civil representatives. Milner called upon Sir Richard Solomon to assist him and Smuts was sent by Hertzog to accompany him. They spent two days negotiating, intrigue and emotion set aside, the aim being to find a formulation of the peace that would be acceptable to all parties.⁵⁸ Hancock suggests that Kitchener told Smuts to look to a change of government in Britain which would arguably speed the Boer states to independence.

The Boers' non-recognition of the annexation of the two republics was a problem for the British delegation. In order to negate this, Hertzog and Smuts insisted that the treaty was to be signed by the representatives of the Boer governments. The implication was, whether they realised it or not, that Britain *de facto* recognised the Boer republics. A further concession on the part of the British – not mentioned in the Middelburg⁵⁹ proposal – was in the settlement of the “native franchise”⁶⁰ which would be left to the respective governments once they had attained self-government.⁶¹

At almost midnight on 31 May 1902, in Pretoria, the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed.⁶² After nearly two months' negotiation the warring nations had agreed terms. All sides had won victories but in the final analysis the definitive clause for the Boers, even though no date was attached to it, was clause 7⁶³ which permitted them self-government in the future.

⁵⁸ C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers, Volume II, South Africa 1899 – 1905*, pp. 346 & 347.

⁵⁹ The original peace proposal drafted in March of 1901.

⁶⁰ Clause 8 of the Treaty: “The question of granting the franchise to natives will not be decided until after the introduction of self-government.” G. W. Eybers (ed), *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History, 1795 – 1910*, p. 346.

⁶¹ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, I. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, p. 159.

⁶² President Steyn did not sign the treaty due to ill health, although, he had always said the he would not “put his had to paper”. See J.D. Kestell & D.E. van Velden, *The Peace Negotiations between Boer and Britton in South Africa*, p. 208.

⁶³ “Military administration in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony will at the earliest possible date be succeeded by civil government, and, as soon as circumstances permit, representative institutions, leading up to self-government, will be introduced.” G. W. Eybers (ed), *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History, 1795 – 1910*, p. 346.

c. Milner's Ambitions and Actions

Lord Alfred Milner became High Commissioner for southern Africa in 1897. Thomas Pakenham⁶⁴ argues that Milner pushed, from that very moment, towards war. He wanted to see South Africa united under the Union Jack, as illustrated in a letter to Fitzpatrick⁶⁵ dated November 1899: "One thing is quite evident. The *ultimate* end is a self-governing white community, supported by *well-treated* and *justly-governed* black labour, from Cape Town to Zambezi. ... There must be *one* flag, the Union Jack, but under it equality of races and languages... all South Africa should be *one Dominion*..."⁶⁶ His path set, he pushed wilfully to the conclusion.

Milner would not make concessions at Vereeniging that contradicted his vision of a unified South Africa. Chamberlain⁶⁷ had as early as January 1900 expressed his desire to assemble a commission that could report on the future of South Africa. Milner would have nothing of it and argued vehemently that he should control the settlement at the end of the war.⁶⁸ He got his way. Chamberlain was battle weary and did not want the war to go on. Kitchener was tired and wanted to return to England and this opened the field for the energetic Milner to do as he saw fit. In December 1900 Milner wrote to Major Hanbury Williams that the key to the success of South Africa would be the settlement of a British population that would eventually outweigh the Dutch. He argued that when there were three men of British origin to every two Dutch, the country would be successful and prosperous.⁶⁹ Next, argued Milner, would be the need to educate the Dutch in English. He held firmly to his position that all higher education should be conducted in English.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Thomas Pakenham argues essentially in *The Boer War* that it was always Milner's intention to precipitate war so to affect British dominance over the whole of Southern Africa.

⁶⁵ Sir James Percy Fitzpatrick (1862 – 1931).

⁶⁶ Milner to Fitzpatrick (18 November 1899) in A. H. Duminy & W. R. Guest (eds), *Fitzpatrick South African Politician, Selected Papers 1888 – 1906*, pp. 233 & 234.

⁶⁷ Joseph Chamberlain was Colonial Secretary for the Unionist Government from 1895 to 1903.

⁶⁸ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 330.

⁶⁹ From a Memorandum to Major Hanbury Williams in C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers, Volume II, South Africa 1899 – 1905*, p. 242.

⁷⁰ Interestingly this is one of the concessions made by Milner during the negotiations of the peace in Pretoria, where he conceded some status to Dutch, for expediency. See also A. J. H. van der Walt, J.A. Wiid & A.L. Geyer (eds), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika, deel II*, pp. 665 & 666 for a view on the effect of Milner's language policy.

“Generally speaking, our political aim should be to work towards Federation, by making, or keeping, as many branches of Government as possible common to two, or more, or all of the Colonies... I believe a great deal can be done to federate practically and in detail, before we embark on the discussion of a federal constitution, just as I believe in a lot of virtual self-government in the new Colonies, without letting supreme control out of imperial hands. We must be very sure of our ground before we part with executive authority. Indeed I hope there may never be ‘Responsible Government’ in the two Colonies as separate States, but that we shall always keep Imperial control over them until we can with safety grant ‘responsible government’ to a Federated South Africa.”⁷¹

From the moment that Milner could, he exercised this approach in the administration and development of South Africa. Up and until his departure in April 1905, he seemed wholly successful and with the support from the Unionist Government, first from Chamberlain and later from Alfred Lyttelton, his progress was resolute. The formation of his Kindergarten⁷² meant that he was able to apply the brightest and best minds to almost every problem that beset him and the four colonies. He alone, it seemed, stood in the way of self-government for the former Boer republics.⁷³

Milner had indicated as early as February 1904 that he intended retiring.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, he worked tirelessly towards his goal for South Africa, concentrating his efforts on anglicising the Dutch, and steering the turn-around of the mining industry. To provide labour for the mines the *modus vivendi*⁷⁵ had been negotiated with the Portuguese government of Mozambique. The agreement allowed the Transvaal to recruit labour from Mozambique and in return the Transvaal would utilise the port Lourenço Marques, which operated at a preferred rate. This would gradually have the effect after the war of reducing tonnage through the British ports and increasing tonnage through Mozambique, a trend that, once noticed, caused Milner to call the Inter-Colonial Conference of February 1905 in Johannesburg. At the conference the delegates resolved to request that Mozambique be asked to reduce the preference, which she refused to do.

⁷¹ From a Memorandum to Major Hanbury Williams in C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers, Volume II, South Africa 1899 – 1905*, p. 244.

⁷² An assembly of young Oxford graduates whom Milner used in the administration of South Africa.

⁷³ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 331.

⁷⁴ C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers, Volume II, South Africa 1899 – 1905*, p. 536.

⁷⁵ A working relationship between two conflicting parties.

The Transvaal, who at this stage sourced two-thirds of her labour from Mozambique, was not in a position to negotiate.⁷⁶ Unresolved, this would be one of the factors that would drive Lord Selborne, after taking over from Milner, into the pursuit of a Federation of sorts. Without more tonnage going through the British ports they were doomed not to be profitable.

Although there would be a mild depression in the years following the war, the turnaround of particularly the mining industry in the Transvaal aided the economic recovery. In Britain, Balfour⁷⁷ came to power as Prime Minister in 1902; and in September 1903 he offered Milner the post of Colonial Secretary, which he obviously declined citing his very necessary work in South Africa as an excuse. This is mentioned to illustrate the very determined nature of the man. Reading the tide of British politics⁷⁸ Lyttelton and Milner anticipated the Liberals' return to power under the pro-Boer Henry Campbell-Bannerman.⁷⁹ In the face of this threat they doubled their efforts to rush through responsible government for the Transvaal as a representative system early in 1905.⁸⁰ Through Letters Patent, the Lyttelton Constitution, as the plan became known, came into existence on 31 March 1905. It was destined to fail, failure further aided by the departure of Milner. The newly established *Het Volk* Party and the Responsible Government Association rallied together; and on 14 April 1905, they rejected the plan and demanded full responsible government. Before the month was out, Milner had left for England.⁸¹

“‘Milners may come and Milners may go’ but Afrikanerdom, in the wide sense of the word, is not to be broken” writes M.T. Steyn to John X. Merriman on 27 June 1905.⁸² Smuts was particularly brutal, arguing that Milner completely failed to grasp the act of reconciliation.⁸³ One can only imagine how giddy the atmosphere must have been in Pretoria and in Bloemfontein when the news broke that Milner had left South African shores. The prospect of self-determination and responsible government not being far off – particularly since the coming to power of Campbell-Bannerman – could only have left the Boer leaders with hope that was absent for a decade.

⁷⁶ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 55.

⁷⁷ Lord Alfred James Balfour, Prime Minister 1902 – 1905.

⁷⁸ P. Johnson, *The Offshore Islanders, A History of the English Speaking People*, pp. 364 & 365.

⁷⁹ Prime Minister from 1905 – 1908, he died in April 1908.

⁸⁰ F.A. van Jaarsveld seems to suggest that Milner left South Africa because of the change of government. See F. A. van Jaarsveld, *Van Van Riebeeck to Voster, 1652 – 1974*, p. 248.

⁸¹ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, pp. 196 & 197.

⁸² P. Lewsen (ed), *Selections from the Correspondence of John X. Merriman, 1905 – 1924*, p. 4.

⁸³ See W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, p. 198.

d. Responsible Government

With the Peace of Vereeniging signed, it took some months before the leaders could once again mobilise themselves politically. The immediate task that faced each man was gathering together his family and arranging a regular income. Smuts took up his legal practice, others loaned money to re-established farms. Politically unified against Milner, the Afrikaners rallied around their hate for his policies and organised themselves. It did not take long in the Transvaal to establish the *Het Volk* party – founded in May 1904 – under the leadership of Louis Botha and in the Orange River Colony the *Orangia Unie* was established in May 1906.⁸⁴ Jan Smuts had suffered acute depression in the years following Vereeniging and it was only when Botha persuaded him to take up conciliation as a policy that he was once again engaged in active politics. Botha, well-aware of Smuts' capacity for work, relied heavily on him to organise and structure the party and its policies.⁸⁵

Jan Smuts took it upon himself to draft and present to the colonial office his “Memorandum of Points in Reference to the Transvaal Constitution”.⁸⁶ In this document Smuts brilliantly illustrated the way to move forward in the Transvaal. Taking careful aim at liberal sensibilities, he argued that should the English-speaking portion of the Transvaal population organise themselves in a fashion, they would still hold the majority in the house and thus it would be unnecessary to delay the advent of self-government any longer. Smuts arrived in London in January 1906 when the Liberal Party had gone to campaign at their various constituencies. To his dismay he did not have any initial success from the Colonial Office finding both Lord Elgin (Colonial Secretary 1905 – 1908) and Winston Churchill rather negating on the subject.⁸⁷ Seeking self-government for the Transvaal, he met on 7 February 1906 with Campbell-Bannerman. In the meeting he simply asked whether Britain wanted friends or enemies, implying that should they want the former they should extend self-government to the Transvaal. Campbell-Bannerman did not immediately answer Smuts. He had pledged some months earlier that he would be granting self-government but took the request to the cabinet meeting set for the following morning. Here he overcame the

⁸⁴ C.F.J. Muller (ed), *500 Years of South Africa*, pp. 367 & 368.

⁸⁵ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 32.

⁸⁶ See W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume 2, June 1902 – May 1910*, pp. 216 – 227.

⁸⁷ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, pp. 207 – 214.

doubts of his colleagues and immediately moved to establish self-government, on condition that the electoral system be investigated by a commission.⁸⁸

The consequence of the visit was the withdrawal of the Lyttelton Constitution. A committee under the chairmanship of Sir Joseph West Ridgeway was called to investigate the electoral question in the Transvaal.⁸⁹ The West Ridgeway recommendation was to go with the tested model of colonial responsible government consisting of a Legislative Assembly and a Legislative Council. The Council was appointed by the Governor and after five years they would be appointed on advice from the cabinet. At the same time the West Ridgeway committee looked into the Orange River Colony settling on a very similar system of government. Letters Patent were issued in December 1906 for the Transvaal and June 1907 for the Orange River Colony.⁹⁰ In February 1907 elections were held in the Transvaal and *Het Volk* came to power with 37 of the 69 seats, Louis Botha became the first premier and formed a cabinet. In November of the same year the Orange River Colony followed suit and *Orangia Unie* won a huge majority. Abraham Fischer became the first Prime Minister.⁹¹ Although the question of race would loom large in the future,⁹² self-government had come rapidly to the two former Republics, and inevitably this inspired confidence in the system, particularly for Botha and Smuts.⁹³

In 1908 the climate in the Cape Colony also changed when Jameson – an arch conservative – was beaten in an election by John X. Merriman’s South African Party with support from the Afrikaner Bond. Merriman had long been a supporter of the Afrikaner cause in South Africa, although it has to be said that he differed substantially on the question of enfranchisement. Merriman was profoundly English in almost every respect but remained South African in his thinking and actions.⁹⁴ Three of the four colonies in South Africa at this point, Transvaal, Orange River Colony and the Cape Colony, were governed by men who had much in common and little that separated them.

⁸⁸ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 335. W. K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, pp. 215 – 216.

⁸⁹ For an excellent summary of the events see C. F. J. Muller (ed), *500 Years of South Africa*, p. 368.

⁹⁰ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 336.

⁹¹ B.J. Liebenberg & S.B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century*, p. 42.

⁹² Article 8 of the Treaty of Vereeniging prevented the enfranchisement of “natives” until the attainment of self-government. There was debate as to whether “natives” included Asians and coloureds, they were not included.

⁹³ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 337.

⁹⁴ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, 1. The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, p. 200.

One of the early roots of the movement to Union lay in Milner's very own customs union which was established in 1903. It abolished all tariffs between the various colonies and protectorates in southern Africa.⁹⁵ The later amalgamation of the Orange River Colony and Transvaal railway networks lent weight to further customs agreements. Following the agreement in June 1903, the railway revenue of the Cape and Natal declined, a fact that Milner became increasingly aware of and could have done nothing about because of the tie to labour from Mozambique.⁹⁶ The 1905 conference did, however, resolve that: "The only satisfactory solution of questions relating to through rates and other matters in which the interests of the several Railway systems conflict, is to be found in the common management of at least the through lines and the pooling of their receipts with a division of profits on a fixed basis."⁹⁷ Milner had left South Africa before he had a chance to put into effect this policy statement and it fell to his successor Lord Selborne. Following the conference of 1905, Natal announced her intent to withdraw from the customs union in the hope that this would force the hand of particularly the Transvaal to increase the tariff rates. This move failed and Selborne called a Railway Conference in March 1906 to resolve the situation. The result of the 1906 conference was an increase in tariffs with some concessions granted, a result that displeased everyone. The Cape and Natal vehemently opposed the *modus vivendi*; the Transvaal, the new tariffs. With the imminent granting of self-government to the Transvaal, it seemed inevitable that they would, at the earliest opportunity, give notice to withdraw from the customs union.⁹⁸

e. The Selborne Memorandum

Selborne did not suffer from the narrowness of foresight of his predecessor. His ambition to institute a union over South Africa was guided by the assumption that it would unify the British position and make their overall role in South Africa more significant. Furthermore it would reduce the conflict between Boer and Briton and arguably create an environment favourable for the further immigration of British people to South Africa, realising Milner's dream of a British

⁹⁵ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 54 – 60 and C.F.J. Muller (ed), *500 Years of South Africa*, p. 364.

⁹⁶ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 56.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 56.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 56 & 57.

electoral majority.⁹⁹ A further argument in favour of an early union of the colonies in South Africa was put forward as Britain was being drawn into the European political stage, through their alliance with France (1904). With the apparent increase in Anglo-German tension, the feeling within British government was that a united or federated South Africa would prove far more secure in the face of German South West Africa.¹⁰⁰

Selborne, as early as 1906, realised that the British position in South Africa was not getting stronger and that his predecessor's dreams were fast dwindling. Waiting until the British were in a position to dictate the constitution of Union seemed increasingly little more than a pipedream. The opposite was seemingly happening: the Boer strength was such that it seemed that they would dictate the terms of Union. Furthermore, there existed the distinct possibility that they could secede from the Empire. Selborne had to act quickly.¹⁰¹

In a stroke of brilliance he utilised Milner's Kindergarten under the leadership of Lionel Curtis, who toured the country and prepared what was to become known as the Selborne Memorandum. The idea of Union in South Africa was not a new one but for the first time in real terms, Selborne avoided the trap of making it an imperial suggestion. Curtis rather detailed the merits of moving forward. In order to circulate the document Curtis corresponded with Jameson, then premier of the Cape Colony, who in turn suggested to the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson that Union be considered. F.S. Malan had written – off his own bat – a convincing article proposing Union.¹⁰² Hely-Hutchinson in turn forwarded the proposal to Selborne and the “Selborne Memorandum” as it became known was published in July 1907.¹⁰³

After some consideration it was Smuts – with the Cape and Orange River Colony in agreement – that suggested the Inter-Colonial Customs Conference, scheduled for May 1908, be used to discuss the prospect of Union. In short, it was concluded that it would only be through drastic change that the persisting economic deadlock could be relieved. The Customs Union was

⁹⁹ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 346.

¹⁰⁰ B.J. Liebenberg & S. B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century*, p. 42.

¹⁰¹ E.A. Walker, *A History of South Africa*, p. 521.

¹⁰² See J.F. Preller (ed), *Die Konvensie Dagboek van Sy Edelagbare Francois Stephanus Malan, 1908 – 1909*, pp. 7 & 8.

¹⁰³ See Introduction of B. Williams, *The Selborne Memorandum, A Review of the Mutual Relations of the British South African Colonies in 1907*; L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, pp. 63 & 64.

extended for a further year and Jan Smuts' six resolutions¹⁰⁴ were unanimously accepted. The four colonies would meet in Durban (October 1908) for what was to become known as the National Convention.¹⁰⁵

f. The National Convention

The most informed primary work on the emotions and backdrop issues during the negotiations of the National Convention is F.S. Malan's journal.¹⁰⁶ There are also numerous letters that pertain to the period, detailing the involved debate that occurred between the various delegates. A further document that is essential to the study would be the minutes of the Convention, published in 1911.¹⁰⁷ However, the book that ties – comprehensively – all the strands together is L.M. Thompson's *The Unification of South Africa*.

The convention met behind closed doors. On Monday 12 October 1908, after a meeting with the Mayor and Councillors of Durban, Sir Henry de Villiers, Chief Justice of the Cape Colony, was unanimously elected to be president of the convention. M.T. Steyn of the Orange River Colony was elected as the vice-president. Sir de Villiers opened on the first day stating – and this would be the tone of the entire conference – that the need for Union had already been accepted.¹⁰⁸ It fell to them to decide the form of Union and then to draft a constitution.¹⁰⁹ Sir Matthew Nathan, the

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- ¹⁰⁴ a. The self-governing South African colonies should be united under the British Crown.
b. The inclusion of Rhodesia would be considered at a future date.
c. A constitution would be drafted by the National Convention consisting of delegates appointed by the colonial parliaments.
d. Twelve delegates would represent the Cape Colony, eight the Transvaal, and the Orange River Colony and Natal would have five each.
e. The draft constitution would be published as soon as possible.
f. Voting in the Convention would be per delegate and not by state and the chairman, who would have a casting vote, would be elected from the delegates. J. Liebenberg & S.B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century*, p. 45.
- ¹⁰⁵ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 348.
- ¹⁰⁶ J.F. Preller (ed), *Die Konvensie Dagboek van Sy Edelagbare Francois Stephanus Malan, 1908 – 1909*. Cape Town, 1951.
- ¹⁰⁷ G.R. Hofmeyr (ed), *Minutes of Proceedings of the National Convention and Annexures*. Cape Town, 1911.
- ¹⁰⁸ "...to enquire, not whether an early union is desirable, for that has already been decided upon by our principals, but what form that union should take and what should be the machinery for bringing it into being." L. M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 173.
- ¹⁰⁹ J.F. Preller (ed), *Die Konvensie Dagboek van Sy Edelagbare Francois Stephanus Malan, 1908 – 1909*, p. 19.

Governor of Natal, then addressed the assembled delegates¹¹⁰ and after doing so, left the assembly so as to avert casting any imperial influence.¹¹¹

The delegates who took part in the Convention were assembled from every conceivable walk of life. They ranged in age – the oldest at 67 and the youngest (F.S. Malan) at 37, and in schooling and in economic and political background. The Orange River Colony and Transvaal, who were in a mode of cooperation with the pro-Boer Merriman, effectively controlled half of the voting power, annoying the Cape delegates. What had to be kept in mind was the very recent past and the suspicions of many Boer leaders who were anxious about rapid collaboration with the British. It is fair to say that the delegates represented a cut from the broader white society¹¹² and seemingly held in mind their own interests.¹¹³ The sometimes myopic view on many of the issues, from a nationalistic point of view, explains the sometimes contentious nature of the debates at the National Convention.

The procedural matters require short comment. Over and above the anomalies and exceptions that arose from the day-to-day running, the Convention was run by-and-large in plenary session. Motions were dealt with in the sequence in which notice was given, enabling the Convention to speed along without the hazardous wheels of bureaucracy. Lastly, all proceedings were conducted in secrecy and at the end it was proposed that the minutes should be destroyed. Thanks to Smuts,

¹¹⁰ “...The whole people of South Africa are looking at you to devise a scheme which will unite them in a great nation, a nation of white people, maintaining their virility and increasing in numbers, ruling themselves, and a contented native population in the common interests of all, a nation governed in such a way that the vast resources of the land may be developed and its productiveness may be constantly increased, in such a way that a world commerce may be established commensurate with the favourable position of the country between western and eastern oceans and with commercial instincts of its people descended from the two historic trading nations of Europe, in such a way that peace and good order may be continuously maintained within and security provided against attack from without, so that the new commonwealth may add to and not draw on the strength of the Empire of which it will form part, in such a way that education and the arts and sciences may advance so that in culture as in strength South Africa may be among the foremost nations of the world, and in such a way as to carry on through the coming centuries the ideals of honesty and justice, of courage and purity which have made great the nations which British and Dutch in South Africa have sprung ...” L. M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 173.

¹¹¹ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, pp. 173 & 174.

¹¹² Thompson notes that the racial element seldom came to the fore, this because – he argues – the delegates represented colonies and not races. L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 179.

