MARIKANA

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On 16 August 2012, sixty-nine seconds of video footage raced across laptops, television screens and mobile phones around the world. The footage, shot from a single camera, showed armed South African police officers at the bottom of a hill opening fire on a group of men running down towards them. The men were striking mineworkers, and by the end of the day thirty-four of them would be dead. Amid clouds of dust raked up by the bullets, an explanation for what happened swiftly emerged. These miners were violent extremists, responsible for the deaths of several members of the security forces as well as many of their fellow workers in the preceding few days. Their strike was illegal, and opposed even by their own trade union, and it was dragging South Africa's economy into the mire. High on drugs and persuaded by a local witchdoctor that they were invincible to ammunition, several of the miners had charged recklessly towards police lines, brandishing traditional weapons. In fear for their lives, officers had no choice but to gun them down.

This explanation gained credibility as it was repeated, again and again, by police commanders, by business leaders, by government ministers and by many journalists. 'You had a situation where workers were armed to the teeth, and they were killing their colleagues,' explained South Africa's national police commissioner, who later congratulated her officers for displaying 'the best of responsible policing' during the tragedy. 'Police retreated systematically and were forced to utilise maximum force to defend themselves.'

We now know that almost every aspect of that explanation was a lie. If you shift the camera and view the same events from a different angle, a totally contrasting story emerges: one in which the miners did not charge at the police, but were instead deliberately herded towards them; one in which the police did not shoot reluctantly in self-defence, but rather pursued unarmed, fleeing workers and executed them at close range; one in which the tragedy of Marikana was not really a tragedy at all, but a deliberate massacre borne out of a toxic collusion between international corporations and the state.

Writing about another famous miners' strike more than half a century ago, the late anti-apartheid activist Ruth First claimed it was 'one of those great historic incidents that, in a flash of illumination, educates a nation, reveals what has been hidden, and destroys lies and illusions.' What happened at Marikana has forced many in South Africa and beyond that country's borders to ask themselves what other establishment narratives might have been assembled out of lies and illusions, and about the lenses we all use to make sense of the relationships between power, money and exploited labour forces. The answers aren't always comfortable. South Africa's story—of a 'rainbow nation' that successfully liberated itself from the shackles of apartheid—has been an inspiration to people in every corner of the planet. But if you shift the camera angle very slightly, what does liberation really look like?

Tremors below

Drive west from Pretoria on the N4 highway, alongside a soft carpet of bleached, yellow-green veld, and odd shapes soon begin to assemble on the horizon. Giant cranes and smelters stand sentinel over vast gashes in the earth. Artificial mountains—layers of subterranean rock and soil piled high into the sky—mark a landscape turned inside-out, the surface topped by the submerged. Strung out between them are chains of human settlements, mostly comprising corrugated-iron shacks, as well as a mosaic of high fences and criss-crossing access roads. At times it feels like the fringes of a giant metal city have been scooped up and then scattered at random across the countryside.

'Many people back home imagine there is money lying all over the ground here,' says Thembisa Nkuzo, a seamstress who migrated hundreds of miles to reach this place. 'There is lots of money,' she smiles. 'But the money is not for us. It's a strange world.'

For most of the apartheid period, the region around Marikana consisted of little more than farmland. Today it is the heart of South Africa's platinum mining industry, which contributes more to the nation's GDP than gold and diamonds combined—no mean feat in a country that is home to the biggest, richest mineral deposits on earth. Platinum and its associated elements are uniquely dense and used as catalysts in a wide range of chemical reactions, as well as being a vital component of nearly every single electrical device in existence. Each of us makes use of platinum every time we switch on a computer, drive a car or watch TV. If you own a mobile phone, chances are there is platinum in your pocket right now. It is estimated that one-quarter of all goods produced in the world either contain platinum group metals

or depend upon them during the production process. As a species, we rely on these metals unconditionally. Yet ninety percent of the global reserves lie in a single, narrow stretch of rock in the earth's crust called the Bushveld Igneous Complex, and it is above that stretch of rock that twenty-eight year old Thembisa has made her home.

Thembisa is a shy, softly spoken woman with acres of hair and a talent for music. Sometimes lyrics come to her in her dreams, and she tries to turn them into songs come the morning. She tends to communicate more with her eyes than her mouth. Occasionally though, just when you least expect it, a peal of her laughter will shatter the air like a thunderstorm. Outside of Marikana and her hometown, Flagstaff, no one has heard of Thembisa. Along with millions of her fellow citizens, she resides on the underbelly of South Africa's fabled transition to democracy, the twentieth anniversary of which was celebrated last year. But her tale is stubbornly interlaced with that of the platinum industry, the chapters of which are full of dizzying growth, public commendation and commercial success.

Flagstaff, where Thembisa was born, is a small town more than five hundred miles to the south-east of Marikana, near the coastline of the Indian Ocean. It's one of the poorest regions of the country, and, for related reasons, has been the main source of labour for the mining industry for well over a hundred years. Thembisa's aunt, whom everybody knows as Mazula, first made the long, well-trodden journey from Flagstaff up to the platinum belt in 1994, the year apartheid came to an end. She moved into Nkaneng, one of the informal shack settlements scattered around the mine shafts in Marikana, and found herself with no running water, no electricity and no job in the mines. Access to work was controlled by intermediaries and local labour brokers, and Mazula couldn't afford their bribes and fees. So instead she started up an illicit shebeen, brewing and serving home-fermented beer, had a child and waited patiently for the transformation she'd been promised. A generation later, she is still running the shebeen, still living in the same shack in Nkaneng and still reliant on outside toilets and a communal tap in the yard. The only time the tap has sufficient water pressure is at one in the morning, when the whole family awakens to fill up buckets for the day ahead.

'We were all so excited when Madiba [Nelson Mandela] became president,' remembers Thembisa, who was eight years old at the time and now lives with her aunt in Nkaneng, serving customers in the shebeen and taking on bits and pieces of sewing work whenever they come her way. 'Life was such a struggle. We thought that everything would change.'

