

Eugene de Kock and Parole

–by Prof Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

A few days ago, the motion to immortalise FW de Klerk by renaming Table Bay Boulevard after him was approved by the City of Cape Town. Mayor Patricia de Lille urged Council to consider honouring De Klerk as the last president of the apartheid state who dared to take the leap to announce stunning reforms that set in motion the series of events that brought us to April 1994. By honouring De Klerk, the city pays tribute to him for his leadership in our transition process, and as De Lille explained, ‘in the spirit of reconciliation that Tata Madiba believed in’.

A stain in the memory of De Klerk as the champion of freedom and reconciliation, however, is the murder of five teenagers in their sleep in a raid that was described by the then Minister of Justice and Defence, Kobie Coetzee and his colleagues, as a successful operation. The bodies of the twin sons of Siggibo Mpendulo, Samora and Sadat, 17, their cousin Mzwandile Mfeya, 12, and friends Thando Mthembu, 17, and Sandile Yose, 12, were riddled with bullets in October 1993 in a raid of the Mpendulo home in North Crest, a suburb of Mthatha.

Perhaps what is remarkable about this story is not that it is the only apartheid crime that De Klerk has admitted authorising. What is extraordinary is the modus operandi – extermination-style – similar to the ‘cross-border raids’ conducted by Eugene de Kock and his men in countless raids that brutally ended the lives of anti-apartheid activists. The propaganda apparatus unleashed after the incident also bore striking resemblance to the cover-up stories of De Kock’s days that perpetuated the heroic narrative of the efficient security forces fighting terrorism.

The investigation by Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza shortly after the killing in North Crest provided crucial evidence that put paid to the lies that the five teenagers who were murdered in the operation were terrorists. Were he not a president, and one that ushered in the era of negotiations, De Klerk would be dubbed a murderer for ordering the North Crest massacre. In fact, De Kock already referred to him as an ‘unconvicted murderer’ and in a recent

interview with Mr Mpendulo, the father of the twins killed in the 1993 North Crest operation, about his response to the renaming of Table Bay Boulevard, he reiterated a position he has maintained over the years that De Klerk's hands are steeped in blood. "Renaming the street after him means they are praising his brutality," Mpendulo told a reporter of the *Daily Dispatch*.

Like the response of the Mpendulo family to the honouring of De Klerk by the City of Cape Town, some family members of De Kock's victims have expressed deep unhappiness about the Justice Minister Michael Masutha's granting of parole to Eugene de Kock. For them, the memory of the terrors they endured at the hands of Eugene de Kock's state sanctioned covert operations unit renders the parole decision a betrayal of the memory of their loved ones who contributed to the benefits of a 'free' South Africa.

They are right, this notion of freedom that the ANC says it brought for us has so far been devoid of concerns about what human dignity would mean for the majority of our people, as the young scholar at the University of Cape Town, Dr Buhle Zuma reminds us. Minister Masutha says De Kock is granted parole 'in the interests of nation building and reconciliation'. In a gesture that captures most profoundly the meaning of reconciliation, the meaning, in other words, of the future, the daughters of two of De Kock's victims, Marcia Khoza and Candice Mama, came out publicly in support of De Kock's parole, reaching out to him with a deep sense of empathy for him because of the remorse he has shown.

Masutha and De Lille are right in evoking the memory of Nelson Mandela through these important gestures of reconciliation. The hope that Nelson Mandela inspired was grounded in the quest for us to establish a richer sense of our identity as human beings, connected to others in the human community. He expanded the horizons of what is possible in human relationships by spearheading, as part of the political negotiations, a process of dialogue, fostering the capacity for connecting with others – even others who are former enemies – in order to confront and heal a past characterised by moral corruption and widespread violations of human rights. However, more than twenty years since the end of apartheid, the need to return to Nelson Mandela's vision remains urgent. As I write this article, we continue to hear about the consequences of the yawning void of emptiness faced by many young people in the urban areas and in the small quiet towns in the rural areas of our country – the

violence that has ripped our communities. Oxfam has declared South Africa the most unequal society – ours is a troubled country. This is the problem that needs to be addressed so that all can embrace the reconciliation agendas in the honouring of De Klerk and in the granting of parole for De Kock.

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