¹¹³ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, pp. 175 & 176.

who insisted that each member could keep his own minutes, many versions survived, none of which were official.¹¹⁴

One of the central debates and an early one at the Convention was whether the colonies should settle on Federation or Union. It was Merriman that very early on moved for a Union and sent the debate in that direction. After several days debating, the Convention settled on a formulation of Merriman's motion that was acceptable and so carried. The second clause of the motion moved that the four colonies should become provinces within a Union and that allowance should be made should any other territories wish to join the Union.¹¹⁵

Steyn, before arriving at the convention, enrolled the support of Merriman and Botha on the language question. It was particularly important to the delegates from the Orange River Colony who insisted on the complete equality of English and Dutch. Smuts was in agreement with this proposal and busied himself with a motion that could be debated. The delegates from the Orange River Colony wanted what amounted to much more than equality of the two languages – if you are to believe the thinking of delegates like Walton who argued that making them both official languages leans to compulsion. That is, that all South Africans would be compelled to learn both. Nonetheless an amended draft of Hertzog's motion, emphasising that the languages be treated on an equal footing and that they enjoy equal rights, was carried.¹¹⁶

The form of government that was settled upon was that of an executive, and a parliament (senate and house of assembly) in the Westminster tradition. In the debate that centred on the administration of the native population, the motion that carried vested all powers in the Governor-General-in-Council.¹¹⁷ The thorny issue relating to Parliament was that of the franchise. Every possible opinion held by the men in power was represented. These ranged from the conservative complete exclusion of the "natives", to Fitzpatrick's conservatism of a "civilisation test", to Merriman's view, liberal at the time, of attainable franchise for all men. The pertinent point, noted by Malan was that: "The European race problem had been proved soluble after the war – what about the coloured – native – race issue? A great difference was noticeable: the natives were

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 181 – 185.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 188 – 191.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 192 – 198.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 202.

not directly represented at the Conference.”¹¹⁸ The compromise was the continued existence of the franchises – if they existed – in the colonies as before. Merriman ensured that safeguards were put into place that protected these rights. When it came to membership of the Senate and the House of Assembly, it was settled upon that only Europeans or men of European descent could become members. The last contentious issue to be dealt with was that of settling the constituencies. The delimitations were not easy and debate ranged from the inclusion of all population groups in the division to only considering the white population. At the end of the Durban session a motion was carried that formed part of the draft constitution, namely that provision for electoral divisions that returned three or more representatives should be made. A council was called for to handle the question of delimitations.¹¹⁹

Natal had entered into the session in Durban in the hope that there would be a modicum of independence that could be retained at the provincial level. Following the adoption of the form of Constitution on 15 October 1908, the fight for this independence had effectively been lost. The Constitution simply allowed control in the provinces in local matters, effectively handing all other legislative and administrative powers to the central government. Natal had no hope of retrieving their ideal of greater independence as both Smuts and Merriman favoured the Constitution as it stood.¹²⁰

Sir Henry de Villiers, as the most senior member of the bench in the Cape, led the debate surrounding the formation of a Supreme Court in the Union. Although he had held a unitary view on most matters, when it came to the judicial he proved to be a federalist. After some debate a motion was carried that left the existing judicial structures in place and provided for the creation of a new Supreme Court. Moreover, as in the provisions made in the Australian Constitution, restrictions were put in place for referrals to the Privy Council.¹²¹

Finance and Railways had proved a challenging issue, because every member realised the economic importance of the Transvaal. Fortunately both Smuts and Botha had completely accepted the thesis posed in the Selborne Memorandum that argued the inter-dependence of the economies. Once the Transvaal had acquiesced to broader economic participation, it was only a

¹¹⁸ J.F. Preller (ed), *Die Konvensie Dagboek van Sy Edelagbare Francois Stephanus Malan, 1908 – 1909*, p. 47.

¹¹⁹ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, pp. 212 – 242.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 248 & 249.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 260 – 265.

matter of settling the mechanics of the economy. This was done easily enough and for the first time since the Voortrekkers had departed from the Cape an economic approach that recognised the inter-dependency of all of “South Africa” was incorporated.¹²²

Almost ironically, the last and most contested issue dealt with by the Durban sitting of the Convention centred on the question of the capital. It proved by far the most emotive and it was only after several days that the compromise solution was arrived at: the seat of government would be in Pretoria and the legislature in Cape Town. It was agreed that in order to placate the two other nominations, Bloemfontein and Pietermaritzburg would be compensated for their loss from the national treasury. Bloemfontein did, however, become the seat of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of South Africa.¹²³

It did not take long for the delegates to arrive at a draft constitution and a report unanimously signed. The report, along with the constitution, was returned then to the various colonial governments for amendment discussions. In February 1909 the delegates met once more in Bloemfontein to discuss the comments made by the respective parliaments. Once returned, it was voted upon for acceptance. In Natal it went to referendum where it was endorsed by an absolute majority. Thus, the constitution of the Union of South Africa was accepted by the respective colonial subjects.¹²⁴

g. The South Africa Act & the Formation of the Union

At this stage Lord Crewe had replaced Lord Elgin as Colonial Secretary. In this capacity he met with delegates from the four colonies early in 1909 to discuss the constitution that had been drafted to form the Union of South Africa. After some minor changes, the bill was sent to the House for enactment and was passed without alteration.¹²⁵

Before the coming to fruition of the Union came the task of forming a government. Gladstone would eventually call Botha to form the first ministry, making him Prime Minister of the Union

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 284 – 285, & 294.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 294 – 305.

¹²⁴ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, Volume II, South Africa 1870 – 1966*, p. 349.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

of South Africa. However, it was not such a simple selection. If divisions between the Free State and the Transvaal had not been apparent before, they were certainly apparent in this. The most obvious choice, politically speaking, would have been Steyn. Had this choice been made, or rather had Steyn been fit enough to hold office, it is conceivable that both Merriman and Botha would have served in his cabinet. Steyn, when it had become clear that he would not be able to stand, backed Merriman as a candidate. At a later stage he attempted to broker a deal which failed. Merriman had made it clear that he would not serve under Botha and when the time came the political stalemate left only one real unifying option. Botha was asked.¹²⁶

On 31 May 1910, exactly eight years after the Boer generals had met Lord Milner and Kitchener in Melrose House to sign the Treaty of Vereeniging, South Africa had become a Union. Despite the distrust that had been vented from the Boer camp, the Afrikaners – as they would now become known – had negotiated and achieved their self-determination.

h. Reactions to the Formation of the Union

Lionel Curtis was a master propagandist. Following his work on the Selborne Memorandum he busied himself with the task of constructing closer union societies. In a way, he was preparing the white population of the four colonies for the inevitable. With a generous grant from Abe Bailey¹²⁷ he was able to establish *The State*, a propagandist magazine that aimed to propose and defend the arguments for closer union.¹²⁸

“The response of the African press to the draft act was one of undisguised hostility.”¹²⁹ Despite their manoeuvring in the press and their attempts to change the course of the draft act, it passed through the colonial parliaments. This caused John Tengo Jabavu to convene the Cape Native Convention in an attempt to scuttle the passing of the South Africa Act through Westminster. Jabavu was variously a journalist, educationist and political leader, and played a formidable role

¹²⁶ This debate is variously discussed by Pirow, Van der Merwe and Laurence – all of which is dealt with in the course of the work. For a summary see L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, pp. 448 – 460.

¹²⁷ Prominent mining magnate and member of the in the Transvaal Legislative Council. M. de Beer, *Who Did What in South Africa*, p. 8.

¹²⁸ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 309.

¹²⁹ A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p. 152.

in the establishment of what was to become the African National Congress.¹³⁰ The principal objection of the Native Convention was that Britain would no longer be able to intervene in matters pertaining to the native people and that the relationship between them and the Crown would be broken.¹³¹

This attempt was doomed to fail despite the fact that almost to a man every politically conscious African was sided against the terms – not the principal – of Union. The representatives at the National Convention, all thirty-three of them, and the various colonial governments gave their support to the formation of the Union under terms that effectively ignored the black population.¹³²

This last effort on the part of the African and the coloured communities was to rally around W.P. Schreiner and form a delegation that was sent to Britain to oppose the passage of the act through Parliament. It was, however, to no avail. Even though the House of Commons raised objections to the Bill and many of the MP's voted against the constitution, it passed without alteration.¹³³ The Union of South Africa had been created without the input or political consideration of the majority of the population.

i. Conclusion

It took remarkably little time to organise the country following the destruction of the Anglo-Boer War. And while there were deep scars and irrevocable damage done and swathes of the population would not recover for decades, the leaders, and particularly Smuts with his Merriman-Botha coalition, had determined the future of South Africa. Few sitting around the table at Vereeniging would have believed that in a short eight years South Africa would be set on a path radically different from what fate they imagined awaited them.

The Union was in many respects a miracle. A miracle because two warring peoples could after a short time come to terms and agree to cooperate for the common good of both. They moved away from the destruction of their own recent pasts and instead followed the path of political and economic union. The complete negation and lack of consideration for the African, Coloured and

¹³⁰ C. Saunders & N. Southey, *A Dictionary of South African History*, p. 95.

¹³¹ A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, pp. 181 & 182.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 196.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 226.

Indian portions of the population would be the political mistake that would take another eighty years to erase. Nonetheless, the process that had started at the Peace of Vereeniging had ended in the formation of the Union of South Africa.

3. EARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

In the historiography of the formation of the Union of South Africa there are numerous early works that are critical in the study of the subject. The works range from the formidable diary kept by F.S. Malan and the minutes of the proceedings at the National Convention to the letters of the statesmen and contemporary official documents – like the Selborne Memorandum. There were no professional historians that turned their hand to the subject at the time and those that were working in the field might have been men of letters but they were not men of history. It would take many more years before the first professional historian considered Union in an historic light.

a. Early Monographs

The early efforts that report on Union were in a sense, journalistic. In this section I deal with four authors, namely Frank Cana, Robert Brand, W. Basil Worsfold and George Theal. Each of these wrote with a different perspective on the subject but have in common that they were writing at the time of the formation of the Union.

Frank Richardson Cana was born in England in 1865 and after private schooling became a journalist in London. He moved to the staff of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of which he was to become the departmental editor in the years 1903 – 1915, with a break in 1911. In 1916 he joined the staff of the *London Times*. It was during this time that he established himself as one of the foremost English authorities on Africa. He was a prominent member of the Royal Geographic Society and took to reviewing books on Africa and South Africa in the *Geographical Journal*. In 1909 he published his *South Africa from the Great Trek to the Union* and used aspects of reconciliation as his point of departure. Cana died in London in 1935.¹³⁴

Just scanning Cana's bibliographical notes¹³⁵ tells much of his approach. It is a synthesis of works on South Africa, published primarily in England. There was, seemingly, no primary research and his opinions are garnered entirely in the reading of other works. Because of his connections in the journalistic world he had access to material that informed his writing of the formation of the

¹³⁴ B.J.T. Leverton in C.J. Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume V*, pp. 114 & 115.

¹³⁵ F.R. Cana, *South Africa from the Great Trek to the Union*, pp. 323 – 327.

Union. He often argues the Boer point and he promises in the preface that he is to render a political history. He does not recognise the boundaries that had existed until then and sees them as entirely artificial.¹³⁶ It is up to him to write a history that is fair to both “great races”. If he was to be classified in the schools tradition, he falls squarely into the Settler tradition¹³⁷ of writing. Moreover, as we already know from the short biography presented above, Cana worked as a professional writer, and one that was well-versed in the synthesis of material. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* – a huge amount of his experience – is, after all, constructed from using vast amounts of secondary sources and synthesising them into one comprehensive, yet comprehensible, article. *South Africa from the Great Trek to the Union* is in many senses constructed and written in the same tradition.

Interestingly one of Cana’s main sources is the work of Theal.¹³⁸ Cana’s book is a tidy rendition of popular opinion in London at the time. The question is: could it have been anything else? It is most unlikely that Cana could, from his office in London or his study at home, gobble up daily dispatches from the dominion and compose a work that could be any different. The book serves a purpose: it is a meaningful barometer of British attitudes and while in his own opinion written without bias, it is perhaps fairer to say, without malice. *South Africa from the Great Trek to the Union* presents a canvass of the time, jaded in favour of British opinion.

His rendition of the history of Union is comprehensive. The entire book is set upon with the trajectory of Union in mind.¹³⁹ He sees the history of South Africa (or in his terms of the Union) as one where the white races were now in a position to work together towards the common goal of unification.¹⁴⁰ As a source there is an insight into the process of Union which is useful for a more general British perspective. An energy permeates the text. The excitement of the time, is evident because Cana was a journalist and wrote convincingly as one. He gives one a sense of the *Zeitgeist*.

Robert Henry Brand was born in London in 1878 and died in Lewes, Sussex in 1963. In the course of his life he would be appointed to Milner’s *Kindergarten*, would serve as a banker and become a writer. He worked diligently towards unification even after the departure of Milner. He

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. vii. One is lead to believe that what he means by this is not the borders of the countries and colonies that had existed to that point, but rather the political divisions.

¹³⁷ K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, p. 19. Smith puts Cana into the category of Settler Historian.

¹³⁸ George McCall Theal, prominent Settler Historian who wrote and published prolifically.

¹³⁹ F.R. Cana, *South Africa from the Great Trek to the Union*, pp. 1 – 11.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1.

would earn lifelong respect from Jan Smuts for his abilities and contribution to the formation of the Union. Once Union had been achieved, Brand considered his task in South Africa done, and returned to England in 1910.¹⁴¹

Brand's *The Union of South Africa* intends, "to give a short sketch of the leading features of the South African Constitution."¹⁴² He attended the National Convention as a member of staff – not a representative – to the Transvaal delegation and had unique insights into the proceedings. In keeping with the secrecy of the time, he explains in the preface of his book that it was not up to him to break this secrecy, and so does not enter into the discussion of matters concerning the National Convention.

The book is a valuable insight into the various sections of the South Africa Act. As a commentary it serves the purpose of illuminating some of the debate and discussion that took place. A particularly useful chapter is the one dealing with the "native" question and the debate that was held in Westminster. Brand captures the dilemma of Great Britain in granting a constitution that does not really pander to their liberal intentions at the time. For Brand the debate is simply one of whether the Union should be trusted as being strong enough to deal with the "native" administration or whether Britain should be directly in control. Westminster decided to have faith in the Constitution and in the men of the time leading the transformation.¹⁴³

His Introduction is a concise and fair summation of the debate following the publication of the South African Constitution. He had been a part of Milner's Kindergarten and like so many other men that worked with and for Milner, he became a valuable mind in the transformation to Union. His comments on the period and insights into the constitution serve a reader well. The historical contribution made by the work is substantial.

Lord Milner's task – as he mostly saw it – was to reconstruct the colonies after the devastation of the Anglo-Boer War. It is no surprise then, that the two volumes¹⁴⁴ written by W. Basil Worsfold take this mission as the title. In *The Reconstruction of the New Colonies Under Lord Milner Volume 1*, Worsfold takes the reader to June 1904 having started with the Peace of Vereeniging.

¹⁴¹ A.M. Davey in C.J. Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography, Volume IV*, p. 54.

¹⁴² R.H. Brand, *The Union of South Africa*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 97 – 113.

¹⁴⁴ W.B. Worsfold, *The Reconstruction of the New Colonies Under Lord Milner, Volume 1 & 2*. London, 1913.

In the second volume he continues to Milner's departure from South Africa in April 1905. He then adds an epilogue of eighty pages which concludes with the formation of the Union.

William Basil Worsfold was one of the great supporters of Milner and of Milnerism. He was educated in England gaining an MA in 1886 and spent many years in South Africa. Significantly he was editor of *The Star* (The Johannesburg based newspaper) between 1904 and 1905. He resigned when the political tide in South Africa started to turn against Milner and his policies, feeling that the new dispensation was not to his taste. Worsfold had long believed in the importance of British imperial influence and as early as 1885 regarded the formation of the Afrikaner Bond as a major threat to British interests. He wrote prolifically for some fifty years but always remained a captive of his time, and by the end of his life he was somewhat out of date with the political tide, at heart he remained an imperialist.¹⁴⁵

Ken Smith argues in *The Changing Past* that Worsfold is simply a British imperial historian who harbours, like Headlam,¹⁴⁶ a distinct anti-Afrikaner bias.¹⁴⁷ In the opening lines of the first volume, Worsfold attributes to Milner's collection of papers, the compliment that they are the most valuable and original sources for the writing of the work.¹⁴⁸ One immediately gets the sense that there is not going to be a great deal of objectivity in his approach. In the course of the book he argues extensively in favour of the legacy of Milner, which is exaggerated.¹⁴⁹ He relies too heavily on Milner's papers for the work to achieve anything approaching objectivity. However, it is not Worsfold's intention to be that. His intention is to be a chronicler of Milner's South Africa and despite his biases; he does do justice at this.¹⁵⁰ He defends his perspective though:

“Indeed, it is impossible not to recognise that in the present age, when the obligation of reticence is so widely observed, the writing of the history of our own times – that is, of a frank, complete, and impartial statement of all the vital facts capable of proof – has become increasingly difficult. Fifty years hence the

¹⁴⁵ R.F. Kennedy in D.W. Krüger & C.J. Beyers (eds), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume III*, pp. 853 – 855.

¹⁴⁶ Cecil Headlam, editor of the Milner Papers.

¹⁴⁷ K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁸ W.B. Worsfold, *The Reconstruction of the New Colonies Under Lord Milner, Volume I*, p. iii.

¹⁴⁹ See W.B. Worsfold, *The Reconstruction of the New Colonies Under Lord Milner, Volume II*, pp. 302 – 353.

¹⁵⁰ “My primary and deepest obligation is, therefore, to him [Milner]: first, for his confidence in permitting me to have access to these papers and to his private diaries; and secondly, for the unfailing kindness he has shown to me.” W.B. Worsfold, *The Reconstruction of the New Colonies Under Lord Milner, Volume I*, p. iii.

historian will be free to record the most confidential documents today; and to this extent he will be better equipped than the contemporary writer. On the other hand he will have no acquaintance with the thousand and one matters of common knowledge which are, as it were, a part of the mental atmosphere of the other.”¹⁵¹

From this, one is able to garner that he is a writer on contemporary matters more than he is a historian. There is, however, value in the contribution from Worsfold. He discusses the progression to Unification, the contribution of Milner and gives us perspective on Milner’s actions. It is, if you will, an imperial perspective on the years preceding the creation of the Union.¹⁵²

The last volume to be dealt with in this section is from the pen of George M’Call Theal.¹⁵³ Theal was born Canadian in 1837 and came to the Cape, en route to Australia jumping ship in Port Elizabeth in 1861. He already had a solid grounding in English, French and Latin and had started studying Greek. While in the Cape he acquired Dutch and later Xhosa. Theal was not trained as a historian¹⁵⁴ but garnered his learning from working as an editor of a newspaper, a teacher at Dale College and famously in various Cape archives. His work with historical material started when he worked as a clerk in the Department of Finance in Cape Town – here and in various magistrates’ offices he found historical documents of great value. By 1880 he published a catalogue of documents and would spend his life dedicated to historical and archival work. His work is of great historical value, and was recognised as such at the time, although he was criticised for bias and inaccuracy, particularly from the 1940s on.¹⁵⁵ His writing is not footnoted which has rendered him less significant as a writer of South African history. “The Narrative ... since 1872 is derived from personal observation.”¹⁵⁶ This is from the Preface of *South Africa* and illustrates to the historian working almost one hundred years hence, that his work is little more than his own take at the time. It is not based on thorough and encompassing research, and if it is, it is not possible to verify because it is not footnoted. Theal’s discussion of the formation of the Union is matter-of-

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. iii & iv.

¹⁵² It is also worth mentioning that this book precedes the two volumes dealing with the reconstruction: W.B. Worsfold, *Lord Milner’s Work on South Africa*. London, 1906. This deals with the period of Milner’s arrival to the end of the War.

¹⁵³ As written in the Preface of the Eighth Edition of G.M. Theal, *South Africa*. London, 1929.

¹⁵⁴ “...New questions about the past has rendered the views of Theal as of only passing interest, a matter of historical curiosity.” K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁵ A.M. Davey in C.J. Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography, Volume IV*, pp. 645 – 648.

¹⁵⁶ G.M. Theal, *South Africa*, p. vii.

fact and fails to capture the momentous changes in South Africa: “So matters went on in the Transvaal and in the Orange Free State, without occurrence of anything requiring special notice, until 1910, when an event of supreme importance to South Africa that will be related in the next chapter took place.”¹⁵⁷ The events of 1908 and 1909 are then summarised in a few pages. The book is little more than a survey of South Africa and provides almost no historical insight into the process of unification other than some detail of the workings of the constitution.

b. Contemporary Source Publications

Understanding the dynamics of a meeting is highly contingent on having a document that accurately reflects the events of the meeting and substantially captures the spirit of the event. The two publications of “official minutes” dealt with in this section, *The Peace Negotiations between Boer and Briton in South Africa*¹⁵⁸ and *Minutes of Proceedings with Annexures (selected) of the South African National Convention*¹⁵⁹ are remarkable pieces of work. They are remarkable because in both cases material existed from which minutes could be compiled. In the case of the peace there were official minutes. With the National Convention sufficient material, taking into consideration that only personal notes were kept, could be compiled into minutes. Both instances were also politically loaded with highly contentious issues, in which it served all parties to keep the proceedings secret. Nonetheless, the minutes were formulated and published so that the historian is left with a rich body to work from. In addition to the minutes we have Sir Edgar Walton’s *Inner History of the National Convention*, which is detailed but compiled from Walton’s perspective.¹⁶⁰ Lastly, we have the Selborne Memorandum as it appeared in published form in 1925 and a compilation of source documents published in 1918 and also the two volume collection of source documents pertaining to Union, published by A.P. Newton in 1924.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 421.

¹⁵⁸ J.D. Kestell & D.E. van Velden, *The Peace Negotiations between Boer and Britton in South Africa*. London, 1912.

¹⁵⁹ G.R. Hofmeyr (ed), *Minutes of Proceedings with Annexures (selected) of the South African National Convention, 1908 – 1909*. Cape Town, 1911.