For some South Africans, everything did. The rise and rise of South African platinum is part of what the ruling ANC claims is a 'good story to tell'—a party campaign slogan unveiled in 2014 as the country went to the polls. The general election marked a series of firsts: the end of South Africa's first two decades of democracy, the staging of the first national vote since Mandela's death, and an electorate which, for the first time, included members of the 'born free' generation—those who have lived their entire lives under a system that does not discriminate on the basis of skin colour. Despite being tarnished by a constellation of corruption scandals, the ANC—as it has in every general election since Mandela emerged from jail—romped to an easy victory. President Jacob Zuma declared his party to be 'God-given', and predicted it would remain in power for ever.

But behind the headline figures, ballot results paint a more complex picture: since 1994, the ANC's support among eligible voters has dropped by a third, and the number of South Africans opting to stay at home on election day has increased by almost ten million. Thembisa is among the many who have now abandoned the political movement most intimately associated with South Africa's racial freedom. Back in Flagstaff, she was once an enthusiastic ANC volunteer. In 2014 she not only voted against the government but also campaigned vigorously for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a new party led by former ANC Youth League chairman Julius Malema, who has promised to nationalise the platinum mines and accuses his old colleagues of being 'worse than apartheid'. During the election campaign, the EFF used one of Thembisa's songs as a local campaign track. Thembisa couldn't believe her ears when she heard thousands singing along to it at one of Malema's Marikana rallies on the eve of elections. The following day, she wore the EFF's signature red beret with pride to the polling station. On her way she passed the charred remains of the ANC's Nkaneng office, which had been burnt down by unknown assailants some weeks before. Thembisa told me that when news of the arson spread, she had been delighted. Many of her relatives and neighbours felt the same. The EFF ended up beating the ANC in

both of Marikana's local voting districts, an outcome that was repeated in many mining communities right across the platinum belt.

The ANC's 'good story to tell' fails to account for Marikana's mass disillusionment with a party that has been so powerful in the modern era that it is has become virtually synonymous with the state. Explaining it requires an alternative narrative, pieces of which can be found in South Africa's vital statistics: in the past two decades, gross national wealth has grown three-fold, and yet over the same period the number of people living on under a dollar a day has doubled, while average life expectancy has fallen by eight years. There are fragments, too, in the columns of thick black smoke that dot the skyline each day, spiralling up from villages and townships in every region of the country. South Africa is now our planet's most unequal nation, and also its protest capital. Those columns of smoke are from mounds of tyres set ablaze by residents furious at the relentless consistency of their abysmal living conditions, and weary of the high unemployment rates and low wages of an economy that has delivered untold riches to a tiny elite whilst leaving the majority of the black population estranged from the fruits of financial growth. The domestic media calls these local demonstrations 'service delivery protests'. Some analysts believe that they could more accurately be described as a wide-scale uprising of the poor.

Thembisa and Marikana lie at the heart of this alternative narrative, because the mining industry, as it always has done, plays a critical role in weaving threads of both marginalisation and privilege through South Africa's social fabric. Under colonialism and apartheid it was the interlinked mining interests of government and white monopoly business magnates that fuelled everything from the hated pass laws (through which racial segregation was enforced) to the migrant labour system, which pushed huge swathes of the black African population off the land and into industrialised work. For most of its history, the ANC viewed this enormously profitable marriage between domestic political elites and foreign financiers as one of the principal enemies of black liberation. The movement's Freedom Charter, drawn up by fifty thousand volunteers who fanned out through the country's poorest townships in 1955 to collate dreams of a post-apartheid future, began with a plain declaration that the mineral wealth beneath South Africa's soil must be returned to its people.

And yet following Mandela's release from prison in 1990, something changed. Aggressive lobbying by international financial institutions, western diplomats and technocratic advisers steeped in the neoliberal economic tradition persuaded the incoming ANC government that its plans for nationalisation and radical wealth redistribution would be a mistake. South Africa should instead move in the other direction, privatising as much of its asset base as possible and throwing open its borders to global capital flows. As in many other parts of the continent, those sitting atop the emerging power structure at the moment of transition moved quickly to contain more transformative visions of popular sovereignty that were bubbling stubbornly below. In the end, the ANC's economic policies left the structure of the mining industry virtually intact, apart from the elevation of a few well-connected black faces into executive boardrooms. Today, mining in general and platinum in particular has become the vehicle through which many members of South Africa's newly moneyed classes have made their fortunes. It is also the terrain upon which a fresh round of resistance struggles against the status quo is dramatically being fought.

Recently, a local NGO gave disposable cameras to a small group of women in Marikana so they could make a record of what that terrain looks like through their own eyes. Thembisa was among them, and her photos—of dirty pools of stagnant water and empty taps, of people scrabbling for firewood in the bush and shacks in darkness after sunset—are a visual testament to the gulf between expectations and outcomes that has accompanied the arrival of democracy. 'Children here play in rubbish, they walk to school down dangerous roads, they use outside [long-drop] toilets and sometimes they can fall down them,' Thembisa says. When she first fled the poverty of the Eastern Cape, she planned to take her young daughter along with her. Now she knows Marikana, the idea seems unthinkable. 'I don't think people abroad are aware at all of where their platinum comes from,' she tells me, 'and the conditions we—the people who make it possible for them to have it—are living in.'

By the time Thembisa wakes up each morning and stumbles out of her bed into her aunt's tavern, which doubles as the communal yard, a few shacks are already humming with calypso, or maskandi (Zulu folk music). Cleaning out the tins in which last night's beer was served is

an arduous task. There are streams nearby but raw sewage is regularly pumped into them and some are contaminated with the bilharzia parasite. Thembisa would love to while away the hours at her sewing machine but the mud-churned roads linking Nkaneng settlement with local towns make transport difficult and expensive, so materials are hard to come by. Instead she spends most of the day helping her aunt ferment maize meal and corn into alcohol. With virtually no municipal waste collection, rubbish doubles as fuel.

