

Brothers in war and peace: Constand and Abraham Viljoen and the birth of the New South Africa

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Dennis Cruywagen

Emile C Coetzee

Mafikeng Campus of the NWU

24117889@nwu.ac.za

The transitional period (1989-1994) in South African history is considered to have been a time of great uncertainty and anxiety. During the De Klerk administration, South Africans were not always sure what would be decided at the negotiating tables and within the secret meetings of the National Party (NP) government, the African National Congress (ANC) and the right-wing organisations. It was especially the different Right-wing organisations that concerned Nelson Mandela and he searched high and low for any member of these organisations who would be willing to negotiate. It is now clear that he did not find it in the bolstering Eugene Terre'blanche of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), the outspoken Dr Ferdinand Hartzenberg (the successor to the late Dr Andries Treurnicht of the Conservative Party of South Africa) or in the members of the smaller, yet not unimportant, Right-wing parties and cultural institutions such as the Afrikaner Volkswag of Dr Carel Boshoff, the Boere Krisis Aksie paramilitary group or the dissidents from the Afrikaner Volksunie.

Cruywagen, a political journalist and analyst who was once a spokesperson for the ANC, succeeds in revealing the only member within the right-wing realm of power-hungry organisations that were willing to sit down and continue negotiations with the ANC. His name was Constand Viljoen, a 20th century South African Army general who climbed the hierarchy of command to serve as the Chief of the Defence Force during the first years of the 1980s. Constand Viljoen was however not alone in any of his dealings with the ANC. His identical twin brother, Abraham, was the true instigator who wanted to persuade his brother to stop any designs for war by the right-wing. Abraham was, unlike his brother, a pacifist who did not consider war to be an option

at all. A theologian by training, who was ostracised by the Dutch Reformed Church and the other powerful bodies of the “Afrikaner establishment”, Abraham was once called a traitor by the Afrikaners, a painful accusation which would also haunt his brother when the latter decided to register his candidates for the 1994 election.

Cruywagen begins the story of the Viljoen brothers by sketching the socio-historical background of the town of Standerton in which the twins were raised. He is successful in showcasing the military service undertaken by the Viljoen family dating from the late 19th 20th century. In these first three chapters, the reader is able to discern the influence of the political ideologies espoused by the Standerton MP, Jan Smuts, and his party leader, Louis Botha from the South African Party, on the minds of the Viljoen twins. Interestingly enough, this political influence had contrasting effects regarding the past woes of the Afrikaners and their role in the building of a united South Africa. It is clear within these first chapters that the Viljoen brothers, like so many of their fellow Afrikaners, grew up with only the bare essentials at hand because they placed greater importance on intangible desires such as religion (especially within the Calvinistic perspective) and also the opportunity to receive a level of tertiary education. After spending a year together in the military gymnasium in Pretoria, Abraham decided that his calling was in theology and Constand craved the discipline and supposed camaraderie of the Defence Force. Both the twins would receive different opportunities during their time spent at the University of Pretoria - Abraham being able to travel to several countries in the West to enrich his knowledge of Christianity and consequentially adopting views about Apartheid from different international perspectives.

It is in this chapter about Abraham’s awakening about the strong and untested influences of the Afrikaner establishment that Cruywagen shows his sympathy towards Abraham. Noting that Cruywagen has served the ANC before, the reviewer wonders if the author was willing to fully grasp the conservative views of the young Constand. It might be quite provocative to state that it was obviously easier to understand the mentality of the anti-apartheid brother rather than the one who sacrificed his youth for the sake of the Apartheid state. Yet, the author is nonetheless able to bring a balance towards his pro-Abraham views when he touches on the misfortunes and mistakes which Constand had to face when the general became the politician. Starting out as an advisor to the Afrikaner Volksunie, Constandlater became the “champion of the right-wing” after being asked to lead the right-wing akin to a modern