¹⁶⁰ ‘[S]ir Edgar Walton’s honesty and integrity are household words with political friends and foes alike. Therefore, the reason for the suggestion that someone should certify to the impartiality of Sir Edgar’s record would seem to secure a whipping boy in case of adverse verdict.’ Written by G.R. Hofmeyr, “Report of Sir Edgar Walton’s Proposed Convention Publication” in E.H. Walton, *The Inner History of the National Convention*, p. 329.

It is a matter of consensus that Union became a strong possibility with the treaty at the end of the Anglo-Boer War. Much of the history is bound up in the ambitions of Milner and the options available to and the initiative of the Boers who sought self-government as soon after the war as was possible. It is often said that the Boers lost the war but won the peace. Nowhere is this more evident than in their attainment of self-government so soon after the war. The Treaty of Vereeniging would also lay the foundation for the racial policy in South Africa for almost a century to come. It is for this reason that the minutes composed by Rev Kestell, initially the Chaplain for the Harrismith commando and later a trusted adviser to M.T. Steyn,¹⁶¹ and D.E. van Velden, who although born in the Cape became a citizen of the Transvaal and from 1900 acted as secretary of the Executive Council,¹⁶² is of such importance to the understanding of the movement towards Union. The minutes capture not only the desperate times but detail the manoeuvring of Hertzog and Smuts¹⁶³ to secure the best possible peace against the unwavering Milner. Moreover, as both men represented in their respective capacities as secretaries of each of the Boer Republics, the minutes reveal authoritatively the respective positions of each of the delegations during the peace, giving an insight into the Boer position.¹⁶⁴ The minutes reflect the British imperial fatigue and Boer ambition. They are central to understanding the start of the movement to Union, and the political climate in which the war came to an end.

The official minutes of the National Convention are compiled from the notes made by various members of staff, particularly the work of G.R. Hofmeyr. Gysbert Reitz Hofmeyr was educated at Riversdale School and then at Victoria College Stellenbosch. He entered public service in the Cape in 1890. With responsible government in the Transvaal he became clerk of the Legislative Assembly.¹⁶⁵ It is in this capacity that he attended the National Convention as Secretary for the Transvaal Republic.¹⁶⁶ The proceedings were conducted in secret to prevent the scuttling of the members' efforts. Due to the secrecy no minutes were kept (see next two paragraphs). Walton argues that the official minutes are bare and somewhat complicated and so his book adds some

¹⁶¹ P.J. Nienaber in W.J. de Kock (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume I*, p. 422.

¹⁶² J. Ploeger in C.J. Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume IV*, p. 717.

¹⁶³ See particularly "Further Negotiations at Pretoria" in J.D. Kestell & D.E. van Velden, *The Peace Negotiations between Boer and Britton in South Africa*, pp. 98 – 137.

¹⁶⁴ T.C. Rautenbach, A Review of J.D. Kestell & D.E. van Velden, *Die Vredesonderhandeling Tussen die Regerings van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republieke en die Verteenwoordigers van die Britse Regering wat Uiteloop het op die Vrede wat op 31 Mei 1902 op Vereeniging Gesluit is*, in *Historia*, 29(2), Sept 1984, p. 58.

¹⁶⁵ B.J.T. Leverton in D.W. Krüger & C.J. Beyers (eds), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume III*, pp. 402 & 403.

¹⁶⁶ G.R. Hofmeyr (ed), *Minutes of Proceedings with Annexures (selected) of the South African National Convention, 1908 – 1909*, p. x.

body to them.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the efforts of Hofmeyr are significant because they include the details pertinent to understanding the course of the events. Where other works are beset with perspective, Hofmeyr has attempted to write a clinical record. In his introduction he details that because of the informal nature of the proceedings, it was difficult to do, but was finally in a sense achieved.¹⁶⁸ The official record when augmented by the personal diary of F.S. Malan and other works like that of Walton, presents a rich body of information for the historian. The minutes are the most important document of the Convention.

Sir Edgar Harris Walton was a member of the Cape delegation represented at the National Convention. Born in 1856 in Ceylon, he was educated in England and finally migrated to South Africa in 1879. He was a member of the Cape Colony House of Assembly for Port Elizabeth, between 1898 and 1910. Between 1904 and 1908 he served as Treasurer. He was then elected as the Port Elizabeth member in the Union House of Assembly and served between 1910 and 1920. Following this he was the South African High Commissioner in London. He returned to South Africa in 1924. Walton was the proprietor and editor of the *Eastern Province Herald* and was knighted in 1911. He died in April 1942.¹⁶⁹

Walton would write only one book in his lifetime. The book was born out of an early resolution during the Natal sitting of the National Convention, in which it was decided that nothing was to be disclosed to the public until such a time that the work had been completed. The reasoning for this was that the delegates felt that it would be near impossible to reach a conclusion if debates were raging both inside and outside of the Convention. Thus, the public would be presented with a document which could be discussed and debated, ultimately amended if necessary, but only at the end of the sitting. Walton took it upon himself to keep records of the discussions, which would later be reworked into *The Inner History of the National Convention*.¹⁷⁰

The task he defined for himself was that this volume would amplify the minutes of proceedings at the Convention. He states clearly in the opening paragraph of his second chapter that the volume

¹⁶⁷ E.H. Walton, *The Inner History of the National Convention*, p. 36.

¹⁶⁸ G.R. Hofmeyr (ed), *Minutes of Proceedings with Annexures (selected) of the South African National Convention, 1908 – 1909*, pp. vii, ix & x.

¹⁶⁹ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, pp. 504 & 505.

¹⁷⁰ E.H. Walton, *The Inner History of the National Convention*, pp. 35 & 36.

is not intended as one that provides a complete history of the movement to Union, nor is it intended for the “enthusiastic student” as a result of the omission of “much”.¹⁷¹

Walton was a journalist and this work is journalistic in nature. The book is a collection of essays arranged by subject, like “How the Convention was brought about”, “The Convention” and “Union or Federation” rather than appearing in strict chronological order as the discussions and debates occurred. As a Unionist his political opinion is fairly liberal in context of the time. The work is historically important because it is one of only two¹⁷² that deals directly with the internal workings of the Convention. While one has access to the official record, the insight permitted from such a work is essential for a liberal perspective. Walton’s work is a welcome narrative and as a resource, when added to what exists, bountiful.

The Selborne Memorandum was originally circulated in 1907. Basil Williams publishes an edition of the Memorandum in 1925 which includes a lengthy introduction. Arthur Frederic Basil Williams was born the only son of a barrister-in-law in London on 4 April 1867. Educated at Oxford his first employment was as a clerk in the House of Commons. He volunteered for active service during the Anglo Boer War and later returned to South Africa as a civilian in the service of Lord Milner. A moderately prolific author he died in 1950.¹⁷³ The introduction makes his intentions clear, stating that there is already the important work of A. P. Newton, but that Newton had abstained from comment. Williams feels that it is necessary for him to make some facts known that would otherwise be lost.¹⁷⁴ The main fact that he makes known is that the bulk of the document was written under the direction of Lionel Curtis¹⁷⁵ and furthermore he discusses the exact genesis of the idea and how it was that the memorandum came to be. The publication is extremely valuable and gives insight into the mechanics of colonial South Africa, especially on the politicking that was necessary to circulate the memorandum.¹⁷⁶ The introduction is particularly useful in that its brief overview of the process adds new insight, at the time of publication, into the motions to Union.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹⁷² The other is Preller’s edited edition of F.S. Malan’s *Convention Diary*.

¹⁷³ R. Pares in L.G. Wickham Legg & E.T. Williams (eds), *The Dictionary of National Biography 1941 – 1950*, pp. 957 & 958.

¹⁷⁴ B. Williams, *The Selborne Memorandum*. London, 1925.

¹⁷⁵ Curtis was a prominent member of Milner’s *Kindergarten*.

¹⁷⁶ B. Williams, *The Selborne Memorandum*, pp. xv – xviii.

Arthur Percival Newton was Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at the University of London¹⁷⁷ and would in his lifetime be an influence on De Kiewiet¹⁷⁸ in that he completed his doctorate degree under the tutelage of Newton in the years 1925 – 1927.¹⁷⁹ *Select Documents Relating to the Unification of South Africa*¹⁸⁰ – published in 1924 – is an assembly of some of the key minutes, letters, speeches and acts that form the kernel of material relating to the movement to Union. It is by no means complete but is certainly the only comprehensive source publication on the subject. It forms an essential part of the historiography and can be rendered a fair representation of the most important documents. What makes it particularly useful is that the first volume contains all the early pertinent documents. These include the correspondence of Sir George Grey as early as 1859, to extracts from an address at the formation of the Het Volk Party in 1905. Amongst these, other important documents include: The Selborne Memorandum, various speeches from Merriman, Hely-Hutchinson and others, and a record of the debate in the House of Commons. One is instantly aware in reading the work of the vast opinion that had already leaned toward Union. As far as source publications on the subject go, it is a magnum opus and exactly what one would expect from as influential an historian as Newton.

The final source publication handled here is edited and compiled by G.W. Eybers: *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795 – 1910*.¹⁸¹ George von Welfingh Eybers obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1909 and went on to become a teacher. In 1914 he went abroad to pursue his education later obtaining a Master of Arts degree. For the completion of his doctorate he compiled the work under consideration.¹⁸² The contribution of this collection is to assemble, in one place, many of the key documents that one may have to refer to in the course of writing a history. Particularly in this collection The Treaty of Vereeniging and The South Africa Act relate to the period. Eybers has made limited comment on the documents but arranges them in an easily accessible format. Instead of plunging through appendices, it is essential to employ a book of this sort when writing South African history.

¹⁷⁷ C. Saunders., *The Making of the South African Past*, p. 78.

¹⁷⁸ His seminal work is *A History of South African Social and Economic* and with this catapulted himself to the very top of South African historical study.

¹⁷⁹ K. Smith., *The Changing Past*, p. 113.

¹⁸⁰ A.P. Newton., *Select Documents Relating to the Unification of South Africa, In Two Volumes*. London, 1924.

¹⁸¹ G.W. Eybers, *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795 – 1910*. London, 1918.

¹⁸² N.A. Coetzee in C.J. Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume V*, pp. 252 & 253.

Newton is by far the more comprehensive selection because it deals specifically with the documents surrounding the formation of the Union, whereas Eybers is a general selection focusing on the whole of South African history until 1918.

c. Diaries, Memoirs and Letters that were Published Later

Letters, particularly, are extremely useful in assessing and assembling a history of the formation of the Union of South Africa. Looking at the source list from Thompson's *Unification of South Africa* one instantly becomes aware of just how important they are. Letters document arguments between statesmen and often detail the course of events, although from the perspective of the writer. Diaries are as intriguing but because of their introverted nature also subjective – all ego documents are – but still extremely valuable if they are correctly analysed and evaluated. In the case of the Convention diary of F.S. Malan, the work is singularly unique and extremely important to the study of the subject. Lastly, in the category of ego documents we are faced with memoirs. Always written in retrospect and mostly at an advanced age, the generalisation would be that they are perhaps the most unreliable. Properly verified they present the historian with yet another intriguing source.

In this section I shall cover the nature and contents of the collections and where necessary will comment in my fifth chapter – “The Professional Historians” – about the quality and approach of the editors. It is necessary to approach it like this because although the content falls into this period of discussion, the actual publication dates to a period where the collection is compiled by professional historians.

The Smuts Papers were published in the course of the 1960s and 1970s¹⁸³ and represented the singularly dedicated effort of Jean van der Poel. Van der Poel studied under Walker¹⁸⁴ at the University of Cape Town and later joined the department. After the death of Jan Smuts in 1950, his papers were moved to The University of Cape Town where she was asked to assist in

¹⁸³ Although the collections of papers were only published in the latter 1960s and early 1970s the letters under consideration date from the period (1900 – 1910), thus it is logical that these fall into the division “Early Contributions”. In the chapter “The Professional Historians” comment will be made on the method, technique and skills of Van der Poel.

¹⁸⁴ Eric Anderson Walker.

assembling his papers for publication.¹⁸⁵ The task, in collaboration with Keith Hancock, Smuts's biographer, would take her well into her retirement and last some two decades.¹⁸⁶ It is the first two volumes that are of particular interest to the formation of the Union and in that particularly the second, 1902 – 1910.¹⁸⁷ Like the work done by Lewsen in assembling the Merriman papers, in some ways so much more because of the sheer volume of it, the Smuts collection amounts to a priceless source. It could be described as comprehensive, and for perspective on and reference to Smuts, essential.

In the Introduction of the first volume of papers Van der Poel captures the value and essence of the work which totals seven volumes: "...the Smuts Collection would be a permanent and valuable memorial to historical scholarship as well as a lasting memorial to an outstanding man."¹⁸⁸ While it is in truth only a sampling of the total body of Smuts' writing, it contains – Van der Poel points out – all of what can be considered historically important and pertinent to the history of the man and his time, particularly from the political perspective. Smuts, because of his formidable intellect, insatiable appetite for work and sheer comprehension of the political landscape of South Africa, is easily gauged as the key figure. His contribution to the formation of the Union is – in sheer volume – arguably much more than anyone else's. To have this collection of papers is simply remarkable and presents the historian with a rich collection of material, that is superbly and expertly edited.¹⁸⁹

Political correspondence is the commentary of those in power on the actions of others, the events they are involved in and often the ambitions that they harbour. These ambitions are pursued for the country, for their party and often for themselves. Jan Smuts engaged in frequent and prolific letter writing with many. John X. Merriman was a frequent correspondent.

¹⁸⁵ Before 1960 permission had to be sought from Jan Smuts' son J.C. Smuts. See L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 513.

¹⁸⁶ C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major Historians on Race and Class*, pp. 121 & 122.

¹⁸⁷ W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds.), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume I & II June 1886 – May 1910*. London, 1966.

¹⁸⁸ W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds.), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume I June 1886 – May 1902*, p. vi.

¹⁸⁹ L.M. Thompson, A Review of W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds) *Selections from the Smuts Papers Volumes I – IV*, *The Journal of African History Volume IX*, 1968, p. 669.

Between 1960 and 1969¹⁹⁰ the four volumes¹⁹¹ of correspondence by John X Merriman were assembled by Phyllis Lewsen and published by The Van Riebeeck Society. Merriman was a key player in the formation of the Union and was in 1909 one of the men, as Prime Minister of the Cape, who was being considered to form a government for the Union. As it turned out Louis Botha was called to do so. Lewsen in the Introduction of the fourth volume (1905 – 1924) argues that along with Smuts, Merriman was the key architect of the Union.¹⁹² Merriman was aware of the fact that his role would not extend into the Union. Evidence exists in a letter to M.T. Steyn in June 1907, where he says: “I have no doubt of the success of the South African Party if they only have confidence in themselves, though personally I may play the part of Moses rather than Joshua.”¹⁹³ The letters and extracts from the diaries form a key component of the source material available on the subject. His prolific correspondence along with acutely detailed diary keeping makes his body of work an essential corner piece in understanding the subject.

“Schreiner left yesterday [for London] bent on mischief. You had better advise Solomon over whom Schreiner has great influence.”¹⁹⁴ In this little extract Merriman reveals his need to stick to procedure and consensus, to stick to the programme and follow the agreed protocols. He played an essential role in the National Convention and although he was very much in favour of the extension of the franchise, is not comfortable with what Schreiner may be up to in London. The very next document in the collection of papers is a confidential minute to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson – then Governor of the Cape Colony – in which he details the plight of the “Native” and “Coloured” people: “However much of the provision [The provisions within the Draft Act of Union] may be in conflict with liberal ideals ... there is no doubt that without it Union would not have been agreed to.”¹⁹⁵ This extract interpreted with the previous is revealing and gives us some insight into the man and the situation that was playing itself out. Taken with the correspondence of Jan Smuts, this body of letters and diary extracts represents one of the most significant contributions. The presentation of the material and introductory entries are judged as “a judicious appraisal of his qualities.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Please note footnote on Van der Poel as above – the same applies.

¹⁹¹ P. Lewsen (ed), *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman volumes I - IV*. Cape Town, 1960; 1963, 1966 & 1969.

¹⁹² P. Lewsen (ed), *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman 1905 – 1924*, p. v.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁴ Extract from a telegram Merriman to Botha, 17 June 1909 in P. Lewsen, *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman 1905 – 1924*, p. 134.

¹⁹⁵ Taken from a Confidential Minute to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson by Merriman dated June 1909 in P. Lewsen, *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman 1905 – 1924*, p. 135.

¹⁹⁶ E. Drus, *Selections from the Correspondence of J.X. Merriman, History XLVIII*, 1963, p. 254.

Before considering the Milner Papers, it is worth noting the contribution of the FitzPatrick Papers.¹⁹⁷ Published in 1976 the collection plays an important role, according to A.A. Mawby in a review article published in 1979, of illuminating the character of capital (the mining magnates) in the Transvaal and moreover in politics as a whole. FitzPatrick, a leading figure in both, is thus the most prominent and celebrated example. Mawby is critical of the editorial content of the collection arguing that not enough effort was made in the introductory sections or in the footnoting and much more importantly that the collection ends abruptly in 1906 thus leaving out important documents that appear consequently. The work can be regarded as incomplete for this reason.¹⁹⁸ Sir Percy FitzPatrick¹⁹⁹ – as he would famously become known – was a key opponent of the Transvaal government and an agitator for British (Uitlander) rights on the Rand. While his contribution in terms of politics is limited to the period up to 1906, he was a key figure at that time. He was friendly with Milner, he was active in Transvaal politics and more importantly, he kept a rather lively correspondence going with a great number of people. Of particular interest is his activity following the failed “Lyttelton Constitution”. He clearly was in favour of Milner’s idea that South Africa should remain a British Colony as far as possible. “The grant of Responsible Government to the Orange River Colony means, for all practical purposes, retrocession. A Boer majority in the Transvaal will enable them to resume a scheme of “closer union” of the two States, or actual fusion ... It will not be possible for the Imperial Government to prevent two self-governing Colonies from making terms together. Then the Dutch majority will be overwhelming. They could then withdraw from the South African customs and railways by notice.”²⁰⁰ FitzPatrick’s concern was always the British citizens that found themselves in the Transvaal. Their plight was close to his heart and it explains his involvement in the Jameson Raid and his continued argument against the movement to Self-Government. The collection of papers is essential in interpreting the colonialists’ perspective.

How will history finally treat Milner? So much has been written about the man and yet there seems a distinct lack of something definitive. Perhaps in the South African context it is because

¹⁹⁷ A.H. Duminy & W.R. Guest (eds), *FitzPatrick, South African Politician, Selected Papers 1888 – 1906*. Johannesburg, 1976.

¹⁹⁸ A.A. Mawby, A Review of A.H. Duminy & W.R. Guest (eds), *FitzPatrick, South African Politician, Selected Papers 1888 – 1906* in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1979, pp. 257 & 258.

¹⁹⁹ Please note footnote on Van der Poel as above – the same applies.

²⁰⁰ Extract from a Memorandum submitted to the Colonial Office by FitzPatrick in A.H. Duminy & W.R. Guest (eds), *FitzPatrick, South African Politician, Selected Papers 1888 – 1906*, p. 475

there has been so much else that has needed attention and if Unionism is a relatively small subject in the history of the country then perhaps the role of Milner is too. His influence in the shaping of modern South Africa is distinct though and no volume of history would be complete without considering Milner's actions and consequent influence. Milner did not want an official biography written but instructed – through his will – the executor of his estate to arrange for the publication of his collected papers.²⁰¹ Cecil Headlam,²⁰² editor of the collected papers, makes a competent study of the man. He interlaces his own opinion and interpretation of events between documents and gives the papers a trajectory. If ever in doubt that Milner was seriously imperialistic this doubt is removed once you encounter Headlam. It is the second volume that is of particular interest as it covers Milner's role at Vereeniging and the three short years prior to his departure. Headlam is astute enough to include material that is relevant and cuts letters down to only include aspects he deems necessary to the trajectory that he sees as important. More than any other collection of letters it gives the reader a perspective on Milner via Headlam's opinion of history. Through editing the letters and including only the sections Headlam deems important he presents a portrait that is unbalanced. One gets the distinct feeling that the perspective is Milner's edited view of himself. The lack of footnoting further perverts the content. Headlam ends the collection praising Milner with words such as “nobility of ... character”, “grandeur”, and “splendour”²⁰³ not really considering the tarnished aspects of his record. A “Punch” cartoon is included, in which it already suggests that history's opinion will one day elevate Milner to sainthood. All things considered, this imperialistic work is useful only as a relatively comprehensive assembly of a particular selection of important papers.

Who can doubt that Lord Milner is important? History wages argument about his role in the Anglo-Boer War, sometimes settling on the perspective that it was “Milner's War” and other times giving him only the role of the “man-on-the-spot”. This zealous imperialistic bureaucrat cannot be let off lightly. His view of South Africa – even at the time – was fanatically conservative and where others had surrendered, he felt his task had only begun. “...the man on the spot is for the moment of much more importance than the man in Downing Street.”²⁰⁴ Perhaps this best describes the delusion of the man. It is pertinent that at his departure Jan Smuts writes to him: “History writes the word ‘Reconciliation’ over all her quarrels, and will surely write it over

²⁰¹ C. Headlam (ed), *The Milner Papers, Volume 1, South Africa, 1897 – 1899*. London, 1931, p. v.

²⁰² Please note footnote on Van der Poel as above – the same applies.

²⁰³ C. Headlam (ed), *The Milner Papers, Volume 2, South Africa, 1899 – 1905*, p. 563.

²⁰⁴ Extract from a letter to Lyttelton Gell dated 21 September 1903 and following both Balfour and Chamberlain's request that he return to become Colonial Secretary, taken from C. Headlam (ed), *The Milner Papers, Volume 2, South Africa, 1899 – 1905*, p. 474.

the unhappy differences which have agitated us in the past.”²⁰⁵ While Headlam’s perspective is jaded through editing it is still one that reveals – whether knowingly or not – a fairly holistic view of the man and details significantly his role in the formation of what would become South Africa.