Not long after dawn, the first customers of the morning begin drifting in. Most are mineworkers. Deprivation drove them to the platinum belt, and fear of joblessness has kept them there. Some are in the yard to get drunk, but most are simply looking for something to quell their hunger. 'It's a cheap way to fill their bellies,' explains Mazula. In between sips, the miners who frequent the shebeen echo Thembisa's determination never to let their offspring see Marikana, or get locked in its grooves. 'My father worked in the mines, I worked in the mines, and it ends there,' insists one. 'The way I have suffered at the hands of these mines, I don't want my children to go through the same thing.'

Underground, the days are tough and dangerous. 'It is hard work, work that makes your body forever sore,' says Bob Ndude, a rock drill operator and local union representative. 'You are down underground in a tiny space, holding a metal machine that weighs fifty kilos. You are surrounded by rock on all sides. There are lots of explosives, lots of chemicals and a lot of dangers. I've seen many people injured in the mines, people who no longer have eyes, people who have irons in their legs.' All the miners I interviewed in Marikana described a working climate in which official regulations were regularly flouted amid intense pressure to meet ambitious production targets, resulting in exhaustion and accidents. The problem is exacerbated by the growing use of subcontracted labour, which critics say corrodes labour security and has a detrimental impact on occupational safety. 'We are supposed to do eight hours a day, but we can't leave work undone, so often it ends up being twelve,' says Bhele Dlunga, another rock drill operator. 'I can't find the words to tell you how hard it is. Even when you lose energy, you're forced to continue. You have no choice but to finish the job.' The shafts in question are owned by a British company, Lonmin. Independent monitoring groups have labelled the number of fatalities and injuries among Lonmin's workforce as 'high-level' and 'unacceptable'. Lonmin declined several invitations to offer a response to these claims, or provide any comments for this story.

Physical hardship is not the only thread of continuity binding the mining industry under apartheid to life in Marikana today. Another is gargantuan income inequalities between management and labour. Most of Lonmin's manual workers would have to remain toiling below the earth's surface for more than three centuries to earn what executives at the company's Belgravia headquarters make in a single year. Since the turn of the millennium, the principal mining houses on the platinum belt have achieved operating profits that outstrip other major corporations on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange by up to 200%. In 2011, the year preceding the Marikana massacre, the nine biggest platinum corporations made $4.5 billion in profit. Anglo Platinum, the biggest producer, described that as a bad year. At some major platinum firms over the past decade and a half, more money has been distributed as dividends to shareholders than has been paid out in wages to the entire labour force, cumulatively comprising hundreds of thousands of people. Political epochs come and go; meanwhile South Africa's miners always carry out the hardest work and bear the highest risk, only to come away with the thinnest, meanest slice of the pie.

This economic imbalance has assumed a concrete form on the platinum belt with the proliferation of pay-day lenders and mashonisa (microfinance) offices that jostle for space in every local shopping enclave. A large proportion of miners' wages gets remitted to families back home in towns like Flagstaff. What's left is often insufficient to meet even basic living costs. Creditors offering unsecured loans, some of which carry interest rates of up to 80%, have stepped into the breach. In Marikana, many are trapped in a vicious cycle: they work to try and make a living wage, then take on debt to cover the shortfall, then work to try and service that debt and stave off lenders, then take on more debt to cover the shortfall, and so on, all to ensure that work goes on—and even more debt can be obtained in the future. Nearly one in seven miners nationwide has been served with a legal garnishee order, which allows creditors to deduct a portion of a worker's earnings directly from their employer and reduces take-home pay yet further.

Miners must live close to their shafts, but only a small fraction of the labour force at firms like Lonmin is provided with housing in formal, company-built accommodation. The rest are given a 'living out

allowance'—money that is invariably sent back to families—and left to find homes amid the squalor of informal settlements like Nkaneng, which cling to the perimeter fences of mine shafts like straggly clusters of limpets on a mother ship. The nature of these communities—their isolated location and poverty, the relatively low levels of education among their population, their complete reliance on major multinational corporations that are capable of switching capital and jobs in and out of the area with little notice—accentuates the grossly uneven distribution of power and security on the platinum belt. Thembisa needs to plan several days ahead if she wants to ride a microbus to the nearest city; Lonmin's operations involve the movement of tens of thousands of dollars an hour, and span international borders.

Given that corporate profits are predicated on the existence of migrant labour communities, and to a large extent upon their vulnerability, campaigners have long argued that mining houses have a duty of care towards the people living within them. Little has been done by the mining houses to suggest that they agree. 'The lack of clean running water, sanitation, storm-water drainage, electricity, schools, clinics and any other amenities make Nkaneng as inhospitable a residential site to reproduce labour power as any other in South Africa,' argues Patrick Bond, a political economist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 'yet Lonmin's approach to the community's troubles [has been] tokenistic.' Lonmin claims to run a corporate social responsibility programme, and the company does produce glossy sustainability updates at regular intervals. But the Bench Marks Foundation, a church-owned organisation that monitors major companies based in South Africa and has scrutinised these reports, says that Lonmin's ethical claims are largely baseless, and calls the living conditions of its staff 'appalling'. In a series of investigations published between 2008 and 2013, Bench Marks catalogued the social harm inflicted by Lonmin on settlements like Nkaneng. Their list included insufficient worker housing, dust and pollutant emissions, water contamination, and the deliberate fudging of official statistics and figures in an effort to portray the company in a better light. '"Sustainability" loses all meaning when the corporation does as it pleases and there are no consequences,' concludes one Bench Marks paper. 'What we find in practice is a company intent on extracting minerals at the cost of communities' health and welfare.' Lonmin responded by challenging some of the Bench Mark findings, and insist that the company's operations 'have a positive impact on our employees'.

Nkaneng settlement nudges up against Lonmin's Rowland shaft, named after the corporation's most famous chief executive, the British business tycoon 'Tiny' Rowland. Rowland, who ran the company from 1962 until the early 1990s, gained control of many African industries during the twentieth century. His business empire was once described by the British Conservative prime minister Edward Heath as the 'unpleasant and unacceptable face of capitalism'. Rowland is often likened to his nineteenth-century imperial predecessor Cecil John Rhodes, a white man in Africa who also found material fortune at the nexus of colonial exploitation, mineral extraction and ruthless ambition. On the patch of grass where the Rowland shaft meets Thembisa's Nkaneng, there stands a faded Lonmin advertising hoarding. 'Our Values: Respect for Each Other', it states.

