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Eugene de Kock

After the end of the apartheid era, Eugene de Kock's heinous crimes and violations came to light to the South African population. Immediately de Kock was made out to be the center point of the evil actions that occurred under the apartheid government and the infamous force, Vlakplaas. Considering all the terrible crimes de Kock committed, it is no shock he earned the nickname "prime evil" by the media, but this stigma he has received as being the "prime" executioner of all evil obscures the role played by other apartheid forces. The apartheid government and its high-ranking officials have strategically made de Kock a scapegoat by claiming, "their hands are clean" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 60) Many of his superior officers deny any involvement in the crimes he was involved in but de Kock testifies before the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, revealing, he was not acting alone, but was in fact only following orders from superior government officials.

Eugene de Kock was a member of a covert government force referred to as the "Third Force." The term Third Force was first used by ANC members in 1990 and it clearly referred to an underground government organization that executed plots to cripple the anti-apartheid movement (Ellis, 1998, p. 261). Although the Truth and Reconciliation Committee found little evidence to prove the existence of the actual Third Force, "a network of security and ex-security

force operatives, frequently acting in conjunction with right-wing elements and/or sectors of IFP" were found involved in violence and human rights violations (TRC Report, 584). This covert force was established in 1979 under the State Security Council (Magubane, 2010, p.10). The State Security Council emerged from efforts of Prime Minister P.W. Botha to make the South African Defence Force as strong as possible, in order to withstand anti-apartheid uprisings, like the 1976 Soweto student uprising that "traumatized" the apartheid regime (p. 9-10).

P.W. Botha realized the country was facing a revolutionary war and it needed to carry out any necessary measures to secure the country from the "powers of chaos, Marxism and destruction" in order for the Nationalist Party, or as he thought "those of order and Christian civilization" to prevail (Magubane, 2010, p. 6). Certain measures were carried out to ensure that everything necessary was being executed, and in 1985, Eugene de Kock was placed in charge of the C1 death squad at Vlakplaas, a government owned farm the South African Police unit used as headquarters (Ellis, 1998, p. 274). Before joining the Vlakplaas squad, de Kock had already built a reputation for himself as a member of the South African Police. De Kock joined the SAP in 1968 and served over ten tours of duty in Rhodesia. Rhodesia was a border state of South Africa, and in the late 1960s it faced an infiltration of Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Zimbabwe African People's Union. This infiltration sparked rural guerrilla warfare in the state, which induced as many as 2,000 South African Policemen to join Rhodesia in its efforts to repel the rebels (267).

This Rhodesia experience would prove to be essential in the forming of the South African counter insurgency specialists of the Third Force, particularly for de Kock as he participated in the experience incessantly and trained with several Rhodesian military units,

such as the Special Air Services and the Rhodesian Rifles (Ellis, 1998, p. 268). Through this military experience and training, de Kock seemed overly qualified for the position of a common policeman, which he was not; his qualities placed him in a high position of power within the Vlakplaas that required experience in fighting behind enemy lines and sabotage (268).

De Kock's C1 unit was a general-purpose death squad that worked under instructions from above, or out of initiative from its commander (Ellis, 1998, p. 269). De Kock's amnesty applications suggest that all of his initiatives except for one came from orders from above. This exception was the murder of Oscar Mxolisi Ntshota, Glenack Masilo Mama, Lawrence Jacey Nyalende and Khona Gabele on March 26, 1992 (de Kock, 2001, TRC). The murder occurred as a result of an informant advising de Kock that five MK members were going to commit a robbery on behalf of the ANC; this information proved to be false as the five men were not MK members or working on the behalf of the ANC. De Kock and nine other members of Vlakplaas participated in the ambush of the five men, and each of them were not granted amnesty as a result of there being no real political motive in the killings, there was not attempt to arrest or apprehend the five men, and de Kock did not request permission from his superior, General Engelbrecht. De Kock justified these certain actions by saying pressure from society and superiors forced him and his unit to "get the job done." He believed that anytime the ANC hit targets, he was expected to retaliate as swiftly as possible in order to fight back the terrorism (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 74). Whether or not their actions were legal was unimportant, how they did it was also unimportant, the only important matter was that results were seen. De Kock's superiors had the backing of politicians; therefore it was imperative that they showed them that "their policy of kragdadigheid [strong-arm tactics] was working" (31).