Percy Alport Molteno was a regular correspondent of various South African statesmen. This is because he was born into what could be termed, Cape nobility – if there were such a thing. His father was the first Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. By 1906 he held a seat in Westminster for the Liberal Party. Staunchly in support of colonial self-government and with a deep-seated understanding of the country, his letters are in a word, insightful.²⁰⁶ Thus, it comes as no surprise that one of the first letters he receives upon entering parliament, is from Sir Henry de Villiers: “Allow me to congratulate you most heartily ... Here we are chiefly concerned to know what Campbell-Bannerman will do for South Africa. It is hoped that the new Government and the new Parliament will teach Johannesburg that it is no longer entitled to control the destinies of South Africa.”²⁰⁷ His correspondence extended not only to Cape members of Government but also included prominent men like Botha and Smuts and perhaps most significantly, Jabavu. It is clear Molteno sympathises with the cause of the black South Africans.²⁰⁸ While many of the letters – particularly those by Smuts and Merriman – are reproduced elsewhere, significant ones like those to Jabavu are not. The selection of letters proves very useful and insightful in interpreting some of the perspectives held by the participants (in the formation of the Union), and particularly how their debates stand to liberal criticism. Significantly it spans the entire period of Unification and consequently is of great value to study.

“Think of all the great men who have come and gone in this country. All their faces were turned to the same goal – the goal of South African Union. Grey, Brand, Frere, Kruger and Rhodes all wrought and toiled for this end.”²⁰⁹ This speech delivered by Lionel Curtis on 30 October 1906 launched in effect the motion towards Union. It is from this point that the cogs begin to turn and with the enthusiasm of Curtis – and others – rapidly concludes what many had for decades

²⁰⁵ Smuts to Milner 2 April 1905 taken from C. Headlam (ed), *The Milner Papers, Volume 2, South Africa, 1899 – 1905*, p. 542.

²⁰⁶ V. Solomon (ed), *Selections from the Correspondence of Percy Alport Molteno 1892 – 1914*. Cape Town, 1981, pp. I – iii. Please note footnote on Van der Poel as above – the same applies.

²⁰⁷ Sir Henry de Villiers to Percy Molteno, dated 23 January 1906 *Ibid*, p. 251. Incidentally Merriman echoes the sentiments on Johannesburg in a letter dated 22 January 1906, also to Molteno, see *Ibid*, pp. 250 & 251.

²⁰⁸ “I regret extremely the illiberal limitation as to the qualification of members, which is a great blot on the whole scheme.” Molteno to Jabavu on 24 March 1909 in *Ibid*, p. 310.

²⁰⁹ L. Curtis, *With Milner in South Africa*. Oxford, 1951, p. 353.

thought inevitable. *With Milner in South Africa* is the diary kept by Curtis and sadly ended in February 1902. As a document it nonetheless gives unique insight into Curtis' own thinking and the activities of Milner. For the purposes of this study the only significant entry, however, is the address on the formation of the Union.

Perhaps the most significant work in the form of a diary, would be that of F.S. Malan. Johann Preller (in collaboration with the Van Riebeeck Society) delivers *Die Konvensie-dagboek van F.S. Malan*, in 1951. It is insightful and as a source of a version of events in the formation of Union, essential. It has a comprehensive introduction, thanks to Preller, which details the progression of Malan's life and of his specific contribution to Union before its formation. He is the man that calls the Cape Parliament to investigate the possibility of Federation.²¹⁰ Malan and many others had long held that the movement to the formation of Union was the only logical course of action. Already at the end of 1906 he wrote a series of articles, four in all, that detailed his vision of Union. In this vision he addresses issues such as the question of what geographic area constitutes South Africa right down to the raw numbers of people this union would affect.²¹¹

F.S. Malan forms part of the delegation that represents the Cape Colony at the National Convention. He would eventually form part of the first Union cabinet and his role in South African politics spanned decades. During the National Convention he kept a diary and gave insightful comment on the events and proceedings of the convention. As mentioned before, it was decided that there would be no record kept of the debates and discussions and that the official record would only show the resolutions of the Convention. Malan gives us his perspective and while there are other sources, in the form of letters and commentary written later, his diary is unique as the only detailed document of its kind. This is because it is not purely about the proceedings at the Convention but also covers the events in between sittings. At the end of the first day of the Convention in Durban, Malan mentions – almost in passing – that the Orange River Colony delegates were intent on giving Dutch the same status as English. Malan mentions then that it was discussed amongst the delegates from the Cape Colony and that Mr Walton – an English member of the delegation – “was very moderate”.²¹² This serves as an example of the content. There are many insights into the personalities of the people involved and while the

²¹⁰ J.F. Preller (ed), *Die Konvensie-dagboek van sy Edelagbare François Stephanus Malan, 1908 – 1909*, p. 7. Please note footnote on Van der Poel as above – the same applies.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 252 – 269. Originally written in Dutch, it was translated into English and published in *The Star*.

²¹² *Ibid*, p. 25.

commentary on the discussion is useful, it is the illumination of the individuals involved that is lasting.

What is more pertinent is that from G.R. Hofmeyr's minutes and also from the work of Edgar Walton²¹³ one is able to structure quite accurately the official picture. Malan's diary adds a third perspective and gives us a more fully coloured picture of the whole event. As a historical document it is one of the most important and serves to give personal observations and detailed accounts that are necessary for the understanding of this history.

In closing this section it is useful to note one further collection of letters that spans the latter part of the period in question, namely *Politieke Briewe 1909 – 1910*.²¹⁴ It is a collection of letters by those in power during the months preceding and the months following the formation of the Union. One example is the letter of D.P. Graaff to F.S. Malan in January 1910: "The one outstanding question for which we have two names and only one position, is still very much when you and I discussed it last."²¹⁵ In this rare letter from Graaff, he is discussing the fact that Botha and Merriman would be pitted against one another. The Bond²¹⁶ would eventually back Botha, a backing that arguably resulted in his becoming the first Prime Minister of the Union. Sadly it is a very slim volume but the letters included, are extremely relevant and gives the reader an insight into the last months before the formation of the Union.

²¹³ *The Inner History of the National Convention.*

²¹⁴ A.H. Marais (ed), *Politieke Briewe 1909 – 1910 Deel I*. Bloemfontein, 1972. This was followed by the second part A.H. Marais (ed), *Politieke Briewe 1911 – 1912 Deel II*. Bloemfontein, 1973.

Please note footnote on Van der Poel as above – the same applies.

²¹⁵ D.P. Graaff to F.S. Malan, dated 17 January 1910 in A.H. Marais (ed), *Politieke Briewe 1909 – 1910 Deel I*, p. 76.

²¹⁶ Afrikaner Bond.

4. AMATEURS

Amateurs are defined here as writers who were not trained as professional historians, but nonetheless wrote about South Africa or specifically biographies of individuals who participated in the movement to Union.

a. Biographies

In this category persons undertake the writing of biographies because in most cases they were privileged to have known a prominent personality and have been greatly impressed by them. This is certainly the case with Earl Buxton who developed a great admiration for Louis Botha in the years that he worked with him. A biography is about the person and not primarily the time. It often lacks a wider historical view on the individual. In spite of the limitation, the work succeeds since the private perspective of an important individual is historically valuable. It is the historian's task to weigh all material and arrive at an opinion. Without the biography it is very difficult to appreciate the full picture.

The only substantial biography of General Botha, to date, was written by one of his friends, Frans Vredenburg Engelenburg. Born in 1863 he is described as having been not only a journalist, cultural leader and political advisor but also a lover of art and books. He bequeathed in his lifetime a number of valuable volumes to the State Library. By the time of his death in 1938 he had proved a reasonably prolific writer in his own right yet remained a very modest man. He refused numerous political postings, awards and even a knighthood, opting rather for the quiet of his study. He was part of the South African delegation at Versailles and played, ultimately, an important advisory role throughout his life.²¹⁷

Engelenburg's book published in 1928, sets out chapters dealing specifically with Botha and his relationships and undertakings in specific areas. The chapter on the formation of the Union is entitled: "Botha en Unifikasie."²¹⁸ Although the treatment is brief, it is insightful because it forms part of a relatively small body of writing from the Afrikaner perspective. Engelenburg was intimately involved, not so much in the process, but more with the people that were negotiating

²¹⁷ R Stead in W.J. de Kock (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume 1*, pp. 277 – 279.

²¹⁸ Translates to: Botha and Unification F.V. Engelenburg, *Genl. Louis Botha*, pp. 165 – 183.

the Unification of South Africa. He interprets the events of the time. As an example, he refers to the fact that the Transvaal felt that it was up to the Cape as the oldest legislature, to propose Union. It was Curtis, in truth, who coaxed the Cape to do so.²¹⁹ Engelenburg also postulates that the first meeting of the National Convention was held in Natal because the “Natalians required a great deal of galvanizing into sympathy with the closer union movement.”²²⁰ These insights are brief and personal, yet combined with Engelenburg’s discussions on Botha’s relationships with the leading South African political figures, paints an important portrait. Even though Engelenburg was close to Botha, the book has a measure of objectivity. He is objective concerning the period but seems markedly less objective when it comes to Botha the man.

Sydney Charles Buxton²²¹ served as Governor General of the Union and High Commissioner for South Africa and knew Louis Botha intimately in the years 1914 until Botha’s death in 1919.²²² Buxton had met General Botha as early as 1907 and declares in his first chapter that it was a privilege. In the introduction he clearly sets out that it is not his intention to write a biography of the man but rather an “account of the Botha whom I knew”.²²³ Buxton does not intend writing a full biography of Botha.²²⁴ Buxton discusses the somewhat tenuous and strained relationship of South Africa and Britain and then succinctly gets to the “upshot” of the Anglo-Boer War, Responsible Government for the Transvaal and Free State and finally Union.²²⁵ He explains the “germ” of Union lay in the Treaty of Vereeniging because it fructified Responsible Government for the Boers. Responsible Government in turn, put all four colonies on an equal footing. Without constitutional equality Union was unfeasible. The “natural corollary” was Union, fostered through mutual goodwill and achieved in a very short space of time.²²⁶ Buxton’s causal approach to history and his clinical, or perhaps incisive interpretation of events, sketches a clean and forthright interpretation of a complex sequence. He uses the vantage point of Botha and the men who were leading the change perhaps because he was Governor General and had free access to these men. The lucid interpretation of events is free of scholarly clutter and reads fluently. The result is a captivating portrait, not only of a central figure in Botha but also of a time.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 168.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 171.

²²¹ 1st Earl, thus Earl Buxton.

²²² E. Buxton, *General Botha*, p. vii.

²²³ *Ibid*.

²²⁴ “This book is in no way a Life of General Botha.” *Ibid*.

²²⁵ “...and Downing Street ceased to be a hindrance and became a help.” *Ibid*, p. 19.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 20 & 21.

Nicholaas Johannes van der Merwe wrote a biography of M.T. Steyn. Van der Merwe was born in Senekal in 1888 and died in Bloemfontein in 1940. He trained as a clergyman and other than his literary work would get involved as a National Party politician. A strict Calvinist and avid follower of Steyn, he marries his third daughter. He therefore writes the biography of his father-in-law. He was involved in the drive to have Afrikaans recognised as an official language and participated in the translation of parts of the Bible. With the formation of the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge* he was elected as the first chairman, a position he held until his death.²²⁷

M.T. Steyn is in every sense an important figure in the movement to Union. He is the elder statesman and is much respected by his peers.²²⁸ By the time that Union was being considered he was a sickly man as he had been since the end of the Anglo-Boer War. His involvement as the elder statesman from the Free State was essential for the success of the formation of the Union. Van der Merwe speculates that Steyn could have been the first Union Prime Minister.²²⁹ This could well have been the case, although it is doubtful that he would have had sufficient national support. Although written by his son-in-law and not entirely without its biases, it is a portrait that gives intimate insight into the character of Steyn. It was Stead²³⁰ who initially approached Steyn, asking him to consider the post as first Prime Minister of the Union. Stead was so insistent, to the point of being hysterical, that Steyn agreed. His acquiesce to Stead was on the condition that his physician would give him the go ahead.²³¹ Steyn is clearly the elder statesmen in numerous affairs. The fact that the Transvaal – or Botha, more precisely – court him for his support not only in the formation of the Union but later in giving advice on the ministry, bears testimony. The two volumes are heavily reliant on quotations from letters and speeches giving them a sense of the personal authenticity often lacking in works of such a closely related biographer. Steyn was undoubtedly a highly principled man with a deep sense of morality. For a biographer this could be hugely challenging as seeking and exposing the weakness and flaws of a great individual is the work of the good writer. In the case of Steyn, his words and actions speak for themselves and Van

²²⁷ M.C.E. van Schoor in C.J. Beyers (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume V*, pp. 802 – 805.

²²⁸ “Steyn’s adherence to the unification doctrine was a precious gain to Pretoria.” F.V. Engelenburg, *General Louis Botha*, p. 168.

²²⁹ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn ‘n Lewensbeskrywing, Deel II*, p. 236.

²³⁰ William Thomas Stead, journalist, writer and Boer sympathizer. D.W. Kruger in W.J. de Kock (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography, Volume II*, p. 704.

²³¹ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn ‘n Lewensbeskrywing, Deel II*, p. 236.

der Merwe's gentle handling of them presents an intimate portrait not heavily jaded with opinion. There is no doubt that Steyn's role in the formation of the Union, as the most prominent statesman from the Free State, and his guidance to other men of his time, is stupendous. In the capturing of this giant Van der Merwe achieves a similar feat. He illuminates a man in his time from a personal and public perspective. A review placed in *Huisgenoot* points to the even handedness of Van der Merwe, who manages to reveal not only the strengths but also the weaknesses of his subject.²³²

It is worth mentioning the biography by Bettie Cloete of her father F.S. Malan.²³³ Her handling of the National Convention is extremely brief, but in the pages before and after lends some perspective – that which only a daughter can have – of her father at work. F.A. Mouton in his review article *The Burden of Empathy* dismisses the work as flawed with filial admiration and distorted particularly in her employment of diary entries when dealing with the race to the premiership.²³⁴ One can assume that this observation extends to the work as a whole.

Sir Percival Maitland Laurence wrote a biography of John X. Merriman. Laurence came to South Africa in 1880 after being warned that his health would not shore up well in the London climate. He was admitted to the Cape bar in the same year but went to Kimberley in 1881 and at the age of twenty-eight, in 1882, was appointed a judge of the high court. In 1913 he retired as acting Judge President of the Natal Division and returned to England. Laurence had a prolific life in South Africa and before his death in 1930, had finished his last book *The Life of John Xavier Merriman*. The bulk of the research for the book was based on the Merriman letters held at the South African Library, Cape Town. It is this collection that would later form the basis of the published papers. Laurence was a relatively prolific writer, post his retirement, writing books and also working on various journals.²³⁵

The estate of Merriman made all his letters and papers in their procession, available to Laurence. These in turn, would serve as the primary source for the biography.²³⁶ This limitation in mind, the author gives a fairly objective overview of the events in South Africa in which Merriman was an

²³² S.P.J, Marthinus Theunis Steyn 'n Lewensbeskrywing, *Huisgenoot*, Julie 1921, p. 111.

²³³ B. Cloete, *Die Lewe van Senator F.S. Malan*. Johannesburg, 1946. (Refer to chapter 21 pp. 216 – 224.)

²³⁴ F.A. Mouton, *The Burden of Empathy*, *South African Historical Journal*, 55, 2006, p. 132.

²³⁵ R.F. Kennedy in D.W. Krüger & C.J. Beyers (eds), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume III*, pp. 500 & 501.

²³⁶ P. Laurence, *The Life of John Xavier Merriman*, p. vi.

intimate player.²³⁷ The biography suffers the fate of most biographies, in that it is only really concerned with one man. One cannot underestimate the importance of Merriman in the march to Union. Laurence argues that he was a man of liberal mind and intentions. He actively sought not only to guard but also to extend the franchise in the Cape. He remained a realist and in a private letter to Smuts concedes that extending the franchise beyond the Cape would simply lead to the rejection of the Union constitution.²³⁸ Perhaps the most significant insight given by Laurence pertains to Merriman's rejection of Botha's request to join the Union Ministry. Van der Merwe in his biography of Steyn makes mention of the fact that Steyn supported Merriman as Prime Minister.²³⁹ Merriman actively sought the post and made it clear in private correspondence that should he not be appointed, he would not be willing to serve under an inferior man. Laurence argues that had Steyn been fit and able to take the post, it is likely that both Botha and Merriman would have gladly served under him²⁴⁰. Merriman's rejection of Botha's offer was a great loss to South Africa as Merriman had been one of the key architects. His service in the remaining years would be as a Member of Parliament and foremost critic of the Union.²⁴¹ Laurence was imperial in mind and assesses South Africa and Merriman by the standards of Great Britain and her ambitions. As a summation of the actions and thoughts of Merriman – particularly when it comes to the movement to Union – the volume is authoritative and can be relied on to cover the subject of Merriman thoroughly. Merriman was after all at the peak of his abilities right at the time of the movement to Union. It is comprehensive in capturing the complex mind of the man and does service to his liberal views, even though some of Merriman's South Africaness is lost.

In assessing the work of Oswald Pirow on J.M.B. Hertzog, it has to be taken into account that he moved from being an advocate, to politician and ended his career as a government minister.²⁴² He was also a great confidant of Hertzog and in a sense their political worlds were intertwined. Written after the death of Hertzog it was at a time when Afrikaner Nationalism was on the rise.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p. vii.

²³⁸ P. Laurence, *The Life of John Xavier Merriman*, p. 270.

²³⁹ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn 'n Lewensbeskrywing, Deel II*, p. 237. Incidentally when Botha was asked to form the ministry, Botha did not hold Steyn's support of Merriman against him. The viewpoint is further supported by Thompson, "Steyn and other Free Staters tended to prefer him [Merriman]" in the footnote stating that: "The whole tenor of Steyn's correspondence in 1909 and 1910 shows that he would have preferred Merriman to Botha if it had been politically practicable." see L.M Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 451.

²⁴⁰ See also L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 450, who concurs with this view.

²⁴¹ P. Laurence, *The Life of John Xavier Merriman*, p. 342.

²⁴² See also J.J.J. Scholtz, Pirow, Oswald in C.J. Beyers(ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume V*, pp. 594 – 596.

Pirow's *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*²⁴³ is little more than a hagiography because it constantly seeks to justify Hertzog's position in the Afrikaner mythology. "It is difficult to write impartially of General Hertzog"²⁴⁴ appears in the introduction and illustrates that impartiality does not exist. It is a biography of a man by his friend, thus the term – hagiography – serves both to illustrate his partiality and idolatry of Hertzog. Hertzog was certainly a statesman of principle. Whether one is in agreement with his principles or not, they still remain admirable.

In dealing with the Treaty of Vereeniging, Pirow argues that: "The clash was the beginning of a new struggle between Afrikaner and imperialist, or rather it marked the renewal of the Anglo-Boer War with other weapons."²⁴⁵ This view of the events is a drastic one. It is true that the Boer – or Afrikaner – would be faced with the new strains of being a colony and that their independence had been undermined. To argue that it was the start of a new war is drastic at the very least, particularly with the historic insight of the granting of self government by 1907. This extract serves as an example of how Pirow seeks to further the nationalist cause and he attempts to place Hertzog as the foremost protagonist of it. Arguably Hertzog was just so. It was on his watch that the new flag was introduced, that the Statute of Westminster²⁴⁶ was enacted and that various population groups were struck from the voters' role.

Hertzog entered the National Convention with two main objectives in mind, firstly, that any form of Union should in no way discriminate against the Free State and secondly that Dutch enters the Union on an equal footing with English. The language clause has already been dealt with as contentious. Hertzog, Pirow explains, intended to wreck the Convention should his motion not carry.²⁴⁷ Pirow's active pursuit of Hertzog as the champion of Afrikaner nationalism, causes him to lose perspective of some of the more subtle details and Hertzog's extensive involvement in the National Convention. The biography fails on many fronts but succeeds in illustrating just how desperately important issues like language were. It is also interesting to note that Hertzog was another supporter of Merriman as a candidate for Prime Minister.²⁴⁸ This denotes the conservatism of the Free State versus the reconciliatory policy of the Transvaal. In short, anyone but Botha and Smuts would have sufficed in the eyes of the Free State – even if it was the liberal minded Merriman.

²⁴³ O. Pirow, *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*. Cape Town, 1957.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 38.

²⁴⁶ The Act that gave the Union independence from Britain.

²⁴⁷ O. Pirow, *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*, p. 51.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 53.

Basil Williams in his very general book *Botha, Smuts and South Africa*²⁴⁹ writes a chapter that deals with the period of Union. Every biographer has the tendency to elevate the role of their subject in the victories and diminishing their participation in the failures. It is no less so when it comes to Williams's little book. Published for the first time in 1946, the year after the Second World War, there is sufficient cause to wonder if it was simply to capitalise on the ever growing popularity of Jan Smuts. Williams was a *Times* Correspondent and sheer commercialism simply seems the most probable factor for writing the book. It remains important though because it is a fleeting second-hand account synthesised from works already published by that time.²⁵⁰

Williams gives retrospective motives to the formation of the Union. He, moreover, argues that Smuts and Botha were the principal architects of the formation. It is, however, his reasons for the formation that are enticing, even though they are largely incorrect. He argues that the movement to the formation of the Union was because politicians believed that antagonism may disappear if the four colonies were merged to serve the common well-being and that South Africa was over-governed which was a cause for wasteful expenditure.²⁵¹ This interpretation of the causes is typically journalistic in that it is a simplification of much more complex motifs. It is obvious that these two reasons are benefits in the end, but they don't serve as driving factors at the start. The writing is naturally crisp – a symptom of its contemporary journalistic tone, but where it is captivating it fails on the front of sources. Williams used to narrow a source base to truly capture the events – it is in fact almost solely Engelenburg that is used for his chapter on the formation of the Union – which largely discredits the historical value of the work.

b. General Histories

Jan Hofmeyr, one-time deputy to Smuts and a cabinet minister, gives us his *South Africa*²⁵² which is intended not as a political history but rather as a general introduction to various aspects of South Africa. He gives a very brief overview of the movement to Union in the chapter *The Making of a Nation*. Like many others Hofmeyr interprets the Anglo-Boer War as the decisive ingredient that would eventually cause the formation of the Union. What makes Hofmeyr's

²⁴⁹ B. Williams, *Botha, Smuts and South Africa*. London, 1946.

²⁵⁰ There are only 25 odd works listed in the bibliography. *Ibid*, pp. 210 & 211.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 64.