It was whilst sitting below this advertising hoarding on a bright May morning and leafing through a sheaf of Lonmin-related literature that I came across the following excerpt from a conversation between a mine manager on the platinum belt and a local community member, recounted near the end of a Bench Marks report. The pair were discussing whether the behaviour of mining houses had deteriorated to a degree that necessitated government intervention. The mine manager, unsurprisingly, demurred. 'Our relationship with the community is like a marriage, we must not get third parties to spoil our relationship,' he argued, adding, 'When there are problems in a relationship we must try and resolve them.' The community member took issue with the analogy. 'The marriage you are referring to is problematic, because we woke up one morning … to find this mining company in our bed,' he replied. 'We were violated because there was no consultation, it was sex without consent—it was rape.' The mine manager laughed. 'There is nothing like rape in traditional weddings or marriage,' he joked. 'The wife has to do what the husband wants.'

Below this exchange, the report's author had inserted, without comment, a quote from a letter written by Cecil John Rhodes in 1877. 'Africa is lying ready for us,' it read. 'It is our duty to take it.'

“Are we going to be killed today?”

This was the Marikana from which strikes erupted in the summer of 2012, by miners demanding a fairer wage. And it was close to this patch of grass that Thembisa was walking on 16 August when she first heard the gunshots. ‘I saw workers running in every direction,’ she recalls quietly. ‘I remember those moments so well. And I cry so much.’

Along with a number of women in Nkaneng, Thembisa had been making her way to a rocky outcrop just south of the Rowland shaft in a display of solidarity with protesting workers, who had been camping out there for several days. The hill, or ‘koppie’, had been chosen for occupation because it was one of the few stretches of public land in the area. Everywhere else, including a nearby sports stadium where workers initially tried to gather before being removed by private Lonmin security guards, lay under corporate ownership. Among the miners up on the koppie that afternoon was Lungisile Madwantasi, a Lonmin rock drill operator, who had been watching the build-up of security forces in the area with growing alarm over the previous few days.

‘We weren’t looking to fight with anyone, but from there we thought we would be able to defend ourselves,’ Lungisile tells me. Two years later, the two of us are standing amid a clump of small trees just north of ‘Marikana Mountain’, as the koppie became known, on the exact spot where Lungisile was felled.

Lungisile now walks with a crutch, slowly and painfully. He rarely makes eye contact. He is over six feet tall and powerfully built. The restrictions to his mobility appear be a source of immense internal struggle, both physical and mental. Even when he engages with other people, it feels like the thirty-one year old is screened off by an invisible barrier. This is the first time he has returned to the site of his shooting since it happened, and for a long time we stand motionless as he takes in the landscape without words. Today the scrub feels eerily quiet, the only movement a small knot of sparrows darting playfully in and around the mottled boulders at our feet. To our south lies the Lonmin mine. To the west is Marikana town. And to our east squats Nkaneng, its shacks commingling with the bases of huge electricity pylons whose shoulders ferry energy day and night into the forever-hungry bellies of the platinum shafts, while the homes at their feet sit uncoupled from the grid.

On the morning of the massacre, from his perch up on the koppie, Lungisile watched as ‘hippos’—armoured police vans—swarmed in perplexing numbers down below, and officers began to construct a line of razor wire around him and his colleagues at the bottom of the hill. The miners were agitated. When strike leaders approached officers and asked them to leave a gap in the razor wire so that the workers could depart peacefully to their homes, they were ignored. ‘I saw the officers putting on their bullet-proofs like they were gearing up for a war,’ remembers Lungisile. ‘What came into my mind was the question: “are we actually going to be killed today?”’

Fearful, the miners separated into small groups and began descending from the koppie to avoid being sealed in. Video footage that came to light many months later shows them walking non-threateningly away from the security forces, in the direction of Nkaneng. At that point, the police opened fire. Confused workers scattered in all directions, including some who fled back towards the police lines at the bottom of the hill where armed officers, and a news camera—the one that captured those fateful sixty-nine seconds of footage—were waiting. Others, panicked, ran the other way towards a second, smaller koppie nearby, their route flanked by police vehicles and tracked by police helicopter. Lungisile was among them. ‘We were many, but as we ran I saw other workers shot around me. There was so much commotion happening, you could hear gunshots from all directions, and a big water cannon that was splitting us up. I kept running, but as I ran I could see people sleeping [dead] everywhere.’

When Lungisile first sensed something striking him on the head, he assumed it was a stone and continued running. Then his legs gave way. ‘I fell down there, on my left arm,’ he continues, pointing towards the bottom of a bush. ‘When I realised I was hit, I thought I was dead. I couldn’t feel my arm, and I was bleeding from my nose and mouth. I was face down, inhaling the dirt, I couldn’t breathe.’ What followed was a nightmare thirty minutes as Lungisile lay rooted to the ground, unable to move and stuck in a terrifying soundscape of bangs, haphazard cries and the ceaseless whirring of chopper blades in the skies above. ‘I could hear people screaming as they were beaten up, and I could hear gunshots, there was torture all around,’ says Lungisile. ‘They [the police] were lighting their faces up, shining flashlights into their eyes to see if they were dead or not. I saw many dead around me, there were so many people dead here.’

Lungisile spent the following few months in a hospital bed, missing the funerals of friends and colleagues. Doctors have told him it is too dangerous to remove the bullet still lodged in his skull. It is likely to remain there for the rest of his life.

Today, thanks to the emergence of critical phone and email transcripts and the uncovering of fresh camera recordings, we now know that far from the police opening fire that afternoon as a defensive manoeuvre, a decision to end the miners' strike by force had been taken several days beforehand. We now know that on the morning of the massacre, several thousand rounds of live semi-automatic rifle ammunition were delivered to frontline police officers at Marikana, and that four mortuary vans were summoned to the site in preparation for what was to follow. We now know that once the shooting began, police actively chased weaponless, retreating miners to the second koppie, next to where Lungisile was hit. We now know that seventeen miners' corpses were found at this second location, and that evidence suggests many were killed while trying to back away from or surrender to officers. Some appear to have been shot in the head from very close range. We now know that some members of the security forces went on to plant arms on the dead bodies in a crude attempt to cover up their actions, and that others laughed and congratulated each other as they picked over the scene. 'You fucked him up!' said one policeman to a colleague. Another officer derided a dead or injured miner as a 'pussy'.