Other cases where government involvement seemed predominant were in the bombing of the COSATU house and Khotso house. The bombing of the COSATU house occurred on 7 May 1987; the Congress of South African Trade Unions played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid, and for this reason it was targeted by the Vlakplaas unit (COSATU, 1999, TRC). In this case, there was not much indecision as to where the order to bomb the COSATU house came from; Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok and Chief of Security Branch Velde van der Merwe testified that they ordered to "render the building unusable for purposes that promote a revolutionary climate" (TRC). De Kock also testifies before the TRC and claims that not only was he ordered to bomb the house, but also he was told that the order came from the State President P.W. Botha (TRC). Although the TRC could not find concrete evidence that Botha did in fact order the bombing, it is highly possible de Kock could have been telling the truth. Botha showed his support for terroristic techniques in 1986 as he had ordered for General Fraser's handbook on counter revolutionary war, to be circulated to senior officials; the handbook encouraged South African forces to counter their enemies by using the same style of guerrilla warfare on them (Ellis, 1998, p. 275).

While nobody was killed or injured severely during the COSATU house bombing, and all amnesty applicants were granted amnesty, this was not the case in the Khotso bombing. The Khotso bombing took place on 31 August 1988 in Johannesburg after the apartheid regime found out that anti-apartheid groups were being harbored in that location (Khotso House is Bombed, 2000, SAHO). The perpetrators of the attack were once again de Kock, acting out of direct instructions from Adriaan Vlok (Kamin, 1999, p.133). Nineteen people resulted injured on the day of the bombing, and even to de Kock this order to commit "terrorism" within their own country was baffling (Ellis, 1998, p. 278). Evidence was brought to the TRC that Vlok and

head of Security Police, General van der Merwe, submitted a report to P.W. Botha about the plans. Very ambiguously Botha instructed Vlok to "look into the matter in depth and take the necessary steps to make the building unusable" (Khotso, 1999, TRC Decision). This ambiguous language used made it difficult to determine the chain of command, as both former presidents, Botha and de Klerk used this as a basis in hearings to claim that their policies were simply "misinterpreted" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 65). Instinctively, General Van der Merwe denied this allegations of "misinterpretation," as any solider will understand what commands such as "eliminate," "neutralize," or "take out" actually means (65).

Despite de Kock's testimonies pointing to the involvement of apartheid government's highest officials in the "Third Force," former President of State F.W. de Klerk denied participation or knowledge. He made a rather controversial remark during an address at Harvard University's School of Government, referring to a question over his involvement with de Kock and his crimes, de Klerk shot back by saying, "my hands are clean" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 60). This allegation that he was clear of any crimes is difficult to believe, since de Kock had in fact received many medals for his actions, including the Silver Star, the highest national award for bravery (60). Despite all the recognition for his acts of "bravery," de Kock's superiors were not willing to go out on a limb for him and his reputation. Even the state attorney in de Kock's case intended to frame de Kock's crimes as individual acts of crime; nobody was looking at the broader picture surrounding de Kock and the government organizations that at one point supported him (61). Government organizations such as the State Security Council, created by P.W. Botha, that has stated in its preamble that, "not all the actions proposed in this document could readily be brought under the juridical concept of 'self-defence action' and some operations proposed would have to be clandestine" (Magubane, 2010, p. 10). It seems as though

former President de Klerk worked in his best interest to keep certain operations "clandestine," or simply deflect them towards de Kock and claim he had no control over his actions.