²⁵² J.H. Hofmeyr, *South Africa*. London, 1931.

account unique is that he was a liberal-minded politician who seeks to give a broader perspective of the country and the events that led to the formation of the Union. He argues that the Anglo-Boer War had consequences not thought of before, mainly the birth of a mutual respect between Boer and Britton.²⁵³ This view is a liberal one. It is one of reconciliation and is actively sought in the United Party of which he was a member. Hofmeyr argues that it was politically expedient to unite the four colonies under one flag and by doing this the creators focused the body politic on South Africa rather than individual “national” interests.²⁵⁴ Hofmeyr is critical of Milner’s administration, particularly of his attempt to suspend the Cape Constitution. In this view Hofmeyr again confirms his credentials as being liberal rather than pandering to either language grouping. Hofmeyr is not a historian but he is a highly intelligent and thoroughly informed writer. In the broader context of his book the chapter on the formation of the Union is informed and concise.

Manfred Nathan was born in Hanover in 1875 and died in Johannesburg in 1945. He was a prolific author of some thirty-five books mostly dealing with legal aspects of South Africa. He was also a founding member of the South African Party, serving at council and provincial level. He attained an MA and later a LLD degree and was well placed to comment on the social and legal aspects of South Africa.²⁵⁵

Nathan’s history serves very much as an overview of South Africa from the inside as the title denotes: *South Africa from Within*. His views are somewhat conservative but in context of the time, not radically so, for example: “... South Africa endeavours to treat the native with justice...”²⁵⁶ This statement is patronising and paternalistic and denotes the political character of the writer and of the time.

The main intention of the book is to give a view of the dominion after the formation²⁵⁷ and deals with the history until Union quite fleetingly. His most interesting perspective is that he treats South Africa historically as a political unit. This is useful because it is an early example where regional differences are negated as the driving force in the history of the country. Instead, Nathan looks at the interplay of the various “tribes” and “races” and their ambitions within the borders of the Union. This is refreshing and although only a mechanism for interpretation, is seldom used.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 119.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 120.

²⁵⁵ F.R. Metrowich in W.J. de Kock & D.W. Krüger (eds), *Dictionary of South African Biography Volume II*, pp. 509 & 510.

²⁵⁶ M. Nathan, *South Africa from Within*, London, 1926, p. 25.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5.

There is a lack of detail when he deals with the formation of the Union. Yet he is able to isolate and illuminate the main aspects rather successfully. These are: the Lyttelton Constitution, Self-Government and the Selborne Memorandum. His intention is to give a “bird’s eye view”²⁵⁸ and he achieves this. The book was simply aimed at the general reader. To this end he succeeds historically for where Hofmeyr can be seen as a liberal, Nathan is conservative, perhaps even colonial in his view.

My last inclusion in this section is John Fisher’s *The Afrikaners*.²⁵⁹ The book adds very little to the subject, because it is a synthesis of other secondary sources and employs the work of Van Jaarsveld. Fisher says that: “With Steyn excluded from high office by reason of his poor health, the choice lay between John Merriman from the Cape and Louis Botha of the Transvaal. Steyn spoke for the Orange Free State and was a strong supporter of Botha, neither the Transvaal nor Natal would have accepted the dominance of Cape Town. So it was Botha – ”²⁶⁰ This view and interpretation of events is dubious. Steyn discussed the possibility of serving under Merriman with Botha and considered a deal of amalgamating the political parties. Botha rejected the plan and Merriman, in turn, refused to serve under him. The only political solution was to appoint Botha, who had to be included – because of his position in the Transvaal – at the cost of losing Merriman.²⁶¹

258

Ibid.

259

J. Fisher, *The Afrikaners*. London, 1969.

260

J. Fisher, *The Afrikaners*, p. 214.

261

L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. 453.

5. THE PROFESSIONAL HISTORIANS

The process to sift out the professional historians is one that is relatively simple. Besides those that make it their career, who have studied and trained in history and write it for a living, I have also included in this section theses and dissertations. There are also a few essays or articles that have been published that are both pertinent and in need of consideration. The first professional historian to turn his hand to the subject would be E.A. Walker but it would be L.M. Thompson that would deal with the history entirely on its own. Every professional historian, however, when writing a general history of South Africa – in some measure – covers the period pertaining to the formation of the Union.

a. Source Publications

In assembling the Smuts Collection of Papers,²⁶² a task undertaken before the decision to publish, the primary problem that faced Hancock and Van der Poel was that the collection was rich in in-letters and considerably less rich in out-letters. The first task that faced Van der Poel was thus to contact all of Smuts' correspondents to arrange either the donation of the letters – Smuts wrote primarily in his own hand and did not keep copies of the letters – or to arrange copies of them. Van der Poel, in order to achieve the onerous task, was given permission to house the letters in Cape Town and begin the two-and-a-half year process of archiving and cataloguing the letters. Once assembled and indexed the task became one of having to decide on a first choice selection, appropriate and relevant for publication:

“In making this first choice selection of something over a thousand documents out of many times that number, the editors have been guided by two main considerations: the historical importance of the selected documents, and their value as records of the life and work and thought, not only of a leading statesman, but of a man of rich complex personality.”²⁶³

²⁶² Dr Jean van der Poel started indexing the papers in July 1952. W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds.), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume I June 1886 – May 1902*, p. vi.

²⁶³ W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds.), *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume I June 1886 – May 1902*, p. viii.

In assessing the selection that results from this process and considering the historical relevance and editorial input, including translations, it is blatantly clear that what Jean van der Poel set out to achieve was done so admirably. The selection presented by the collection represents a wealth of pertinent and historically rich information while at the same time lending insight into the mind of Smuts. Thompson noted in a review article of the first four volumes that “the documents had been superbly edited and most handsomely published.”²⁶⁴ Of particular value are the numerous translations of letters from Dutch to English which would otherwise be largely inaccessible to an English audience. The selection process generally is one that is subjective at best, and yet seeing what has resulted here leaves one with the impression that a fair and insightful selection has resulted in a representative body of papers that can be usefully employed by any historian writing about Smuts.

In a review of the first volume of Merriman’s papers edited by P. Lewsen²⁶⁵ the following important point is made:

“Of the 14500 or so items that make up the *Merriman Papers* only a few hundred, at a rough estimate, have found a place in this volume. Not all of them are complete, because passages of a purely personal nature as well as repetitions have been omitted, and not all of them are from the pen of Merriman ... Yet, in the correspondence published here, continuity and point are not lacking. Exhaustive footnotes make casual references clear, and detailed headnotes fill in the historical background.”²⁶⁶

Lewsen distinguishes herself in her ability to crop, edit and cut down a vast amount of papers into a usable selection that is not lacking in historical relevance, personal insight, and fair representation not only of the man but also of his opinions. Her careful selection provides the reader and researcher with arguably all the most important papers and much more importantly she contextualises most events with her broad introductory passages. By the time the last volume was published in 1969 a concise yet fully representative selection of the more than 14500 documents had been made, making it the most comprehensive published source for Merriman.

²⁶⁴ L.M. Thompson, A Review of W.K. Hancock & J. van der Poel (eds) *Selections from the Smuts Papers Volumes I – IV*, *The Journal of African History Volume IX*, 1968, p. 669.

²⁶⁵ P. Lewsen, *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman 1870 – 1890, Volume I*, Cape Town, 1960.

²⁶⁶ N. G. Sabbagha, Review Article *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman, 1870 – 1890*, *Historia 17(1)*, March 1962.

A.H. Duminy and W.R. Guest compile the selection of FitzPatrick papers on one level to dismiss what they regard as inaccurate and unfair views that had arisen over time. They are particularly motivated by Hancock and Thompson's dismissal of Fitzpatrick as a mere romantic and Cartwright's assumption that Fitzpatrick's role in South African politics was easily overstressed.²⁶⁷ It is then the fact that he is dismissed as an important politician that forms one of the major motivations for the publication. Both Guest and Duminy are professional historians and while they may have been spurred on, on one level, by the inaccurate view of Fitzpatrick's political involvement, what emerges is a far broader and historically significant and valuable collection that gives insight beyond the recollection of Fitzpatrick as a rouge and firebrand politician. Duminy particularly had been involved, as early as in 1956, with the cataloguing of the FitzPatrick collection. His long association with the study of Fitzpatrick thus lends a broader view of what is significant and what not. The truth be told about Fitzpatrick, he remains a romantic figure. The conception of the frontier adventurer, the man seeking his fortune, Jock of the Bushveld and so many other elements make the historical perception of him rich, and certainly romantic. It is thus easily understandable that he is conceived in the same light when it comes to his political involvement. The selection of papers goes a long way to clarifying the perception and what emerges is a man that was steadfast to the end in what he believed. It is selection that lends a more balanced view of the man.

Cecil Headlam's editing and collating of the Milner Papers can be viewed as one of the more complex selections since Milner is such a maligned and, in many instances, hated character in South African history. The truth be told his imperialism did not sit well with historians and his out of date methods – even for the time – have been greatly criticised, not only by his contemporaries but also by historians. Headlam, however, sets out to achieve something rather unique. Milner did not want an official biography written but was happy to release his papers for publication, thus Headlam set about collating and ordering the papers, and in an attempt to give greater insight – in view of the fact that a biography would not be written – into the circumstances and events that surround each document. Hence the text is not an endless selection of papers, but rather extracts (in most instances) linked with “a pointing pole in hand” so that the documents can tell “their story”.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ A.H. Duminy & W.R. Guest, *FitzPatrick, South African Politician, Selected Papers, 1888 – 1906*, pp. 6 & 7.

²⁶⁸ C. Headlam, *The Milner Paper, Volume I*, p. v.

Ultimately what emerges from this exercise is a rich selection that gives pertinent insight to Milner. Even though it was published in 1933, it is no less significant and no less professional. Headlam displays some sympathy for Milner's views, but it has to be said presents not only the good but also the flawed and the sometimes tainted and despised parts of Milner. For this fact the modern reader gains much value to the historiography of the period is just that much richer. Headlam seems to transcend, if only at times, the trap of hagiography.

As I have said before one of the most important sources in the historiography of Union is the Convention Diary of F.S. Malan.²⁶⁹ Johann Preller acts as the editor of this work and writes the introduction which gives us a relatively holistic view of who and what F.S. Malan was. The footnotes are certainly an important addition since it adds significant insight into certain of the points made by Malan. Preller is able to corroborate this by pointing to other sources. The further important contribution of the work is that it is translated into English, and presented side by side with the original Dutch. This task was not undertaken by Preller but rather by A.J. de Villiers. Along with the Merriman Papers this volume is also published by the Van Riebeeck Society, an important point, as it speaks of a scholarly standard and approach that places it well within the realm of professionalism. Both De Villiers and Preller have MA degrees.

The 1972 publication of *Politieke Briewe 1909 – 1910*²⁷⁰, edited by A.H. Marais, is undertaken by *Die Insituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis*²⁷¹ at the University of the Orange Free State. It was obviously intended to be a far broader publishing programme (there was only one other volume) intended to publish source documents from 1910 to the present. In real terms the selection is somewhat narrow and many of the letters – if not all – are published in other collections. Footnoting is also spare and is generally only employed when it is necessary to clarify something that is extremely obscure. Lastly, the introduction in each of the two volumes is extremely broad and gives insight only to the wider political developments of the day. All of these factors do not make this volume – particularly – less scholarly as it does still contain letters that add to the general understanding of the formation of the Union.

²⁶⁹ J.F. Preller (ed), *Die Konvensie Dagboek van Sy Edelagbare Francois Stephanus Malan, 1908 – 1909*. Cape Town, 1951.

²⁷⁰ A.H. Marais (ed), *Politiekr Briewe 1909 – 1910*. Bloemfontein, 1972.

²⁷¹ Institute of Contemporary History.

b. Dissertations, Theses & Articles

J. van Heerden,²⁷² while doing a diploma in librarianship at the University of Cape Town collated a bibliography on the subject of Union. The work is a complete source for material that was published, or in the case of theses, completed before 1952. The very brief introduction, only one page long, details the key events and personalities that played a role in the formation of the Union. If any criticism is to be launched against the bibliography it would be that it is perhaps too broad and that some of the books included are not specifically valuable in the understanding of *The Closer Union Movement*. Many of the books like J.J. McCord's *The Struggle for South Africa*, or S.G. Millan's *The People of South Africa*, hardly touch on the formation, in some cases not at all, rendering them irrelevant. It is the work of a librarian and not a historian. Remarkably though, it is a complete listing and has every important work, even if the definition of what is relevant is somewhat stretched.

There has been one major master's thesis which has dealt with the election of Louis Botha as leader of the Transvaal. It was undertaken at Potchefstroom University by B. Spoelstra and titled: *Die Bewindsaanvaarding van die Botha-Regering oor Transvaal as Selfregerende Britse Kolonie in 1907*.²⁷³ Of particular interest is the handling of the labour question in the Transvaal by Milner. Spoelstra goes into some detail concerning the importation of Chinese labour. He deals specifically with Milner and poses the question: How would a Boer government react to this drastic action?²⁷⁴ Furthermore, Spoelstra deals with the disintegration of the Milner administration in the face of the coming Liberal government in Westminster. In particular he deals with the direct consequences of Milner's Chinese labour policy and the failed attempt to implement the Lyttelton Constitution.²⁷⁵ Both Botha and Smuts had refused office from Milner and did not return to politics after the war. Once Milner attempted to institute the Lyttelton Constitution Botha and Smuts felt it necessary to return. Smuts only returned at the request of Botha. In 1905 they consolidated Boer political power with the formation of the *Het Volk* party.²⁷⁶ The work is

²⁷² J. van Heerden, *Closer Union Movement 1902 – 1910, Bibliography*. U.C.T., 1952.

²⁷³ B. Spoelstra, *Die Bewindsaanvaarding van die Botha-Regering oor Transvaal as Selfregerende Britse Kolonie in 1907*, M.A. thesis, Potchefstroom, 1950.

²⁷⁴ B. Spoelstra, *Die Bewindsaanvaarding van die Botha-Regering oor Transvaal as Selfregerende Britse Kolonie in 1907*, M.A. thesis, Potchefstroom, 1950 in A. Kieser (et al), *Archives Year Book for South African History, Seventeenth Year, Volume II*, p. 320.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 323 – 327.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 330 & 331.

insightful and one of very few that explores the details of the political environment following the Anglo-Boer War and the gaining of self-government in the Transvaal.

For a detailed understanding of the period 1908 – 1910 when dealing specifically with the Cape Colony, a useful work is *A Study of the Politics in the Cape Colony From January 1908 to May 1910*.²⁷⁷ The work is unique because it looks specifically at this period in the Cape Colony.

Moreover, there is a detailed chapter on Merriman's work; since "matters although they were of vital importance to the Cape were essentially of secondary importance to South Africa"²⁷⁸ Ross places the Cape contribution to the formation of the Union and their particular interests in pursuing Union in context. While the dissertation is intended to concentrate on the domestic issues particular to the Cape, the shift to national issues of the day are dealt with

comprehensively. The author has managed to include varied sources, ranging from minutes and proceeding notations, to letters and private correspondence which at the time, would not have been easily available. Of particular interest is the final chapter in which Ross details the race between Merriman and Botha. In this he – for reasons of the study – takes the Cape perspective and loads his chapter with sources that give insight into particularly the Merriman camp:

"Although it was an extremely bitter blow for Merriman, having done so much towards the creation of the Union, to go out practically into the political desert, nevertheless he was returned unopposed by Victoria West and entered the Union Parliament in November as a 'humble musket-bearer' in the ministerial ranks."²⁷⁹

L.M. Thompson spent the early part of his academic career on writing political and constitutional history. One of his early contributions, published in 1955, is an essay titled *The Colony of Natal and the "Closer Union Movement"*.²⁸⁰ What Ross does for the Cape, Thompson does for Natal. The essay, while not being voluminous, manages to detail the core events and personalities in the colony. Natal was at best reticent and at worst distrustful of the movement to Union. At the same time Natal politicians were well aware of the economic problems that faced them, should they not resolve the harbour question. The Transvaal, through their *modus vivendi* agreement, was routing the bulk of their shipping through Mozambique and not through British ports. In a sense the essay is a preamble to the large scale work that was to come from Thompson. At the time of publishing

²⁷⁷ B.K. Ross, *A Study of Politics of the Cape Colony from January 1908 to May 1910*, M.A. dissertation, U.C.T., 1950.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 66.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 107 & 108.

²⁸⁰ L.M. Thompson, *The Colony of Natal and the Closer Union Movement* in T.W. Prince & B. Beinart (eds), *Butterworths South African Law Review*. Durban, 1955, pp. 81 – 106.

the essay, he had already been working on *The Unification of South Africa 1902 – 1910* for five years. Natal becomes a passenger on the train towards Union²⁸¹ and even on the eve of the creation of the Union there was a small possibility of her not entering. Thompson explains that part of Natal's reluctance to join the Union was a deeply rooted suspicion of the other governments and their fear that these would impose Afrikaner dominance over the whole of South Africa. In order to encourage their entry into the Union Lord Selborne even visited the colony. In the end the reality was that Natal had little choice. Her precarious financial situation meant that she could not survive alone and thus entry into the Union was inevitable.²⁸² Thompson, in his extremely able way, gives a detailed portrait of the events in Natal eight years prior to the Union. This essay is one of the most important contributions to the historiography. In assessing Natal's position it is the most important.

Christiaan Jamneck delivers a thesis in 1947 titled *Die Milner-Régime in Transvaal 1902 - 1905*.²⁸³ Of specific interest here is the treatment of the railway usage question and the related question of labour on the mines. He covers the *modus vivendi* with Mozambique,²⁸⁴ the reconstruction of the mining industry and the consequent improvement of the railway network. The labour exchange programme with Mozambique would eventually become a key factor in convincing the coastal colonies of the need of Union. Jamneck's thesis, in dealing with the period immediately following the war, covers the early contributions in what would eventually become the factors that were most pertinent in forming the Union.

Die Bydrae van Transvalers tot die Staatsvorm van die Unie, 1908 – 1909 is an unpublished thesis by D.J. Kriek from the University of South Africa. It details the arguments and intrigues that dominated the debate in the years preceding the formation of the Union. One of the vexing questions was whether the unification should take the form of Federation or Union. Kriek gives a detailed account of the Transvalers' stance and also at how their point of view was countered by other politicians of the time. A further example arises when Sir Henry de Villiers²⁸⁵ comments on the initial proposals for a constitution by Smuts. Kriek notes that: "Dit is moelik om vas te stel hoeveel genl. Smuts deur sir Henry de Villiers beïnvloed is. Dat hy wel tot "n mate beïnvloed

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 96.

²⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 100 – 103.

²⁸³ C.P. Jamneck, *Die Milner-Régime in Transvaal, 1902 – 1905*, MA dissertation, University of South Africa, 1947, p. 6.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 40.

²⁸⁵ Sir Henry de Villiers was a member of the House of Assembly for Cape Town, 1902 – 1908. Later he would serve in the Union cabinet under Smuts.

was, sal later in die bespreking blyk wanneer ander aspekte van die konstitusie behandel word.”²⁸⁶ So it is apparent that the course to Union was much more complex. It was not simply one opinion versus another, but at times an amalgamation of diverse approaches. Kriek handles numerous other issues of which the most important are: the Capital, the Senate – whether there should be a qualification for the franchise, the Provinces – how they will be divided and how the powers of government would be divided, and so on. Throughout the work there is a subtext of just how strong the Transvaal position was. The reality simply was that the other provinces needed the Transvaal more than it needed them. The rapid movement to the formation of the Union was precipitated by the Transvaal’s notification of their intention to leave the customs union. The discussion points handled by Kriek are intensely detailed and well presented. In his conclusion he affirms that the contribution made by the Transvaal was the most significant.²⁸⁷ Kriek’s studious academic work and acute insight make this contribution extremely significant and adds a tremendous amount to understanding the Transvaal position. Kriek manages to pull together divergent contributions and successfully isolates the Transvaal’s role.

The extensive doctoral work of J.M.H. van Aardt, who looks specifically at Botha’s term of office in the Transvaal between 1907 – 1910, is yet another in-depth and valuable study.²⁸⁸ Of particular interest is Van Aardt’s dealing with the Chinese labour question. While at times leaning toward the nationalist: “Die mynbestuur het ook nou besef dat die alleenlopende man van oorsee nie so geskik is nie as die Afrikaner-gesinshoof”,²⁸⁹ his handling of the material in this regard is comprehensive. Van Aardt dedicates an entire chapter to Botha’s administration facing the formation of the Union. The *Het Volk* Party was established primarily to pursue the formation of a united South Africa.²⁹⁰ Van Aardt explains it was also an ideal long held by Smuts and so fitted well the objectives of the party. It becomes clear that although the impetus to the formation of the Union would be led from the office of the Governor General, the Transvaal still played the biggest part in getting the wheels turning towards Union. Van Aardt also assesses the situation in the Free State, Cape Colony and Natal. His analysis is not all that deep, but does clarify the role

²⁸⁶ D.J. Kriek, *Die Bydrae van Transvalers tot die Staatsvorm van die Unie*, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1958, p. 27. Translates to: *It is difficult to determine to what extent Gen Smuts was influenced by Sir Henry de Villiers. That he was influenced to an extent is certain as is in evidence later when I shall deal with aspects of the constitution.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 202.

²⁸⁸ J.M.H. van Aardt, *Die Botha-Bewind in Transvaal, 1907 – 1910*, D.Litt. thesis, Potchefstroom, 1958.

²⁸⁹ Translates: The mine managers realized that the single foreigner is not as well suited as the Afrikaner head of the family. *Ibid*, p. 311.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 505.

of the Transvaal in the political landscape, detailing party politics on the eve of the formation of the Union.

Nicolas Weideman in his doctoral thesis, *Die Politieke Naweë van die Anglo-Boereoorlog in Transvaal tot 1907*²⁹¹ investigates primarily the consequences of, and the course to, self-determination in the Transvaal. It details the role that Milner played in the reconstruction of the Transvaal, his departure, the abandonment of the Lyttelton Constitution and the realisation of self-government in 1907. Weideman elaborates on Milner's attempts to anglicise the youth of the Transvaal and Free State.²⁹² The aspects that he deals with would later form an important part of the movement to Union. Weideman succeeds in outlining the direct consequences of the war which in turn become some of the causes of the movement to Union. While the work ends in 1907 it is no less important in understanding the broader political landscape in the Transvaal and in South Africa.