'This was not public order policing,' concluded one examination of what happened that afternoon. 'This was warfare.'

But most disturbingly of all, we now know something else as well about this 'warfare', something that helps explain why the events of 16 August 2012 unfolded as they did and the context in which they were able to take place. We now know that the mass killings at Marikana were to some extent the product of a specific set of relations between multinational capital, state authority and the official organs of worker representation in the mines. We now know that the interests of those entities had become disconcertingly blurred on the platinum belt at the expense of people like Thembisa and Lungisile, just as they have become blurred across South Africa as a whole. And what we now know raises difficult questions for us all.

In democratic societies, police forces are assumed to serve a government that represents the will of its people, and are accountable to them. Neither ministers nor security forces can function as private lobbyists or armed militias on behalf of particular groups or businesses. At Marikana, the fallacy of those assumptions was laid bare. Private discussions held between Lonmin executives and senior police chiefs during the build up to the massacre reveal a situation in which the boundaries between material corporate interests and responsible policing had all but collapsed: far from the police force being a neutral element on the scene, Lonmin often appeared to be issuing orders to police commissioners, and making tactical decisions about the state's security response to the strike themselves. At one point the company even volunteered to lend its own staff and a helicopter to the police—an offer that was accepted. Cyril Ramaphosa, a former mine labour leader who has gone on to become one of South Africa's most powerful business magnates and a senior member of the ANC, was on Lonmin's executive board at the time of the massacre. Copies of his emails indicate that he was privately using his high-level political connections to characterise the striking miners like Lungisile as 'dastardly criminal' and calling for 'concomitant action to address the situation'. Less than twenty-four hours after Ramaphosa dispatched that message, thirty-four miners were killed.

Understanding why figures like Ramaphosa, who straddled the loftiest realms of business and state, were so terrified by the 2012 Marikana miners' strike—and so determined to break it—requires an understanding of the political backdrop against which the strike was taking place. A key factor was the position of South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which, since its formation in the early 1980s, had been the most important organ of labour power in the industry. NUM's mammoth, coordinated work stoppages, led by Ramaphosa, peppered the dying years of white rule and helped draw apartheid to a close. But by August 2012, NUM stock among workers on the platinum belt had plummeted to an all-time low. Many miners viewed the union's highly paid leadership not as a champion of labour rights, but as part of the same establishment circle as their bosses—shop stewards in the mine shafts earned three times more than their colleagues, and general secretary Frans Baleni commanded a salary of $160,000 a year. The union's role, it seemed, was no longer to stand rock solid behind its members during disputes with management, but instead to pacify and rein members in whenever the interests of the

mining houses were threatened. In 2011, when miners laid down their tools during a wildcat strike at Karee, another Lonmin mineshaft in the Marikana region, Baleni advised Lonmin executives to sack all 9,000 of the workers involved. That was not the only occasion on which direct action by workers was thwarted by the union's top brass, and workers were beginning to discern a pattern. NUM has traditionally enjoyed top-tier membership of the national trade union federation COSATU, which comprises one third of South Africa's ruling 'tripartite alliance' (along with the South African Communist Party and the ANC). The union therefore has had close ties with Zuma's government and supplied it with significant political support. That same government is interlinked with figures like Ramaphosa, who has made a great deal of money from the mining industry. With those in the higher echelons of NUM seemingly co-opted by the very entities they were ostensibly tasked with standing up to, in the aftermath of the Karee dispute some of Marikana's miners had all but given up on the union, and began organising for themselves, some semi-clandestinely, others more openly.

By July 2012, anger over pay was mounting once again and at many shafts, grassroots democratic strike committees were formed, with leaders elected to negotiate with Lonmin on the employees' behalf. But over the following weeks, whenever these committee leaders attempted to speak with Lonmin management they were rebuffed: bosses told them that NUM was the only legitimate outlet for complaints, and any labour demands had to be routed through the official union. Yet when miners attempted to meet and discuss the matter with NUM, they were also rejected. On 11 August, five days before the massacre, up to 3,000 miners marched to the local NUM office to call on their formal labour representatives to take up the wage demands and negotiate with Lonmin for a better pay deal. In response, NUM security guards opened fire on the crowd. When a similar march was attempted the following day, private Lonmin security guards prevented the miners from reaching their own union's offices. In the clashes that ensued over the following days, at least eight people were killed, including several miners, two police officers and two security guards.

NUM's role in resisting the Marikana miners' campaign for a pay rise went further than obstructing negotiations with Lonmin management. Remarkably, once the workers issued a strike call and set up camp on Marikana mountain, the trade union deployed its own buses to ferry other staff into the mine shafts in an effort to break the strike. Later, when NUM president, Senzeni Zokwana, addressed strikers at the koppie and called on them to end their protest, he arrived in an armoured police hippo. It was a visual expression of just how far the distance between Marikana's working class and the labour body paid to represent it now stretched, and up on the koppie workers were appalled. In light of the compromised position of NUM, a rival and more radical labour syndicate for miners, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), had started to attract some supporters in the area. AMCU did not organise the strike—indeed its leader, Joseph Mathunjwa, also called on workers to vacate Marikana mountain in the run-up to the massacre—but nor was the younger union as hostile to it as NUM. Unlike NUM, AMCU was not affiliated with COSATU, and no ally of the ANC. For both the mining houses and government ministers, the prospect of any mass shift in labour loyalty on the platinum belt from NUM to AMCU was a cause for grave concern. And just as the miners' faith in NUM was dissipating, so too was trust in the state, and specifically the ANC, which seemed, at least in the eyes of miners, more concerned about the welfare of Lonmin shareholders than that of the company's workers. In the weeks leading up to the massacre, Julius Malema, who was expelled from the ANC following a battle with President Zuma and the party leadership, had been making political capital out of unrest in the region and calling publicly for the mines to be brought into workers' hands. The increasingly tense situation in Marikana in the summer of 2012 illuminated the matrix of political power that structured life on the platinum belt, which bound Lonmin, the state and NUM together and precluded the possibility of meaningful advances for workers. But it also brought to the fore some institutional alternatives. 'NUM, the government, Lonmin … They are all on the same side,' says Bob Ndude, the Lonmin rock drill operator. 'That's what we realised. They are the same, one person.'