Even if de Klerk and his cabinet are being truthful about their involvement, why was there no rigorous attempt to investigate the crimes being committed? De Klerk's own Minister of Law, Adriaan Vlok, was involved in the bombing of the Khotso house; yet de Klerk was content with Vlok's assurance that "he had no knowledge of criminal activities" going on (Kamin, 1999, p. 133). It is very difficult to believe that the President of the State and the Minister of the Law were unaware of the mysterious occurrences going on, such as people being killed and kidnapped or buildings and cars being exploded that had ties to the liberation movement (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 61). The fact that they may have turned a blind eye to the events happening does not make them innocent they are just as guilty as the men who committed the crimes, because they failed to complete their duty to the country, of protecting and guiding the South African people.

Colonel Eugene de Kock was tried and sentenced to two life sentences plus 212 years of imprisonment on 30 October 1996 (SAPA, 1996, de Kock). De Kock remembers his trial as a betrayal- "first by the state that had given me my orders, and then by my friends, who lined up to testify against me" (Gordon, 249, 1998). Just as his superior officers had done, de Kock's friends and associates were now turning their back and testifying against him in their defence. Also deputy attorney general Anton Ackerman built his case around the sole goal to pin everything on de Kock and try him as a "common criminal" (271). This idea of being tried as a "common criminal" upset and puzzled de Kock as he questions, "What common criminals take their orders from the top brass of the police and the Ministers of the government?" (271). It seems as though the state attempted to build a case where de Kock was made out to be the

scapegoat of the crimes that originated from the top of the government. The same man who throughout the entire apartheid era was supported and protected by the state, and as he believes by white society as well, was now made out to be the 'prime entity of evil' of the apartheid regime (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 113).

There is no doubt de Kock deserves any punishment he has been given, the crimes he committed were heinous, whether they were ordered or not, but it is clear he was strategically outcast by the same organization that put him in a position of power. Placing such a large burden of an entire government organization on a single person does no good to the families that suffered and the country of South Africa that deserves to know the real origins of the violations.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela was a TRC commission member and as a psychologist she interviewed de Kock and recorded her findings in her book, *A Human Being Died that Night*. Throughout her book Gobodo-Madikizela speaks about forgiveness and how liberation of those who were affected is found through the truth, well for de Kock that truth is still hidden in the shadows, and it has created a burden of shame in his life (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 113). De Kock is still in imprisoned in Pretoria Central Prison, where he has requested a presidential pardon in hopes of having his sentences reversed (135). De Kock is also up for parole; he was set to have his hearing on December 14, 2012 but it was postponed for unknown reasons. According to South African newspaper, *Rapport*, Eugene de Kock applied for another presidential pardon after meeting with President Jacob Zuma in 2009 (News24). Whether de Kock should receive parole or a pardon is topic of much debate, considering all the crimes he has committed. It is difficult for people to accept the idea of letting him go free, but having a

better understanding of de Kock and his involvement in the apartheid regime is truly necessary to make a judgment call on whether or not he should be pardoned.

De Kock writes in one of his books, *A Long Night's Damage*, "I do not deny that I am guilty of the crimes, many of them horrible, of which I was accused… but we at Vlakplaas, and other covert units, are by no means the guiltiest of them all" (Kamin, 1999, p. 132). Based on my findings, "the guiltiest of them all" are those who in fact assembled all the forces into the murderous group they became; all the superior officers and politicians who have gotten off freely from their acts deserve as much blame, or more, than those who followed their commands. The superiors leading the covert "Third Force" instilled the idea that they were fighting against terrorism through the will of God, and everything necessary must be done to overcome the enemies (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 53). As many brave soldiers would do, they followed orders, because not following orders could be viewed as treason, which meant they were enemies of the state. De Kock, a soldier of the state, followed orders strictly, maybe at times too strictly, but that was his job, he was recruited to fight in a force that was created to end the liberation movement: at all costs.


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