The last academic contribution is a doctoral thesis by Ferdinand Vermooten. He studies the Transvaal in the period up to the formation of the Union.²⁹³ This thesis is particularly important because it deals with the role of Louis Botha, something that is not extensively written about elsewhere. The influence of Jan Smuts is almost always more prominently placed when reading about the formation of the Union. Seldom is the role of Botha highlighted and when it is, it is fleeting. Vermooten's thesis is comprehensive and he covers all the usual expected areas and some novel ones – like the use of propaganda. The work covers events like the National Convention in extensive detail; this is done with special reference to Botha's role in the pursuit of Unification.²⁹⁴ What makes academic theses of this nature particularly important is the extensive primary research that is included. It is from these works that the greatest individual detail emerges.

By the end of the 1950s, academic work in the form of theses had ceased. Perhaps this is born from the fact that the tide had turned toward Afrikaner Nationalism. Following the 1948 election and the National Party victory, academic efforts focused elsewhere. The publication of Thompson's book in 1960 so comprehensively dealt with Unification that it became *de facto* a

²⁹¹ N.C. Weideman, *Die Politieke Naweë van die Anglo-Boereoorlog in Transvaal tot 1907*, D.Phil. thesis, U.P., 1955.

²⁹² *Ibid*, p. vii.

²⁹³ F. Vermooten, *Transvaal en die Totstandkoming van die Unie van Suid-Afrika, 1906 – 1910*, D.Litt. thesis, Potchefstroom, 1955.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 175.

saturated area of interest. The contribution made by the various students is enormous and their individual effort has ensured that the finer detail is recorded.

The last entry in this section is from Gey van Pittius who added a short essay to the *Hertzog-Annale*. In this piece he deals with the contribution made by General Hertzog at the National Convention and he attempts to set the record straight.²⁹⁵ His representation of Hertzog is fervently made, giving us the well-known position that Hertzog as a nationalist was an Afrikaner first and then a South African. He cites three examples of actions or motions that demonstrate Hertzog's commitment to the Afrikaner nation. The essay is historically interesting since it demonstrates to the reader – sitting one hundred years from the event and almost fifty from the publication of the essay – just how doggedly Hertzog pursued his objectives. His first motion at the convention was to move that Dutch be one of the official languages used at the conference, else he would immediately resign.²⁹⁶ The second example worth citing, is his continued insistence that the vote should simply be one for Europeans. Thirdly, he moved to load the rural constituencies. He felt so strongly about the last motion that he threatened to derail the process in the Orange Free State legislature, should the Convention not carry his resolution.²⁹⁷ This article serves two purposes for the historian. In contributing to the history, it clearly outlines General Hertzog's role at the National Convention, the sub-committees on which he served, the motions he proposed, the actions he resisted and most significantly the continual protection of *his* nation's independence and rights. He pursued his objective even at the cost of other groups represented in Natal. Secondly, it serves as a prime example of Afrikaner Nationalist rhetoric, executed with all the traits that identify this particular nationalistic history. Broadly speaking Afrikaner Nationalism traits are: an opposition to British Imperialism, the myth of being God's people and the superiority of the Afrikaner cause. Hertzog perpetually lingers on issues such as language, race and self-determination, irrespective of where South Africa was heading. Published in 1959, the rising Afrikaner nation would have identified strongly with the notions contained in the essay.

²⁹⁵ It is important to remember that there was no record kept of the actual debates. The National Convention following the completion of its role and the drafting of the South Africa Act and constitution, published the official record which detailed only the resolutions and the voting.

²⁹⁶ E F.W. Gey van Pittius, *Generaal Hertzog se Standpunt in die Nasionale Konvensie*, *Hertzog Annale* 6, December 1959, pp. 4 & 5.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 7.

c. Biographies

Keith Hancock draws much of the detail required for his two volume biography of Smuts (the first appearing in 1962 as *Smuts, The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*,²⁹⁸) from the *Smuts Papers*. Hancock had been asked by Cambridge University Press, in 1951 – the year following the death of Jan Smuts – to take on the task of writing a biography. After affirming the support of the family trust, at the time under the control of J.C. Smuts, the son of Jan Smuts, he began his work.²⁹⁹ As a biography of Smuts, because of the exhaustive work done not only with the correspondence but also in the Smuts archive, the two volume work remains arguably the most complete and definitive. It is written very much from Smuts’s perspective and employs reams of original information. An example of this is Smuts’s meeting with Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman in London on 7 February 1906. This meeting would precipitate self-determination for the Transvaal. It was only with the publication of the biography that there was an account of the meeting. “Do you want friends or enemies?”³⁰⁰ Hancock is fair-minded and even-headed in his handling of Smuts. He accounts for his successes and speaks specifically too about his flaws. As an example he writes extensively about the perception that had arisen around Smuts as being deceptive. “Slim Jannie” – as Smuts would become known – was not trusted by some of his fellow politicians: “By two totally wanton and short-sighted acts of duplicity he has managed to give every man in the Convention the same feeling of profound mistrust that dogs him in all he does.”³⁰¹ Hancock is also very good at detailing the labours of Smuts and assessing his role in events. “More than any other national constitution within the Commonwealth, that of the Union of South Africa bears the imprint of one man’s mind. This, however, was not generally understood until it was revealed by historical research half a century later. Smuts himself took care never to say a word which would reveal the immensity of his own labours.”³⁰² Some of the success of this biography can be attributed to the fact that it was only written after Smuts’s death. A.F. McC. Madden in a review article published after the appearance of the first volume raises some concern with the presence of the biographer and his views, but it is not all negative.

“The presence of the biographer does seem sometimes misleading. It is not always clear whether the views expressed are those of Smuts or of Hancock: a

²⁹⁸ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*. London, 1962.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. xi.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 215.

³⁰¹ Taken from a letter by Sit Percy FitzPatrick in *Ibid*, p. 275.

³⁰² *Ibid*, p. 268.

study of Chamberlain and Salisbury papers would, for example, throw considerable doubt on the assumption that the government in London had no desire for negotiations to succeed in the early months of 1899. On the other hand Hancock is not unaware of the difficulties of retrospective foresight: Smuts, he will warn us, ‘had, therefore no precise knowledge of the case which Milner was building up against his people and government’ One overwhelming advantage which this biography possesses is undoubtedly the breadth of comparative knowledge which Hancock has at his command: it is this which enlivens and illuminates his narrative.”³⁰³

Hancock’s free access to the estate ensured that he was able to treat even the controversial episodes with some sensitivity. “As author my first aim has been authenticity”³⁰⁴ and arguably Hancock achieves this “authenticity”. With all the possible pitfalls often present in biography, this seems to side-step many.

Eric Anderson Walker is one of the prominent South African historians. He arrived in South Africa in 1911 to take the “Chair of History” at the University of Cape Town. He quickly saw that there was a need for a general history and began working on one in 1921. During his tenure at UCT he also became the first president of the South African Historical Society.³⁰⁵ By the time he left the South African stage to take the chair of history at Cambridge University in 1936, history – a subject that was in its infancy when he started his career in South Africa – had grown to be a fully fledged discipline.³⁰⁶ In this growth Walker had played a significant part. Walker, if one considers that he was born in Surrey (1886) and educated at Oxford (1905) and Bristol (1908), would have made a perfect, imperial British conservative. Instead he tends to be surprisingly liberal. There are many arguments in mitigation of his conservatism: Smith argues that his sometimes close collaboration with MacMillan and De Kiewiet is a factor. Moreover, Walker wrote a biography of the Cape Prime Minister, William Schreiner, who undoubtedly was a foremost liberal of the time. This liberalism arguably filtered through to Walker. His approach to South African history was one that developed along the lines of a frontier culture. The clash and retreat consequently defined racial attitudes. This analysis was new to South African history

³⁰³ A.F. McC. Madden, Review: Smuts, *The Sanguine Years, 1870 – 1919*, *The English Historical Review* 79, 1964, p. 804.

³⁰⁴ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts, The Sanguine Years 1870 – 1919*, p. xi.

³⁰⁵ C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, p. 112.

³⁰⁶ K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, p. 125.

and was a liberal approach. Walker was, if nothing else, a romantic. Testimony of which is his viewing of the Great Trek as a great adventure.³⁰⁷

In 1925 Walker publishes his biography of Lord De Villiers. One striking quotation from the biography is: “His public life thus fell in the most complicated and controversial period of his country’s history... Two interests dominated his life – the law and federation.”³⁰⁸ The last phrase particularly captures the man and his place in South African history. Because Lord de Villiers was from the Cape, the biography takes a view from the Cape. It is no surprise that in the opening lines of the chapter he sets the stage for the formation of the Union, Walker details the Cape position. He deals with the dire financial state of the Cape administration at the time of Merriman taking office. Merriman had to cut back the deficit drastically, knowing fully well that if there were any chance of Union, the Cape finances would have to be restored.³⁰⁹ The relationship between De Villiers and Merriman is dealt with briefly. There are reams of private correspondence between the two men. De Villiers is always anxious to discover progress of the private debate and how the plan to Union was unfolding. “The proposals shadowed forth in that letter [between Smuts and Merriman] seem to open up the way to a practical solution of the question of Union.”³¹⁰ If Smuts played a significant role in the structuring of the Union Constitution then the other significant contribution was made by De Villiers: “...My visit to Canada would give me a good opportunity of enquiring into the working of the federal constitution. I am particularly interested and anxious to ascertain whether it would be possible to work a constitution which allotted to the Provincial Legislatures even smaller powers than those conferred on the Canadian provinces.”³¹¹ De Villiers was a formidable legal man, perhaps the best at the time. Selborne in a letter to him, bestows high praise and while wishing him well on his trip to Canada, extols his virtue as one of the best. De Villiers was well aware of the role that he had to play: not actively involving himself in the public debate but constantly involved in discussions behind the scenes, “as became a Chief Justice.”³¹²

When it came to the National Convention – De Villiers was elected as chair – his role was one of marrying the demands of the North³¹³ and the South.³¹⁴ However, he actively participated. Of the

³⁰⁷ K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, p. 122. C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, p. 113.

³⁰⁸ E.A. Walker, *Lord de Villiers and his Times*, p. v.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 425.

³¹⁰ De Villiers to Merriman 30 March 1908 in *Ibid*, p. 427.

³¹¹ De Villiers to Merriman 9 April 1908 in *Ibid*, p. 431.

³¹² *Ibid*, p. 437.

³¹³ Botha and Smuts.

seventeen committees that prepared work for the Convention, he was chairman of ten. Ultimately, whether one assesses his material contribution or not, his greatest value was as go-between for the Transvaal and the Cape. As observed at the time: “The man with the oil can.”³¹⁵ History sometimes forgets the contributions of men like Lord De Villiers. As time marches on, the significance of those who are very much in the background during major political change are simply forgotten. Walker in this immensely lucid biography captures something of the personality of the man giving a sense of his gravitas. Ultimately he was able to command the respect of his countrymen in the Cape and of the whole country, a lasting testimony to him. The truth of the formation of Union is that it was greatly aided by De Villiers and through his efforts the aim was achieved more speedily. Walker creates a vivid portrait of Lord de Villiers and records his due place in history.

In 1982 Phyllis Lewsen publishes a biography of Merriman, *John X. Merriman, Paradoxical South African Statesman*.³¹⁶ This work, which is broad and comprehensive, deals with Merriman’s participation in the formation of the Union. It gives a colourful insight into the last Cape Prime Minister: his studious dedication to parliamentary politics, his dedicated liberalism and coveted ambition of being the first Prime Minister of a united South Africa. An insightful review article *The Burden of Empathy* written after the death of Lewsen, casts some doubt on the interpretation that Malan sought the first premiership and additionally gives a different account of the run-up to Gladstone’s decision to back Botha’s candidacy. F.A. Mouton still weighs Lewsen’s book as a landmark study but casts a shadow on some of the more detailed interpretation of events.³¹⁷ In dealing with Union the perspective of Merriman, his opinions, interpretations and insights, prevail. Merriman realises that the compromise of Union came not only at an enormous individual cost but also a monumental political cost for the Cape. He goes as far as to quote the famous line: “What shall it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his own soul.”³¹⁸ It troubled Merriman greatly that the political centre had moved away from the Cape and that the Transvaal had assumed the role of political master. It was not only this that angered him but also the position taken with regard to the majority of the population. “Sauer and I had to sit and listen to things that made our blood boil... But the divisions were not [English – Afrikaner] at all. Our own English-speaking countrymen struck me as being the most violent and intolerant as regards

³¹⁴ Merriman and Jameson.

³¹⁵ E.A. Walker, *Lord de Villiers and his Times*, p. 443.

³¹⁶ P. Lewsen, *John X. Merriman, Paradoxical South African Statesman*. Johannesburg, 1982.

³¹⁷ F.A. Mouton, *The Burden of Empathy*, *South African Historical Journal*, 55, 2006, pp. 125 – 141.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 316.

the Natives – a very evil omen for the future.”³¹⁹ Merriman was truly vociferous in his questioning of the actions of the National Convention. Malan moved to have the Lord’s name included in the preamble, to which Merriman objected. He argued that it was not proper to use the Lord’s name in a document that violated the doctrine of all men being created equal. How could you use the Lord’s name when most of the population had been excluded politically? Following the Convention he wondered if he had done the right thing in moving the Cape towards Union.³²⁰ Lewsen captures the enigma that is Merriman, illustrating his thwarted ambition and his genuine liberalism in the face of an onslaught that would be more severe than even he may have imagined.

Sir Percy FitzPatrick can be regarded as somewhat of a rogue turned gentleman. Alan Cartwright points out in his biography of FitzPatrick, *The First South African*³²¹ that as a member of the Transvaal delegation at the National Convention, he was forever clashing. He was highly irritated with the manner in which Lord De Villiers handled the Convention and found it hard to sympathise with the Cape Opinion. He spent his free time between sittings corresponding and it is here that we find the most revealing aspects of FitzPatrick’s opinions. He details skirmishes in lucid prose. One particular example is of a dressing down handed out by Botha to the elder statesman from the Cape, Hofmeyr. Yet another is of him – FitzPatrick – insisting that De Villiers move to withdraw a motion. His actions present him as breathless and obstinate.³²² Cartwright captures another dimension and reveals that he was not as roguish as imagined. In fact, he was able to speak his mind and although he is not closely associated with the formation of the Union, he is remembered for sticking to his principles. When he had a fight to fight he would do so and not back down. The book illuminates the spirit of the man who has in recent years been largely forgotten – it gives us little insights into the life of a truly interesting South African politician, who participated with his heart on his sleeve.

The 1969 publication of *President Steyn, A Biography* by Johannes Meintjes³²³ is the first biography of Steyn to appear in English. Relatively comprehensive, it deals with the life of M.T. Steyn using, as a main source, his own dictations. It is not referenced and so it is virtually impossible to pin particular statements of fact. However, the oral element serves a valuable purpose in giving perspective on Steyn and some of the other important Free State men, like

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 317.

³²⁰ *Ibid*.

³²¹ A.P. Cartwright, *The First South African, The Life and Times of Sir Percy FitzPatrick*. Cape Town, 1971.

³²² *Ibid*, pp. 174 – 176.

³²³ J. Meintjes, *President Steyn, A Biography*. Cape Town, 1969.

Hertzog. Very little is revealed in respect of the formation of the Union. Of some passing interest is the outline of the race towards becoming the first Prime Minister. Meintjes comments about the National Convention which is well worth noting: “General Hertzog concentrated mainly on the language question, to the point of obsession, but Steyn’s interest vested in every aspect of the proceedings.”³²⁴

d. General Histories

There are very few general histories which are not constructed from other published sources. The synthesis nature of a general history means that new facts seldom emerge and that it is from the source list and the footnotes that an assessment of the quality and contribution can be made, provisionally at least. Most general histories also go through several editions, in some cases spanning fifty years, before they are seen as out-of-date or not worth revising. For this reason I will as far as possible, consider the final edition for assessment.

In terms of general histories, the mainstay, concerning the early part of the twentieth century would be the work of Eric Walker. His history would undergo two major revisions. First published in 1928 it was revised in 1941 and finally in 1957.³²⁵ The 1928 edition of *A History of South Africa* is definitive in two respects: firstly in that Walker approaches South Africa as a single entity. Secondly, that he did not simply look at the history of South Africa as the interplay between English and Afrikaans, but as the formation of racial attitudes derived from a frontier culture.³²⁶

“But, while it is a storehouse of information, partly because it is such a storehouse, the book has not escaped what has been the bane of the standard histories of South Africa, their voluminousness. There is ever a tendency in them for the forest to be obscured by the trees, and in the present instance it is almost impossible even for those who bring to the reading ... some previous knowledge of South African history to read its pages with intelligent continuity.”³²⁷

³²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 218.

³²⁵ These dates refer to full revisions as apposed to updated editions. The last revised update was 1968.

³²⁶ E.A. Walker, *A History of South Africa*, p. vi.

³²⁷ P. Coupland, *A History of South Africa, History XIV*, 1930, p. 168.

The chapter that deals with the Unification of South Africa³²⁸ would remain the most comprehensive on the subject until the publication of L.M. Thompson's *The Unification of South Africa 1902 – 1910* in 1960. Walker has a liberal approach and although biased at times his writing fairly reflects both the perspective of imperial Britain and of the Boer states. His handling is fluent and comprehensive and makes a very important contribution in tying together the various elements into one historical account. Unification is considered in the context of South Africa's broader past not as a largely isolated consequence of the Anglo-Boer War. In terms of historiography this work could be seen as bridging the imperial and British perspective with a more liberal interpretation.

Walker issued a second edition of his *History of South Africa*. The revisions made in this edition amount to very little. The time period between the Great Trek and the start of the Anglo-Boer War is somewhat enhanced.³²⁹ In 1957 he reissued the revised third edition. The changes, once again, were superficial. He added further chapters and extended the book to now include all of southern Africa.³³⁰ Ken Smith describes the changes in the edition consequent to his 1928 version as disappointing.³³¹ In later revisions post 1960, the research of L.M. Thompson was incorporated.³³² With limitations kept in mind, the book still served as an important general history.

For the purposes of this study I will consider the final edition, published with revisions and corrections in 1968.³³³ By then, Walker argues, that a mythology around the National Convention had arisen. This mythology claimed that the will of the British authorities dictated the constitution and that in doing this the minority of whites through imperial lead excluded the majority of blacks. This is not so and Walker clears up this myth in respect of particularly the Cape members. Simply put, the Cape delegates would not support Union if the native franchise was not entrenched in the constitution.³³⁴ Walker's summary of the race for the position of Prime Minister is brilliant. After ruling out the other candidates leaving only Botha and Merriman, he summarises the differences as follows: "Botha had many advantages. He was an Afrikaner, Natal

³²⁸ E.A. Walker, *A History of South Africa*, pp. 457 – 535.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, p. vii.

³³⁰ E.A. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa*. London, 1957.

³³¹ K. Smith, *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 130.

³³² *Ibid*, p. 128.

³³³ E.A. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa*. London, 1968.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 533.

born and Transvaal trained, a farmer, a Liberal in the old republican days, bilingual, genial, boundlessly tactful and the representative of the dominant North. Merriman, too, was a farmer, English born, South African by adoption, with a great knowledge of men and of affairs, cultured, eloquent, imposing, the Cape Parliament with all its traditions, in the flesh. But he was not tactful and never had been.³³⁵

Walker's work was truly significant in 1928 but with the passing of time, diminished in its importance. A review article published in 1930, while somewhat critical of some aspects of the work, does end with: 'The narrative as a whole is clear and interesting, and the book probably gives as good a view of South African history as we can hope to get considering how close we still are to so many debatable issues.'³³⁶ As a liberal historian he is over-shadowed by others, and in context of the history that was to come by the end of the 1960s, out-dated, despite numerous revisions. However, this does not diminish his original contribution. He takes his place as one of the great historians, certainly one of the most important when it comes to writing on the formation of the Union.

The last edition of *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* to appear, by the Stellenbosch professor of history, S.F.N. Gie, is published in 1942.³³⁷ Gie attempts to put South African history into a European context. He fails in this, drawing instead a picture of European history and a separate parallel picture of South African history.³³⁸ He gives only cursory treatment, little more than two pages in the addendums, to the formation of the Union. He focuses on the constitutional differences in comparison to Canada.

In a similar vein there appears the five volume history: *Drie Eeue, die Verhaal van ons Vaderland*³³⁹ as part of the tri-centenary celebrations of the landing of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape. While this was a work compiled by competent and professional historians, it was intended to enter the popular domain. It is heavily illustrated and not particularly scholarly, in that it lacks source referencing. The history is also one that carries a nationalistic flair to it, detailing the long, arduous road to the Afrikanerdom. While the history, particularly in its dealing with the formation of the Union is brief, it is amusing to note that there is a significant entry on the celebrations that

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

³³⁶ C.W. Previt -Orton, Review: The History of South Africa, *The English Historical Review* 45, 1930, p. 172.

³³⁷ S.F.N. Gie, *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika, Two Parts*. Stellenbosch, 1942.

³³⁸ K. Smith, *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 89.

³³⁹ A. B eseken *et al.* (eds), *Drie Eeue, Die Verhaal van Ons Vaderland*. Deel 4. Kaapstad, 1953.

followed the passing of the South Africa Act.³⁴⁰ This nationalistic history is geared towards social history. It brings nothing new to the academic but adds to a broader social understanding of the time.

While the two preceding histories had their flaws it is the publication of the two-volume history under the editorial guidance of A.J.H. van der Walt, J.A. Wiid and A.L. Geyer – *Geskiedenis van Suid Afrika*³⁴¹ – that really deserves attention. Ken Smith condemns the work for having far too many contributors dealing with a variety of subjects. These are chronological pieces in the first volume and thematic ones in the second and as a result the work lacks a sense of unity.³⁴² It is Wiid³⁴³ who writes the essay dealing with the formation of Union. This essay is written from the Afrikaner perspective and is by no means heavily biased. The Afrikaner perspective of the time was one of a wronged nation, oppressed by the British. Wiid outlines the Anglo-Boer War and then swiftly sketches the events following the war ending with the National Convention. It is a highly informative and detailed account. In the second volume G. Dekker writes on the cultural development of the Afrikaner. This is important only in as much as it deals with Milner’s attempt to completely anglicise South Africa.³⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that in the face of Milnerism and his policies, Wiid is capable of giving him some credit: “Milner was ‘n bekwame, vlytige burokraat, wat geen persoonlike geldgierigheid and die dag gelê het nie. Hy het ook verdienstelike werk gedoen, veral in verband met die ontwikkeling van die landbou in die verowerde kolonies.”³⁴⁵ Fair comment from a historian on someone who would have been seen as public enemy number one at the time. Where the published history has its flaws, Wiid’s contribution is significantly better and representative of a broader Afrikaner perspective.