day Pompey Magnus. It seems that Constand the soldier was unsuited for a war in the coliseum of politics. The chapter on Constand's final military defeat in the former homeland of Bophuthatswana, in particular, gives a clear and basic picture of the great blunders which Terre'blanche and his armed mob caused when Constand had to support President Lucas Mangope. This defeat and utter humiliation became his own personal Operation Valkyrie, but unlike General Ludwig Beck, Constand had another option. After consulting with the former Commander of the infamous 32 Battalion, Colonel Jan Breytenbach, Constand sent Pieter Groenewald to register his candidate list at the IEC Headquarters and thus the Freedom Front became a contender for the 1994 elections. Cruywagen makes this registration seem like an anti-climax and even ridicules it with the comments made by the late Jakes Gerwel about why he voted for the Freedom Front. Yet, there was nothing funny about this decision and the impact it would have on the rights of minority groups within South Africa after 1994.

Cruywagen's illusive objectivity in the final chapters is also enriched with several incorrect facts such as the date of Dr. Andries Treurnicht's suspicious death in the Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. Maybe one could argue that an incorrect date is not all that important. Yet, the mistake that Cruywagen makes by stating that only Mr Mandela made a statement to the South African public after the assassination of Mr Chris Hani on the 10th of April 1993 and that President De Klerk did not, is in the opinion of the reviewer unforgivable. It is widely known that both the leaders of the NP and the ANC made sincere requests during special broadcasts to the public to remain calm and not derail the efforts made to negotiate for a new political dispensation. The only difference was that Mr Mandela's speech was broadcast live and President De Klerk's was recorded but both messages were broadcasted directly after each other with De Klerk's recorded message following Mr Mandela's speech.

The book ends with the final struggles faced by the Viljoen twins in their own special capacities. After serving one term in the South African parliament, Constand returned to his farm in Mpumalanga, able to think about the roads-not-taken (such as his desire for a "Volkstaat") and it is clear from the interviews which Cruywagen had with several relevant contemporaries of the Viljoens, that Constand is now facing a total onslaught of regret. The work by Cruywagen narrates the story of the Viljoen twins and their contrasting experiences in 20th century South Africa for the first time. However the

macro-historical scope, enjoying more attention in several parts of the book, is not entirely successful in being interwoven with the biographical story of the Viljoens. That said, this book should be seen as a new and informative source on two South Africans who have received little attention by historians thus far. It is therefore a worthy contribution that will lay the foundation for further work on the Viljoen brothers.

Christiaan de Wet Annale 11: Die Anglo-Boereoorlog in die Potchefstroom omgewing

(Bloemfontein, Oorlogsmuseum van die Boererepublieke (in samewerking met die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns), 2013, 278pp. R 170.00)

Gert N van den Bergh

Danell de Wet
Potchefstroom
ddewet@live.co.za

Prof Van den Berg se boek handel, soos die titel dit stel, oor gebeure tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog (Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog) wat tussen 1899 en 1902 in spesifiek die Potchefstroom omgewing afgespeel het. Besondere klem word geplaas op die betrokkenheid van die Potchefstroom-kommando by die oorlog. In hierdie verband is dit belangrik om te onthou dat daar, soos vermeld in die inleiding van die boek, na Potchefstroom in daardie jare verwys is as die groter area wat Ventersdorp, Klerksdorp, Coligny, Hartbeesfontein, Koster en Carletonville ingesluit het. Die boek is dus hoofsaaklik 'n streeksgeskiedenis.

Die studie dek 'n wye oorsig van die hoofgebeure tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog met spesifieke verwysing na die Wes-Transvaal, wat insluit die ontstaan van die Potchefstroom-kommando, die Britse besettings van Potchefstroom, die verskroeiende-aarde- en konsentrasiekampbeleid, en die Bittereinders. Die gebeure word vertel in chornologiese volgorde, en daar word deurlopend in die boek van interessante feite en staaltjies vertel.

Van den Berg gee die lot van die Potchefstroomse burgers van daardie tyd weer. Die voedsel situasie, wat insluit die verdeling daarvan, asook die tekorte