We now know that sentiments like that, and the prospect of both AMCU and Malema gaining popularity on the platinum belt—a trend surely likely to intensify if the miners' strike were successful—were at the forefront of establishment thinking as security responses to the strike were weighed up. In a phone conversation—a transcript

of which is now in the public domain—between the regional police commissioner, Lieutenant General Zukiswa Mbombo, and a Lonmin executive, Bernard Mokoena, two days before the massacre, Mokoena speaks extensively about the dangers of AMCU and insists that 'we want people arrested'. Mbombo makes reference to conversations she has had with government ministers and the pressure that is being brought to bear by 'politically high' individuals, citing Cyril Ramaphosa in particular. She goes on to mention the presence of Julius Malema on the platinum belt and his calls for nationalisation of the mines, stressing that the strike 'has got a serious political connotation that we need to take into account, but which we need to find a way of defusing. Hence I just told these guys that we need to act such that we kill this thing.' Mokoena replies, 'Immediately, yes,' before going on to insist on the need for a 'D-Day'. That language was repeated in the police control room just hours before the massacre. Mbombo declared that, 'Today, we are ending this matter'. Police spokesman Captain Dennis Adriao confirmed, 'Today, unfortunately, is D-Day'.

When Lungisile decided to join the Marikana strike and ascend the koppie, he thought he was asking for a living wage. In reality he was threatening a co-dependent comfort zone of economic privilege that has benefited a narrow strata of the new South Africa and excluded the majority. Rather than negotiate with Lungisile and his colleagues, and risk emboldening elements that stood outside of the existing establishment forces on the platinum belt, both Lonmin and NUM chose to ignore them. Rather than treating the strike as a common and entirely rational labour dispute, the police, seemingly under pressure from individuals high up within the government, chose to unleash a militarised assault against it. The massacre was only possible because of the political framework in which it took place and the way that framework rendered a demand for a higher salary into something far more consequential. It is doubtful that Zukiswa Mbombo, Bernard Mokoena or even Cyril Ramaphosa wanted miners to die. But deaths were the logical conclusion of a purposefully adopted, highly politicised strategy of prioritising corporate interests over worker grievances and casting Lonmin miners as enemies of the state. 'These people were hardly occupying some strategic point, some vital highway, a key city square,' argues Ronnie Kasrils, a former ANC freedom fighter and cabinet minister who has become a stern critic of the government. 'They were not holding hostages. They were not even occupying mining property. Why risk such a manoeuvre other than to drive the strikers back to work at all costs on behalf of the bosses who were anxious to resume profit-making operations? They drove these guys to the death line where the police were waiting to mow them down like rabbits. This was premeditation, for murder most foul … and that's why we must always be angry.'

In the aftermath of the killings, as police overran Nkaneng and arrested hundreds more miners, eventually charging 270 of them with the murder of their own colleagues under an obscure apartheid-era 'common purpose' law (the charges were later dropped), the narrative of savage, pre-modern workers forcing the police to empty their weapons in self-defence wormed its way through government corridors and newspaper front pages alike. 'Following extensive and unsuccessful negotiations by SAPS [South African Police Service] members to disarm and disperse a heavily armed group of illegal gatherers at a hilltop close to Lonmin Mine, near Rustenburg in the North West Province, the South African Police Service was viciously attacked by the group, using a variety of weapons, including firearms. The Police, in order to protect their own lives and in self-defence, were forced to engage the group with force. This resulted in several individuals being fatally wounded, and others injured,' reads a statement, still on a government information website. Domestic media headlines over the following days included, 'Marikana strikers may have been "in a muti-induced trance"' (*Business Day*); 'Magic, potions, blood, death …' (*Sunday World*); and '"Police had to use force"' (*The Citizen*).

And then, of course, there is the video. Those sixty-nine seconds of footage that flew across the world, and which, once the official explanation for the shootings had been constructed and a particular interpretation of events cemented in the public gaze, appeared, frame by frame, to bear those headlines out. The state's version would have us see that the recording begins with police officers standing still, in a line, calm and professional. When the scrub in front of them begins to blur with motion, they crouch defensively and point their guns towards it. We can't see the individual faces of those who burst out towards the camera lens—they are too fast, and too numerous—but we sense the collective threat that they convey. The police officers begin walking backwards, away from whatever it is that is bearing down on them,

but when it keeps coming they clutch at their triggers. After a flurry of shots, an officer raises his arm and yells out 'ceasefire'. Others quickly take up the cry, and the barrage dies away. After some moments, the camera zooms in on a pile of largely lifeless bodies, as static and silent as the trees that surround them. One man, in a green jacket, is still breathing. Before we can see any more detail, the video fades to black.

Of course a different camera angle, shot from a video recorder that was not embedded behind police lines, would—and ultimately did—reveal a different story altogether. Perhaps if more journalists had spoken to miners themselves about what unfolded that afternoon, those sixty-nine seconds would have been deciphered differently and the headlines splashed across the newspapers would have been less misleading. In fact, out of all the sources cited in the initial media coverage of the massacre, 61% came from the business community, mining companies, police, government or NUM. Just 3% were workers.

But conventional lenses are so much easier for a privileged audience—for those not stuck on the wrong side of South Africa's post-apartheid 'success story', those whose interests and voices command the greatest weight in public discourse—to accept. After all, so many other dominant narratives—in this case the notion that poor black men are unsophisticated, violent and threatening, and that the forces of law and order are inherently fair and reasonable—seem to intersect with and reinforce them. The stories told through cameras embedded behind elite lines are, for those that benefit from them, suffused with common sense; they appear inherently logical, even when they are constructed out of little more than lies and illusions.