The revision of Van der Walt, Wiid and Geyer’s original two volume history of South Africa into the one volume in the 1965 edition (edited and revised by D.W. Krüger) *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*,³⁴⁶ can be seen as a parochial undertaking, not attracting the attention of the major

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 288.

³⁴¹ A.J.H. van der Walt *et al.* (eds), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, Deel 1 & 2. Kaapstad, 1955.

³⁴² K. Smith, *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 89.

³⁴³ J.A. Wiid, *Weeropbou (1902 – 1910)*, J.H. van der Walt *et al.* (eds), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, Deel 1, pp. 606 – 643.

³⁴⁴ G. Dekker, *Die Kulturele Ontwikkeling ná die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, J.H. van der Walt *et al.* (eds), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, Deel 2, p. 665.

³⁴⁵ Translates: *Milner was an accomplished, diligent bureaucrat, who was not in it for personal gain. There was merit in his work, particularly in the reconstruction of the farming communities in the wake of the war.* J.A. Wiid, *Weeropbou (1902 – 1910)*, J.H. van der Walt *et al.* (eds), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, Deel 1, p. 625.

³⁴⁶ A.J.H. van der Watt *et al.* (eds), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*. Pretoria, 1965.

critics. The victory of the National Party in 1948 is described as a triumph; this essentially captures the perspective. The original chapter written by Wiid is left unaltered, while Krüger writes a bridging chapter spanning 1908 – 1910. It is a matter-of-fact delivery of the history. Krüger spends some time on the language question and details the key points of the National Convention. Tragically, the work is not footnoted, perhaps because it was intended for broader public consumption. Although the bibliography is relatively complete the absence of footnotes makes it less feasible as a work of historic importance.

*The Making of a Nation*³⁴⁷ is D.W. Krüger's history of South Africa. He deals with the post Union period and ends with the formation of the Republic.³⁴⁸ This he sees as the highlight and victory of Afrikaner nationalism. The passing of time led to a mellowing of attitudes and the gradual ascent of Afrikaners to the helm.³⁴⁹ Krüger had some training abroad³⁵⁰ and it is no surprise that in his preface to *The Making of a Nation*, he argues that “in history the last word is never spoken”,³⁵¹ this statement displays a professionalism that allowed him some breadth of vision. His history published in 1969, had some pride of place but by 1977 was superseded by the more broadly accepted history from Davenport.³⁵² Krüger's handling of the formation of Union is detailed and spans some twenty pages. In real terms his effort is a re-working of the chapter in Van der Walt, Wiid and Geyer. It is important though, that the work was published in English and would reach a broader audience. The book, in its time, would be regarded as a relatively authoritative one volume work.

F.A. van Jaarsveld, if nothing else, can be considered monumentally prolific. He wrote substantially on the subject of South African historiography – particularly Afrikaans historiography at that – and managed to produce several major volumes of history, the most significant in this study being his general history. First published in 1971 as *Van Van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd*,³⁵³ it would in later editions become *tot Voster* and finally, *tot P.W. Botha*. Saunders is dismissive of the work³⁵⁴ while Smith credits it as one of the first major Afrikaans general histories that gave some significant place to the role of black people in the history of South

³⁴⁷ D.W. Krüger, *The Making of a Nation*. Johannesburg, 1969.

³⁴⁸ It was originally published as *The Age of the Generals* in 1958.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 1 & 2.

³⁵⁰ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 69.

³⁵¹ D.W. Krüger, *The Making of a Nation*, p. 2.

³⁵² K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 218.

³⁵³ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Van van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd*. Johannesburg, 1971.

³⁵⁴ See C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major Historians on Race and Class*, p. 43.

Africa. He is not, however, uncritical of the work and argues that it is only in conflict with whites that black people are represented.³⁵⁵

In the first edition of *Van van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd*, Van Jaarsveld uses the famous quote from the great Dutch historian, Pieter Geyl, which argues that history is a debate without end. Van Jaarsveld grew massively as a historian and in his prolific and long career he was able to mould the perceptions of the public on the subject of Afrikaner history and at the same time revised and developed his own opinions. While the history may have been written with the explicit intent of giving an overview of the “fatherland”, it was also written to give the Afrikaans student access to a history that was not verbose and excessively long. Van Jaarsveld is well read – he wrote a substantial review article of *The Oxford History* – and would have been well aware of the attempt to make South African history multi-cultural. It is therefore not all that odd that he argues in the preface that while it is possible to give the history of South Africa multiple starting points his is from the point of a colonial beginning. He does not, in doing this, completely ignore any other history but chooses the history he wishes to sketch. Relative to the Afrikaans histories that had appeared by 1971, this was an inspired attempt.³⁵⁶

His handling of the Unification of South Africa is relatively brief. Considering that his book was intended primarily to give an introduction to the history of South Africa as opposed to a comprehensive history, it is sufficient. It is interesting that Van Jaarsveld, like Thompson,³⁵⁷ sees Union as a compromise and emphasises that South Africa was a country with two white nations at the time of unification.³⁵⁸ It is no surprise that at the end of the chapter he recommends Thompson’s book as further reading on the subject.

For the first time in 1969, *Five Hundred Years, A History of South Africa*³⁵⁹ is published, under the direction of Professor C.F.J. Muller, head of the History Department at UNISA at the time. Where the moderately intentioned *Oxford History* had been ripped to pieces, *Five Hundred Years* was simply not even worth the consideration of serious radical critics. In the revised third edition which was published in 1981, Muller claims that he is tasked with reinterpreting the past in the light of the recent research. One is not entirely clear on what this research is as there seems to be

³⁵⁵ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 84.

³⁵⁶ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Van van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd*, p. ii.

³⁵⁷ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa*. London, 1960.

³⁵⁸ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Van van Riebeeck tot Verwoerd*, p. 259.

³⁵⁹ C.F.J. Muller (ed), *Five Hundred Years, A History of South Africa*. Pretoria, 1969.

little departure from what is merely considered a run-of-the-mill, Afrikaner political history. He does not detail what it is that has come to light and how it has been interpreted. For Muller, the Great Trek held prominence over the South African history. He did, however, acknowledge that there may come a time, if the country were to change hands from white to black, that the Trek would be viewed merely as a brief crescendo in the imperialistic phase. From this statement Smith argues that he was a thoroughly professional historian.³⁶⁰ The Preface to the third edition has this remarkable paragraph: “Naturally the history of South Africa did not begin with the advent of the White man and the non-Whites have played an extremely significant role in South Africa’s development. Nevertheless, reliable factual records in exact chronological focus concerning the indigenous population are too scarce for an authoritative history of them to be written.”³⁶¹ It is clear that even in 1981 the history remains little more than a history of the white population in South Africa and does not take into account any of the research done on the pre-colonial period.

Perhaps the best description of the history to rise to expectation is captured in a review article by Davenport: “Since the appearance of the first edition in 1969, the South African historical sea has become very much more turbulent ... As seasoned mariners in 1980, they had a chance to show how skilfully they could ride the storm and the interest of this edition for the present reviewer relates directly to their academic seamanship. Unfortunately, whatever the reasons – whether lack of opportunity, or editorial constraints – most of the contributors have not ventured beyond the mouth of the harbour.”³⁶² Not all reviews are in agreement with Davenport. Reviews of the first edition in 1969 celebrated the departure and particularly praised the translation, at that stage a novelty in South African publishing.³⁶³ J.S. Bergh in his essay – originally inaugural lecture at the University of Pretoria – *Uitdagings vir die Afrikaanse Historikus* points out that some Afrikaans reviewers could not find fault with the work speaking to its acceptability as a general work. Where criticism was launched it was often set around the introduction – as noted above. From the left the sharpest of criticism was from Shula Marks who argued that there was nothing wrong with the undertaking, but that is only if it does not claim to be a History of South Africa.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 71.

³⁶¹ C.F.J. Muller (ed), *Five Hundred Years, A History of South Africa (Revised Third Edition)*, p. xii.

³⁶² T.R.H. Davenport, A Review of C.F.J. Muller (ed) 500 Years a History of South Africa, 3rd Edition, *Kleio XIV*, 1982, pp. 93 & 94.

³⁶³ See N.G. Garson, Review Five Hundred Years, *Kleio Vol 1 Issue 2*, June 1970, pp. 1 & 2.

³⁶⁴ J.S. Bergh, *Uitdagings vir die Afrikaanse Historikus*, *Historia 32(2)*, September 1987.

S.B. Spies – a professor of history at UNISA – contributes the essay to *Five Hundred Years* that deals with the subject of the formation of the Union. The twenty page analysis of the events is a competent, if a somewhat short, summation of the events that led to the Union. He uses as sources, principally, but not exclusively, Thompson and manages to give a balanced, clinical overview.³⁶⁵ A better description of his efforts is found in the review article by Davenport where he argues that Spies would have been better suited writing a chapter on the Anglo-Boer War. Davenport finds his chapter on Unification amounting to cautious competence “without really creating the impression that many topics in this period are contentious.”³⁶⁶

A.P. Newton is no stranger to the subject of South Africa, and importantly had edited a collection of papers that pertained specifically to the formation of the Union. In the 1936 edition of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire* he acted as one of the general editors, the other being E.A. Benians. Volume Eight of the series deals specifically with South Africa, Rhodesia and the Protectorates. In addition E.A. Walker was asked to be the advisor on South Africa.³⁶⁷ Walker is in the 1930s a historian at the height of his power. His appointment to Cambridge is a crowning achievement and his work on the Cambridge history a phenomenal feat. It is Hugh Wyndham who is called to write the contribution on Union, “The Formation of the Union, 1901 – 1910”. The essay is not long but is all-encompassing and unlike other brief treatments stretches a little further. Objections to the fact that a colour bar was included³⁶⁸ in the South Africa Act, serves as one example. Another example is that the essay dates from 1901, a year earlier than the accepted 1902. The next edition, published in 1963³⁶⁹ under Walker as General Editor, is disappointing. There were very few changes, and in a sense this could have been expected as a result of Walker being old and not fully up to the task. The bibliography is astounding (it is comprehensive) and what is more so is that in the chapter on Union, Thompson is not cited, although listed in the bibliography. In fact, the essay remains exactly the same as the 1936 edition. It is not surprising that the writing on *The Oxford History* started so very soon after the publishing of the *Cambridge*

³⁶⁵ C.F.J. Muller (ed), *Five Hundred Years, A History of South Africa (Revised Third Edition)*, p. 362.

³⁶⁶ T.R.H. Davenport, A Review of C.F.J. Muller (ed) 500 Years a History of South Africa, 3rd Edition, *Kleio XIV*, 1982, p. 95.

³⁶⁷ A.P. Newton & E.A. Benians (eds), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Volume 8, South Africa, Rhodesia and the Protectorates*. Cambridge, 1936.

³⁶⁸ H.A. Wyndham, The Formation of the Union, 1901 – 1910, in A.P. Newton & E.A. Benians (eds), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Volume 8, South Africa, Rhodesia and the Protectorates*, p. 640.

³⁶⁹ E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Volume VIII, South Africa, Rhodesia, and the High Commission Territories*. Cambridge, 1963.

History. To his credit Walker claims in the Preface to the second edition only a “fair number” of revisions, fair interpreted here as being almost none.

In 1988 Christopher Saunders still held De Kiewiet’s *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic*, as one of the greatest histories of the country and unsurpassed.³⁷⁰ Smith echoes these sentiments although they are ever so slightly watered down.³⁷¹ By 1941 – and in fact hardly notably until fairly recently – there had been little if nothing written on the social aspects of the formation of the Union. De Kiewiet introduces a chapter with a quote attributed to Lord Selborne: “The white people of South Africa are committed to such a path as few nations have trod before them, and scarcely one trod with success.”³⁷² His perspective could not be illustrated more clearly. The history of South Africa had almost exclusively been treated as one of white politics, of constitutional development, of the struggle between Boer and Brit. What makes De Kiewiet unique and thus the “brightest star”³⁷³ is that he incorporates the history of the other peoples of South Africa, the black, coloured and Indian. There are strong economic reasons, in fact arguably one of the strongest reasons for the formation of the Union is economic, and De Kiewiet explores these reasons. “All South Africa depended for its prosperity on the mines. If a proper share of that prosperity were to be assured for all communities, then the Transvaal could not be permitted to follow the lines of its own economic interests, especially if this led to a foreign port.”³⁷⁴ The chapter is somewhat unconventional, in the context of what had been published by 1941. It does not rely on the chronological and political structure of a general history but instead follows a thematic structure which uses political divisions where necessary. Due to the attention given to the economic and social aspects, the history is greatly influential.

The approach of the *Oxford History of South Africa*³⁷⁵ on the subject is perhaps best summarised by the opening paragraph of the Preface in the first volume: “This work derives from our belief that the central theme of South African history is interaction between peoples of diverse origins, languages, technologies, ideologies and social systems, meeting on South African soil.”³⁷⁶ From this short extract, it is obvious that the intention of the history is to abandon the approach of

³⁷⁰ C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major Historians on Race and Class*, p. 94.

³⁷¹ See K. Smith, *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 113.

³⁷² C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic*, p. 141.

³⁷³ K. Smith, *The Changing Past, Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 113.

³⁷⁴ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic*, p. 149.

³⁷⁵ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa (In Two Volumes)*. Oxford, 1969 & 1971.

³⁷⁶ M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, I South Africa to 1870*, p. v.

simply considering the political history of the country. A more vivid history could only be derived by an inter-disciplinary approach. The Preface goes as far as to discuss the merits of Marxist history and the value in adopting some of the principles to interpret South African history.³⁷⁷ By “inter-disciplinary” is meant the use of material and research which fall outside of history, archaeology being the prime example. This approach would forever dispel the myth that South Africa’s history began with the rounding of the Cape by the Portuguese, that the history of South Africa was the political history of the white man.³⁷⁸ Some critics were sceptical of this approach. Martin Legassick in a review article argued that the “roughly equal division of the work into ‘socioeconomic’ and ‘political’ chapters has meant that, instead of a new overall approach, the usual ‘white’ history is supplemented by, but not integrated with, the accounts in the changes in the social patterns of town and countryside, and of non-white protest.”³⁷⁹

It is not surprisingly that L.M. Thompson writes the section that deals with the formation of the Union of South Africa.³⁸⁰ The treatment is comprehensive and in over forty pages he delivers an excellent précis of his dedicated work on the subject. He deals with all the major issues. Interestingly, this version begins with the Anglo-Boer War and then moves into the formation of Union. The brief treatment of the Anglo-Boer conflict is justified because the emphasis was intended to be on Union. Perhaps this marks the change where political events would begin to decline in importance in history and much more would be written about social history. What is surprising is that Thompson, who had spent years writing political and constitutional history, would almost completely turn away from it. His closing paragraph captures a vivid interpretation of South African history in the years that follow the formation of the Union:

“The remaining chapters of this book show how the political forces have operated within the framework that was devised by the National Convention and given legal efficacy by the British Parliament. There have been three related processes: the struggle among white people of South Africa for control of the machinery of government by winning elections; diverse attempts by non-white peoples of South Africa to obtain a share in the control of the machinery of government, with a view of changing the racial structure of society; and the elimination of the

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

³⁷⁸ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 139.

³⁷⁹ M. Legassick, Review Article The Oxford History of South Africa Volume II, *Journal of African History XIII(1)*, 1972, p. 145.

³⁸⁰ L.M. Thompson, *The Compromise of Union*, in M. Wilson & L.M. Thompson (eds), *The Oxford History of South Africa, II South Africa 1870 – 1966*, pp. 325 – 364.

last vestiges of British imperial authority over South Africa and the warding off of new external challenges to the system of white supremacy.”³⁸¹

This paragraph concisely captures the themes that emerge as a result of the process of Unification.

The lasting contribution was that, once and for all the question of the existence of a history prior to the arrival of the white man was settled. This would not mitigate the severe criticism that was launched at the work. Interestingly because of the work done on the subject of pre-colonial Africa the attacks that would be mounted arose not only from the right, but also more interestingly from the left.³⁸² One of the primary concerns argued against the history was that because of its interdisciplinary nature – use was made of an archaeologist, and anthropologist and a linguist – it was not history at all and that as a result of this, what was produced was ahistorical. The view and interpretation of an anthropologist tends to be static and thus lacks the sense of historical motion or time. While the dynamism produced by a political history cannot be applied to pre-colonial society, because of a lack of research at the time, the attempt largely failed. It spawned, however, further work on the subject. Shula Marks noted that: “*The Oxford History*, which can as sensibly be read from the middle to either direction as from the beginning to end, as a result lacks a certain sense of historical development.”³⁸³ This perhaps, most accurately summarises the main objection to the work.³⁸⁴

The most vehement attack would be launched in a review article by Van Jaarsveld. He had numerous objections to the work, the most significant point being that the cooperative nature of the work caused a lack of emphasis on the role played by conflict. This is coupled with sheer historical tardiness, where, according to Van Jaarsveld, “all too often” only one fact was used to substantiate an entire argument.³⁸⁵ These factors combined to create a vision of a country that was

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 364.

³⁸² It has also been said before that *The Oxford History* marks the watershed in the development of a radical tradition in South African historical writing, because of the reaction to some of the published findings in the work.

³⁸³ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 140.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 139 & 140.

³⁸⁵ For an example see K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 144.

always non-white and that the whites would forever simply remain settlers in a land that was not theirs.³⁸⁶

All criticism of the work aside, the reality is that even today, when one considers the work in context of its time, it was a pioneering effort.³⁸⁷ The inclusion of inter-disciplinary research particularly the vision of pre-colonial South Africa, would be a breaking of new ground. The reaction to it, both positive and negative, would simply spawn a whole new life of historical writing. The formation of the Union, while comprehensively dealt with, is seen as diminishing in importance, a fact that future histories would acknowledge. The tide, and *The Oxford History* marked this, had begun to shift – at least for the liberal and radical school.

One of the most influential general histories of South Africa published to date, has been *South Africa, A Modern History*³⁸⁸ by Rodney Davenport. A professor of history at Rhodes University, Davenport's book would go into four editions, 1977, 1978, 1987 and 1991. The 1987 and 1991 editions were major revisions that included substantial rewriting of the text and the inclusion of significant research, particularly on the subject of black history. In 2000 Davenport cooperated with University of Cape Town professor of history, Christopher Saunders, and produced another extensively revised fifth edition. Davenport's intention – if he were to be categorised, he states in the preface of the first edition – is to be placed somewhere into the category of liberal Africanist. He makes the important point that often liberal, particularly English historians, had worked in complete isolation from those that were Afrikaner nationalists. To write a history that is comprehensive the historian needs to recognise the peculiar complexities of South African society.³⁸⁹ This is perhaps best captured by an extract from the preface of the fifth edition:

“It was important that readers of South African history should learn to appreciate the limitations of historical knowledge – not in the way understood by the likes of Alvin Toffler, in his insistence that the pace of change is now so fast that historical knowledge is in any case irrelevant, or for the reasons attractive to those post-modernists who insist that history is helpful only as a way into the mind of the historian; but because of the need for mature circumspection if we are to avoid being tricked into false perspectives by dishonest manipulators of the

³⁸⁶ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, pp. 143 & 144

³⁸⁷ C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past, Major Historians on Race and Class*, p. 156.

³⁸⁸ T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History*. London, 1977.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. ii.

truth. It has often been said that the basis of knowledge is either historical or mathematical: mathematical, in so far as it depends on an understanding of the inner connectedness of logical relationships; historical in those instances where a phenomenon can only be understood in terms of its origin and development. Historical change, by being largely unpredictable, holds the elements of surprise, thus warning against the over-confident acceptance of social, economic and psychological theory.³⁹⁰

Ken Smith was of the opinion in 1988 that Davenport's third edition was the natural successor of Eric Walker's general history as the most accessible and comprehensive single volume history of South Africa.³⁹¹ D.H. Heydenrych in a review article of the third edition argues that at the very least, because of the liberal intentions of the book, it should be required reading for all politicians.³⁹² One of the more substantial review articles of the third edition came from Christopher Saunders.³⁹³ He details the tradition from which Davenport writes and points out that he remains firmly rooted in political history.

Needless to say, the handling of the formation of the Union is superb. The most important contribution is the inclusion of a piece on the reaction of the black portion of the population to the National Convention, the drafting of the constitution and the eventual enactment of the Union. This is, up to this point, a largely ignored aspect of the movement to Union and in the progress towards a liberated society, an ever more important one.³⁹⁴ Davenport ends his chapter dealing with the formation of the Union as follows:

“The promulgation of a constitution for the Union of South Africa could have become the occasion for a fresh start in public life, and for this the orgy of “convention spirit” which had accompanied the compromises of 1908 – 09 seemed to prepare the public. In the nature of the case, though, the earlier party lines re-emerged, and the notion of a “government of all talents” ... was stillborn.”³⁹⁵

³⁹⁰ T.R.H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa, A Modern History (Fifth Edition)*, p. xxiv.

³⁹¹ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 218.

³⁹² D.H. Heydenrych, T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa a Modern History*, *Historia* 32(2), p. 112.

³⁹³ C. Saunders, Review Article Davenports Third Edition, *South African Historical Journal*, 19, 1987.

³⁹⁴ K. Smith, *The Changing Past – Trends in South African Historical Writing*, p. 436.

³⁹⁵ T.R.H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa A Modern History, Fifth Edition*, p. 264.

The continued and failed attempts of particularly Jabavu – and others – to get some recognition for the greater portion of the population is brought into crisp focus, it is the major flaw of the formation of the Union. Davenport makes it clear that the political masters, in making the Union, had forged the history that was to follow. The inclusion of African reaction to the Union is thus a significant one.