The Marikana massacre is the latest in a long lineage of mass killings by the state that have defined South Africa, from Pondoland to Bisho to Sharpeville and Soweto. It was a human catastrophe. But since it compels us all to interrogate our dependence, not only at moments of crisis and tragedy but also every day, on conventional lenses that explain the political and economic structures under which such crises and tragedies can occur, it is also an opportunity. 'As a species, we are teleological—we make sense of ourselves, and the world around us, through storytelling,' says Catherine Kennedy, director of the South African History Archive. The tale of South Africa over the past two decades has been one of epic transformation, as apartheid gave way to liberation and liberation to democracy. Marikana forces us to ask who wrote this tale, and how much of it is true.

The people shall govern

In January 1990, a month before his release from jail, Nelson Mandela wrote a note to his supporters clarifying the ANC's economic philosophy. 'The nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industries is the policy of the ANC,' he confirmed, 'and the change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable.' Within four years, just such a change had occurred.

As in many other parts of the world, the potency of South African neoliberalism has been derived from its dual function as economic theory *and* political project. On the one hand, it operates as a notion that societies and economies are best served when capital is disembedded from any form of state or popular control, when no limits are placed on private accumulation, and when all forms of goods, services and human interactions can be commodified and traded—when sovereignty, to put it another way, lies ultimately with the market. But at the same time neoliberalism in South Africa has been a programme designed to concentrate financial resources in the hands of the few, by opening up new financial landscapes and opportunities for wealth accumulation at the top. Despite the opposition of theoretical neoliberalism to state involvement in the economy, this second function depends on an active partnership between the state and socio-economic elites in which the former helps create new markets for the latter, insulates their activity from popular pressure and disciplines citizens who dissent.

Since being road-tested in General Pinochet's Chile and implemented on a much broader scale by Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the US throughout the 1980s, neoliberalism has undergone a process of democracy-proofing that reached its zenith in South Africa. Part of that process has involved redefining neoliberalism not as a contested economic theory or factional ideology, but rather as an uncontested reality, indistinguishable from modernity, freedom and common sense. Anybody challenging the orthodoxy is therefore rendered an extremist. 'There is no alternative,' was Thatcher's slogan as she drove a battering ram through many of the UK's collectively held social goods. Another part of the process has been the hollowing out of government sovereignty in neoliberal states, so that popular demands for social justice become impossible to implement. Over the past thirty years, in both the global north and the global south,

vast areas of government activity have been hived off into the hands of 'technocrats', supposedly apolitical experts freed from the chains of public pressure who think and work entirely within neoliberal strictures. This shrinking of the territory upon which governments can take action and electorates can exert any influence has left states even more dependent on 'market confidence' to maintain their economic wellbeing. Having surrendered many key policymaking tools, governments find themselves vulnerable to market discipline so that any move away from the neoliberal orthodoxy leaves the country vulnerable to capital flight, which devastates jobs, incomes and trade. The result has been that across the planet, neoliberal practice and soaring inequality have spread hand in hand. Since the late 1970s, the share of national income held by the top 1% of the population has tripled in many countries, including Britain and the USA. The share of the top 0.1% has quadrupled. We now live in a world in which the eighty richest people control more wealth than the bottom half of the global population combined—that's 3.5 billion people. By next year, the planet's wealthiest 1% will own more than the rest of the 99% put together.

In the early 1990s, Francis Fukuyama, a neoconservative American academic, published his famous thesis proclaiming economic liberalism as 'the end of history'. At the same time, however, South Africa—awkwardly for neoliberals—was making a history of its own. In the long struggle against apartheid, millions of citizens like Mazula, Thembisa and Lungisile had acquired expectations for liberation that went far beyond an end to formal segregation and the chance to put a cross on a ballot paper once every five years. After generations of colonial exploitation and racial abuse, black South Africans sought economic security, human dignity and the right to shape their futures by exercising a collective democratic will. The liberation they were granted proved to be very different. Formal political rights were there, but little else. Today Mazula, Thembisa and Lungisile's ability to confront inequality and economic exclusion is, at least within formal channels, no greater than it was under apartheid. Just as in many other countries in Africa, and all over the world, direct imperialism and racial domination have been replaced by an empire of capital that structures and delimits all of our lives, and which, as Marikana proved, will go to extraordinary lengths to defend its hegemony.

By the time Mandela emerged from jail, this empire of capital was rampant. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic liberalisation of China and the spread of financial deregulation in the west had boosted neoliberal confidence to such a degree that, on a global level, alternative economic philosophies were disappearing fast from the mainstream political lexicon. South Africa, suddenly front and centre of the world stage, had the potential to be different. Seeded within the arduous and painful battle for freedom were radical visions of meaningful wealth redistribution, with economic production and mineral resources being placed under the control of the people. But elites, both local and international, had no desire to see this now hugely influential nation buck the broader trend. Throughout the transition period, as the ANC was legalised and negotiations began on the creation of a procedurally democratic electoral system, both the outgoing National Party and advisors from international financial institutions sought to restrict the incoming government's room for economic manoeuvre by tying the country to global trade agreements, 'depoliticising' crucial policymaking areas, and committing the Rainbow Nation to long-term structural adjustment reforms that left its economic health reliant on the whims of financial speculators and private investors. The 1955 Freedom Charter proclaims that 'The People Shall Govern'. But once Mandela's party arrived in power, the domain over what governance was possible had shrunk beyond all recognition. By 1996, economic liberalisation, involving not just the maintenance of mine ownership in private hands but also the privatisation of many other industries, plus the dismantling of social safety nets, had been formally codified in the form of the 'Growth, Employment and Redistribution' (GEAR) programme, which committed the government to cutting back spending, selling off assets and relaxing controls on capital. Liberation as political, social and economic empowerment for the masses had morphed into liberation for market forces alone to truly run free. By the turn of the millennium, the ANC's original economic vision had undergone such a thorough reversal that Mandela himself was able to declare, with pride, 'I am sure that Cecil John Rhodes would have given his approval to this effort to make the South African economy of the early twenty-first century appropriate and fit for its time.'