S.B. Spies had already contributed a substantial chapter on the formation of the Union to C.F.J. Muller's *Five Hundred Years, A History of South Africa*. In 1993 B.J. Liebenberg and Spies would partner as editors to publish *South Africa in the 20th Century*.³⁹⁶ Spies would once again contribute the chapter that dealt with the beginning of the century, viz 1900 – 1919. This time around the demarcation was ever so slightly different, Spies divides the period into three sections, yet handles the period as a single entity. Spies is an example of a professional historian at the height of his craft. Although he deals with the same period as before, he includes Odendaal's³⁹⁷ perspective in his writing. Odendaal had written in 1983 a thesis that dealt exclusively with black resistance to white oppression. It serves to illustrate the dynamism of Spies and the fact that interpretations had marched on. The fact that the volume deals exclusively with the political developments and history of the twentieth century, means that it is highly focussed and as a result the chapter on Union is extensive.

One of the best, albeit extremely short, summations of the whole movement to Union is held in *A History of South Africa*.³⁹⁸ In this volume Thompson gives a sweeping history of the country. He starts with its prehistory and ends the first edition with the dawn of the new South Africa. In the preface, while providing a brief historiography, he argues that he has drawn from both the liberal and the radical traditions in constructing this particular history.³⁹⁹ He also strives to give a balanced view of the country's history. Ethnicity becomes an increasingly more important aspect and subjects like Union disappear into the mists of a far more complex age. He starts his chapter that eventually deals with Union in 1870 and titles it *Diamonds, Gold and British Imperialism*. This is certainly a departure from traditional historiographical approaches and affirms the

³⁹⁶ B.J. Liebenberg & S.B. Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century*. Pretoria, 1993.

³⁹⁷ A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*. Cape Town, 1984.

³⁹⁸ L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*. New York, 1995. The latest edition was published soon after his death in 2005.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. xii.

complex themes that emerge in the era.⁴⁰⁰ He also, at the end of the chapter, briefly deals with black resistance to the formation of Union. This is an important and fair handling of the subject and because of its appearance in a broader history, places the period into context and gives it the emphasis required, particularly with a vantage point that is the end of the century.⁴⁰¹

A barrage of books appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Over and above the ones that have been dealt with in some detail already there are four more that range from social to economic and also political history of the country. These contributions vary in substance but there is little that sets them apart from anything that had been written previously – particularly in context of the formation of Union. I will deal very briefly with each.

First there is the 1973 publishing of John Selby's *A Short History of South Africa*⁴⁰² It rests very heavily on secondary sources and even then when dealing with the formation of the Union, does not include Thompson's work. This is an oversight that, at best, means that the chapter – while relatively comprehensive – lacks in aspect and depth. Freda Troup presents us with *South Africa, An Historical Introduction*⁴⁰³ in 1972. It is a new look at South Africa's history but has as its main aim, assigning blame. "Much current legislation, if not introduced, at least has precedents set by British administrators."⁴⁰⁴ Her approach is rather conservative and once again the work that leans heavily on published material, so that little new historical perspective is added. Alex Hepple's 1966 book, *South Africa*⁴⁰⁵ follows the trajectory of economics in South African history. He claims that the contemporary political debate had arisen not out of anything other than the exploitation of all non-white labour.⁴⁰⁶ There is no comprehensive statement on the subject of Union but Hepple does go about constructing a detailed picture of the handling of blacks and other racial groups in the construction of the Union constitution.⁴⁰⁷ The last book which is a social history and ends in 1910 is Alan Hattersley's *An Illustrated Social History of South Africa*.⁴⁰⁸ This volume lends some social perspective, he deals with the celebrations following the formation of the Union and the general public reaction to it, but does little else. A contemporary review

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. xiii & p. 110.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 152.

⁴⁰² J. Selby, *A Short History of South Africa*. London, 1973.

⁴⁰³ F. Troup, *South Africa, An Historical Introduction*. London, 1972.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. xi.

⁴⁰⁵ A. Hepple, *South Africa*. London, 1966.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. ix.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 97 – 105.

⁴⁰⁸ A.F. Hattersley, *An Illustrated Social History of South Africa*. Cape Town, 1969.

article celebrated its visual success but did point that there seemed to be little historical relevance and that the author was clearly uninfluenced by the historical debates of the time.⁴⁰⁹

An important illustrated history to appear in 1988 is the Reader's Digest *Illustrated History of South Africa*⁴¹⁰ edited by Christopher Saunders. "...One person's beliefs is another persons lies"⁴¹¹ and so in the preface the collaborators aim to give a different perspective of the history of the country. Undoubtedly the writers and publishers were aware of the continuing political change and Saunders, who had already proved himself liberal in approach, aimed to make this history as entirely inclusive as was possible. The chapter that specifically deals with the formation of the Union is comprehensive, albeit brief. One gets a sense from reading the chapter that there is so much more to the formation than a simple compromise between Afrikaans and English. It is in a word engaging, even if brief and nothing new is brought to light.

At around the same time, the heavily illustrated *History of Southern Africa*⁴¹² appeared. It sought to paint the history of the country as one that was based in a gradual, yet systematic discrimination. Omer-Cooper argued that by 1985 it appeared that Apartheid was on its last legs and so a history of this nature was needed.⁴¹³ The book is comprehensive but brief in its dealing with unification. There is some attention paid to resistance to the formation of the Union. He notes that one of the direct consequences of creation of the Union and the manner in which the bulk of the population was treated was the formation of the African National Congress.⁴¹⁴ "The adoption of the draft constitution and, in particular, the franchise clauses aroused politically conscious Africans and Coloureds."⁴¹⁵ His comments are brief but formed in a highly informative manner with sufficient weight given to aspects like the resistance to Union.

Frank Welsh's *A History of South Africa*.⁴¹⁶ is published in 1998. In his lengthy introduction Welsh manages to capture some of the dichotomy that is South African. One of the pertinent points he makes is that one can consider South Africa as either the first country in Africa to gain its independence or the last to do so. As a one volume history it manages to illustrate how it is

⁴⁰⁹ F. Harcourt, *An Illustrated Social History of South Africa*, *History* 57, 1972, p. 153.

⁴¹⁰ C. Saunders (ed), *Illustrated History of South Africa*. Johannesburg, 1988.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴¹² J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*. London, 1987.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, p. xi.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 156.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴¹⁶ F. Welsh, *A History of South Africa*. London, 1998.

that modern South Africa arose out of a political landscape that at various times looked dire. He captures South Africa as a wholly unique society with its own complex set of problems.⁴¹⁷ It is primarily, if not entirely, a work from secondary sources, and in this is, comprehensive. Surprisingly, it also seems free of any real agenda and could in some respects be described as Rankean. This is perhaps – as Tempelhoff in a review article points out – because he is not a professional historian, but rather a professional writer.⁴¹⁸ Welsh has an economic approach to his writing – he was at a stage an international banker – and so doing approaches Union with a sense of the economic imperatives that drove it. “To a great extent it was a question of hanging together rather than hanging separately; economic jealousies between the states were leading to something approaching a trade war.”⁴¹⁹ This is a clear theme in the formation of the Union, Welsh is not the first to point this out. Economics, for that matter, remain a clear cause for the formation of any federation or Union.

One of the latest and most brilliant concise histories to appear at the end of the twentieth century was *A Concise History of South Africa*⁴²⁰ by Robert Ross, published in 1999. It is a synthesised work from secondary sources and it is one seemingly without agenda. His trajectory is to argue that South Africa, despite its regionalist history and size, is one country, even though the divisions of the past are still perpetuated today. “The various strands in the country’s history are of course not independent one of another. It is out of their interweaving that modern South Africa has been created. It is purpose in this book to explicate their interconnections and development.”⁴²¹ While the contribution on Union is not vastly different from any other, Ross sought to marry the various strands into one concise history. Much on a par with Thompson’s shorter history, this is sharp and highly focussed without any obvious bias.

There have been two general histories, excluding reprints and revisions that have appeared since the turn of the century. In the wake of a radically changed country, these are equally so and range from the old liberal – now often seen as conservative – to what the government would regard as the prevailing opinion, perhaps in general radically left. These measures of left and right don’t really apply. The history of South Africa, for thirty some years, has been the work of professionals. They are professional writers, professional historians and the like, people who have

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. xxvii.

⁴¹⁸ see J. Tempelhoff, Boekresensie Frank Welsh, *Historia* 45(1). May 2000.

⁴¹⁹ F. Welsh, *A History of South Africa*. p. 364.

⁴²⁰ R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*. Cambridge, 1999.

⁴²¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

the time to digest and construct something that even in its most one dimensional is vast. The first example is R.W. Johnson's *South Africa, The First Man, The Last Nation* published in 2004.⁴²² Johnson's is an attack on nationalism, particularly the establishment which is against meritocracy and the freedom to write history that is fair and just. The crux of his argument is that although the Marxists had launched countless attacks against the last regime in South Africa, they failed to emerge in the new country. This flies in the face of a government, particularly Thabo Mbeki, who is racist as opposed to classist. The example cited is his reference to ethnicity when he argues that South Africa is a country of "two nations, the poor black and the rich white".⁴²³ Even though this is clearly against Marxist principles there has been little or no criticism of it. Thus, his history of the country becomes a sternly liberal one, that espouses the values of debate and is staunchly against any nationalist movement, whether it be the National Party or the African National Congress. The result is that one is handed an opinion of the formation of Union – of the history of South Africa – that is without the symptoms of political correctness. It is a history that is not comprehensive and lacking, but robustly liberal in its line of attack.

At the complete opposite end of the scale is *Every Step of the Way, The Journey to Freedom in South Africa* published in 2004.⁴²⁴ Funded by the Ministry of Education and created under the guiding eye of Kadar Ashmal, it represents everything that is reprehensible when history is under the control of a government. Its trajectory is weak and unsubstantiated; this is because more than anything else it has a literary motif and is not themed like a history. As an example, it starts with fire, an extended metaphor of energy in Africa. It then descends into a description of some "freedom fighter's" body's being burned.⁴²⁵ Ashmal, in the introduction clearly has a political objective – he speaks of all the inequalities and the divided history of the country that is, he argues, not unified⁴²⁶ – and then goes on to argue that South Africans should embrace their common humanity.⁴²⁷ All this may or may not be true but setting out a history that dispels "heroic myths" and seeks to give the truth, can only be flawed. The dealing with Union is partial at best and although it includes some substantial writing on the resistance to Union, it is better done elsewhere. Like work done by Cecil Headlam,⁴²⁸ it will be historically interesting but in this case,

⁴²² R.W. Johnson, *South Africa, The First Man, The Last Nation*. London, 2004.

⁴²³ *Ibid*, p. ix.

⁴²⁴ M. Morris, *Every Step of the Way, The Journey to Freedom in South Africa*. Cape Town, 2004.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 2 & 3.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid*, p. vi.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid*, p. ix.

⁴²⁸ Editor of Milner's Papers.

only because of it eschewed bias. The work could have been more meaningful if it had not been for its political agenda and flawed structure.

The year 2007 saw the publication of the most recent illustrated history: *New History of South Africa* under the editorship of Hermann Giliomee and Bernard Mbenga both seasoned historians.⁴²⁹ The book is an amalgam of published works that have been rewritten, condensed and appended into easily accessible essays that function more to give a broad introduction than a detailed comprehensive account. The editors have started as far back as the Mesolithic period and end the book with a projection into the future, thus departing from the form and content of previous histories into something different. Paul Murray in an excellent and wholly comprehensive review of the book speaks about the diverse list of contributors – 31 in all – and their undeniable mastery of their respective fields.⁴³⁰ The chapter dealing with the movement to unification is brief and speaks more to the resistance and black reaction than about the actual mechanics of the time. It is evident from this rendering that most histories of the future will give only the briefest of handlings to the subject and in this summarised form deal with only the most important facts – that there was a National Convention, that The South Africa Act carried and that the Union formed in a cloud of resistance that ultimately lead to the formation of what would become the African National Congress.

The last two examples serve to illustrate the dividing line in historiographical writing. If one only considers the general histories, it is clear that where ideology once filled them they are now plagued by agenda. Is the purpose of the writing to crush the myths – past or the present – or to promote nationalism? History is useful that way – it can serve either purpose. The beauty is that there are so many varied opinions that the reader can choose his source, some more reliable than others, some more clouded by bias and yet all of them, somehow, representing the past.

⁴²⁹ H. Giliomee & B. Mbengu (eds), *New History of South Africa*. Cape Town, 2007.

⁴³⁰ P. Murray, 'Paul Murray takes a look at the *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*.' <<http://www.litnet.co.za/reviews>>, s.a.

e. Monographs on Unionism

By way of an introduction, I will briefly deal with the work of Rodney Davenport in *The Afrikaner Bond*.⁴³¹ Davenport argues that if 1904 is viewed as the nadir of Boer fortunes then the reversal to the zenith is in 1908. Self-government had been achieved in the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal where the Boers dominated the political scene and in the Cape the Afrikaner Bond had achieved significance in parliamentary politics. The Afrikaner was on the rise which is largely why Unification was achieved when it was. Similarly, the Union took the constitutional form that it did because of the recent history of the Boers. Davenport ends this introduction explaining that his interest is only in the part played by “political Afrikanerdom” since recent work – a reference to Thompson – clearly sets out the remarkable achievement if measured by the obstacles which were overcome by the participants.⁴³² Davenport spends a significant amount of time detailing the subtleties of the racial question. The Bond, unlike the parties from the North – *Het Volk* and *Oranje Unie* – did not exclude anybody on the basis of colour. They did not, however, put this principle into practice and never actually admitted anybody that was not white. But the leaders of the organisation made it clear on more than one occasion that non-exclusion was still important to them. When the debate was eventually brought to the fore at the National Convention briefly, the franchise was not extended. This was partly through bureaucratic clumsiness and partly because the members in favour, were so few.⁴³³ Perhaps the most interesting section in the book deals with the change of allegiance by some of the Bond given to Botha in the race to become Prime Minister. There is sufficient correspondence to suggest that Graaff, Malan, De Waal and Van der Horst switched their support from Merriman to Botha. Moreover, Davenport suggests that there is evidence to suggest that these men conspired against Merriman even going as far to threaten the security of his Victoria West seat in parliament.⁴³⁴ Davenport does not cover what Thompson writes but gives an intriguing perspective on the attitudes and focus of the Bond in the months prior to Union.

L.M. Thompson, when he joined the staff at the University of Cape Town, was not the liberal Africanist that he was to become. Instead his interest lay in constitutional history, certainly spurred on by the events at the time of the removal of the coloureds from the common voters’ roll. He was immensely active in all manner of things, even writing for local newspapers. By the

⁴³¹ T.R.H. Davenport, *The Afrikaner Bond*. London, 1966.

⁴³² *Ibid*, p. 271.

⁴³³ *Ibid*, pp. 277 – 279.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 295.

end of the 1950s, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Unification of South Africa, his *magnum opus* was ready.⁴³⁵

The Unification of South Africa was the first complete history of the Closer Union Movement. In his preface Thompson describes the movement as “one of the last creative expressions of the age of optimism which was brought to a close by the First World War.” It is worth quoting further: “This decisive step towards the elimination of imperial authority in South Africa, in favour of white settlers of Afrikaner and British stocks, was considered to be justified by the hopes that the Anglo-Boer feud would disappear, that white South Africans would grow increasingly humane in their dealings with their non-white fellow countrymen, and that the Union would become a liberal democracy on the British pattern.”⁴³⁶ By the time that Thompson was writing the book, these high hopes had been dashed by a system that was the reverse. Thompson’s skill as a historian and ability won him acclaim, J.D. Fage described his opening chapter as ranking amongst one of the best ever written on South African history.⁴³⁷

What is important about Thompson’s study is that unlike other works of the time – the biographies that had been published – his work was not based on a fraction of what was available, it used everything. He points out that at the time of writing the book, many of the contentious issues of fifty years before were still politically contentious and so he reserved judgement on these.⁴³⁸ The numerous and continued references to Thompson’s book highlights its importance. It is the publication most cited and used in reference to this period and theme. It is in a word, definitive.⁴³⁹

Thompson’s conclusion is immensely interesting. He opens this section with a brief discussion of the mood that dominated and followed the formation of the Union. It was a mood of optimism in the face of a multitude of possibilities: Boer and Briton would finally fuse into one nation. This nation would be prosperous and through increasing liberalism eventually absorb the High Commission Territories to form a single political entity that would be an active British partner. It was not to be so. There were simply too many obstacles. These – flawed as they were – were deftly defeated in argument in the years preceding the formation. Thompson lists several:

⁴³⁵ C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, pp. 122 – 124.

⁴³⁶ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910*, p. v.

⁴³⁷ J.G. Fage, The Unification of South Africa, *The Journal of African History II(I)*, 1961, p. 338.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ G. Bennet, The Unification of South Africa, *History XLV*, 1960, pp. 287 & 288.

differences in religion, differences in racial sentiment; more important, that not everyone adopted the progressive views of men like Botha, Smuts and Merriman. Some like FitzPatrick, still hoped that economic expansion would stimulate the growth of the British population and that ultimately South Africa would become British. From the Boer perspective the Republican ideal loomed ever larger. In every sense the constitution that was adopted would not do justice to what was idealistically anticipated.⁴⁴⁰

The Unification of South Africa, 1902 – 1910, was a mammoth undertaking. It fused together a mountain of primary material⁴⁴¹ and weaved a comprehensive monograph that will, almost certainly, for a very long time be regarded as significant.⁴⁴² It is not without its flaws and in the years since its publication, these have loomed larger. The best summarised criticism of the book is from Saunders: “His work did not consider in depth black responses to Unification. Over two decades later, André Odendaal’s study of early black protest politics, which used archival records not available to Thompson as well as African newspapers, showed how much could be added to Thompson’s account.”⁴⁴³

The criticism is justified and from a modern perspective, important. Without being an apologist for Thompson, it does not diminish his work. Adding the reactions of particularly the black protestors enhances the work and this oversight in 1960, is understandable. It was not Thompson’s intention – and this is blatantly obvious – to exclude such resistance. Instead, he arguably never thought to add it, as was the case with most historians at the time. After Odendaal’s publication, Thompson includes this aspect in his further writings. This bears testimony that he acknowledges Odendaal’s contribution and in his own case speaks of his good scholarly practice.

It is possible to deduce from the above that the most substantial contribution and addition to this field of study is *Vukani Bantu! Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912*.⁴⁴⁴ Odendaal explains that in the aftermath of the expansion of white communities into Africa, some of the African leaders came to be convinced of the futility of their methods. In order to protect African interest they adapted to the ways of the conqueror, seeking instead constitutional solutions to their

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 480.

⁴⁴¹ The only substantial evidence missing was that which had not been released into the public domain in the UK.

⁴⁴² J.G. Fage, *The Unification of South Africa*, *The Journal of African History* II(I), 1961, p. 339.

⁴⁴³ C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, p. 124.

⁴⁴⁴ Translates to: Rise up you people!

concerns.⁴⁴⁵ Originally submitted as a dissertation at Stellenbosch in 1981 it was converted into a book and published in 1984. Odendaal used as the principal source for the book, African newspapers. This enabled him to get perspective not only of the time but more importantly employ an array of opinions in arriving at his account of the events.

In reaction to the passing of the South Africa Act (1909), the following editorial response from *Imvo Zabantsundu* is worth noting:

“The blow has fallen, and the British Government and the House of Commons have passed the Union Constitution Act without the amendments we had hoped for ... The Native and Coloured people must now realise that an entirely new chapter in South African history is opening, in which they will have to depend on themselves and their South African European friends for the securing and maintenance of their civil and political rights. They must become united politically and, refusing to cling to any of the present political parties, must work for the creation of a new political party in the state which will unite the religious and moral forces – European and Native – of South Africa upon lines of righteous legislation, justice and fairplay, irrespective of race or colour... The Natives – men, women and children – must bend their energies to the advancement of themselves in all that civilisation and true Christianity means, so that their claims to equality of treatment for all civilised British subjects may be irresistible.”⁴⁴⁶

This is a very chilling summation of just how dire the consequence of the passing of the Act was to the African elite.

Odendaal’s contribution is extremely significant. While other areas of the formation of the Union have countless books and articles dedicated to it, this aspect only has one. In the years to come, if any more is to be written on the formation of the Union, it should be about the African perspective of the formation of the Union.

⁴⁴⁵ A. Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu! Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912*, p. xi.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 228.

6. CONCLUSION

The creation of the Union of South Africa was the last act in the age of optimism. Soon after its creation Britain and the whole of Europe would plunge into the first total war. Africa would become a significant theatre and the two generals who played such a significant role in creating the Union would lead troops against Germany for Britain.

The books that have been written on the subject of the formation of the Union of South Africa can be divided into three groups. First there are the early writings; second, amateur attempts; and lastly the work of professional historians.

There is a wealth of material that originates from the time, particularly diaries, letters and official documents. This body of sources has over the century formed the basis of the most authoritative attempts at writing the history. The culmination coming from L.M. Thompson in 1960, which at the time relied on what were then mostly unpublished private papers. Most of these, and certainly the ones that are considered important to such a study, have been published in collected volumes. These undertakings in all their forms add a wealth of material into the public realm and make the historiography of this subject that much richer.

The formation of the Union of South Africa is by no stretch of the imagination unique. It follows the Federation of the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to name a few examples. Of these the one that forms the most natural example for comparison would be Canada. The primary difference between the two is only really that South Africa's Unification came so much later. The key characteristic of all territories that unify, at least on one level, is economic and usually the first step is born out of a Customs Union.

The Unification of South Africa caused a backlash in reaction from particularly the black and coloured communities. As most of the discussions were held behind closed doors and discussions were conducted in secret, it would be some time before these communities became aware of what awaited them. They rallied and campaigned for the South Africa Act to be stopped in Westminster, but failed. It is perhaps ironic that a change of government in Britain set the ball rolling toward Unification and yet at the same time sold out – if this is the term – the bulk of the population.

The most important element of this history is what is covered here. In the context of South Africa one hundred years later it is blatantly evident that much more research and writing needs to be undertaken to assess black politics and protest to the Union. Andre Odendaal's book is extremely important in this regard, but is already more than twenty years old.

As South Africa moves into a new epoch, into a multi-racial society, the dreams and ambitions of the men who met in Durban seem somehow old fashioned. But that is history, almost eighty years later the ANC would sit down with the National Party and negotiate the structure and constitution of the New South Africa. Perhaps in a sense this meeting addressed the short-comings of the National Convention. Arguably the ANC was born out of the party reaction to the formation of the Union. Either way the historical context is not lost.

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