Although the global context played a major role in transforming the ANC from a movement of freedom fighters into an instrument

of market fundamentalism, the party's evolution was never merely a matter of Mandela's well-intentioned negotiators being outfought or hoodwinked by their counterparts on the other side of the table. The ANC comprised many different factions, and the party's conservative wing had always looked askance at the more revolutionary tendencies displayed by some colleagues. During the 1980s, instinctive neoliberals within the party like Thabo Mbeki—the future prime minister who, upon the launch of the GEAR programme, labelled himself a Thatcherite—had gained the upper hand against leftists like Chris Hani, so that by the time the ANC assumed power much of its leadership were already immersed in an economically right-wing tradition. Of course this drift, from radicalism under a state of insurgency to conservatism once the state has been seized, is a process hardly unique to the ANC. Throughout history, emerging political forces have harnessed the profoundly transformative hopes of the masses who support them to propel themselves into government, only to contain and dampen such hopes as soon as power is achieved. Once party leaders are inside the state and well placed to take advantage of economic opportunities, the existing mechanisms of wealth creation and distribution begin to look a lot more attractive. In his classic analysis of postcolonial societies, Frantz Fanon describes the historic mission of the bourgeoisie as having 'nothing to do with transforming the nation: it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism rampant though camouflaged.' It is undoubtedly the case that some among the ANC leadership defined themselves in these terms, and that they were able to win out over those who, like most of the movement's supporters, interpreted freedom from apartheid as something with more depth than a trip to the polling station once every half-decade. 'Releasing active, assertive and sustained popular energies from below, and from an increasingly empowered citizenry, was the last thing a vanguardist, increasingly conservative ANC was actually interested in,' concludes Canadian academic and South Africa specialist John Saul. 'Now, some decades after the fall of the most visible forms of colonial and racial domination, it has become ever apparent just how narrow the definition of "liberation" has been permitted to become.'

The consequence of South Africa's neoliberal turn was that democratic freedom, even as it was being feted across the planet, arrived with enough manacles to preclude any meaningful opportunity for ordinary people, including miners in Marikana, to exercise much democracy or freedom at all. An $850m debt package from the IMF forbade the government from imposing any controls on currency, enabling the executives of large corporations to move their operations outside the country in an instant if macroeconomic policies didn't work in their favour (diamond giants De Beers did exactly this upon Mandela's release). Water provision in certain municipalities was among the many state services flogged off to investors, with half of the proceeds devoted to servicing debt acquired by the apartheid regime. Public-private partnerships, a set of arrangements allowing private companies to run public services at a profit whilst leaving the state to retain all the risk, proliferated. Government subsidies for key industries like automobiles and textiles were drawn to a close, sparking huge job losses, and reform of land ownership—a key plank of white power under the apartheid system—was checked by the new constitution. The distribution of free drugs to help stem the country's AIDS epidemic was prohibited owing to the terms of intellectual property protections guaranteed by the World Trade Organisation. The widely heralded Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC), set up to expose the atrocities of apartheid South Africa, largely ignored the structural economic inequalities the apartheid system had engendered and instead focused on specific personalities who had facilitated torture. The TRC's modest suggestion of a 1% 'solidarity' tax on multinational corporations, to help fund the construction of a fairer nation, was swiftly dismissed by the ANC as 'antibusiness'.

By the 2000s, all but the richest South Africans had seen a decline in real wages. For the poorest 10%, take-home pay has halved. Meanwhile the wealthiest decile have seen their share of national income rise by more than 50%. The winners of South African liberation have been the major players of multinational capital, the domestic white business elite and a limited but well-connected strata of the black upper-middle class who have joined that elite in the boardroom. This latter process has been greatly facilitated by the government's Black Economic Empowerment programme (BEE), which enabled ANC bigwigs like Cyril Ramaphosa to conjure an astronomical fortune out of the hazy juncture between private corporations and the state. The losers can be found in cities, townships and villages throughout the country, on the wrong side of heavily guarded security fences, on the

end of police teargas canisters, and among the shacks and dirt roads of Nkaneng and hundreds of mining settlements just like it. Amid the countless episodes of corruption—of cash doled out for political influence that is then channelled towards the acquisition of cash, of the lobbying of state office-holders by private interests that want pieces of the state put out to tender, and of the officer-holders of state securing those tenders for friends, families and themselves—neoliberal South Africa has followed the rational destiny of market fundamentalism. It has reached the point where democratic government and the patronage complex it affords has itself become little more than a financial commodity to be jockeyed over, traded and parcelled up for the acquisition of private wealth, a rentier rainbow state extracting tithes out of its very evisceration from within. Nothing epitomises this reality more clearly than the fabulously inequitable minerals-energy complex and the platinum belt, where the triumph of elite interests over the collective welfare of South Africa's population is starkest and ingrained on the land itself.

Just south-east of Marikana lies the Hartbeesport Dam, water from which once irrigated a huge swathe of fertile farmland in the region but is now contaminated by e-coli due to effluent run-off from nearby shack settlements lacking formal sanitation in the surrounding hills. On the banks of the dam stands Kosmos village, one of the country's most exclusive gated communities. Its private villas, heated swimming pools and modern sewage system are all serviced, exclusively, by the inhabitants of those same shack settlements. North-east of Marikana is the region's municipal headquarters, where officials are under investigation for filching public money via the manipulation of business tenders. To the west is the city of Rustenberg, where a local councillor turned corruption whistle-blower was murdered at the behest of the ANC mayor in 2009. In Marikana town-centre, signs can be found for JIC Mining Services, a temporary worker-outsourcing firm that enables companies like Lonmin to procure miners without affording them long-term job security or benefits packages. It has become the largest labour brokerage on the platinum belt, and is co-owned by the president's son, Duduzane Zuma, whose taste for Porsches, Chryslers and super-bikes is well documented by the press. Nearby are the rival microfinance and loan outlets that exist to provide needy miners with high-cost debt. One such outlet, Ubank, is jointly owned by the National Union of Mineworkers and the South African Chamber of Mines. Among the main investors of another, Capitec, are several fundraisers closely connected with the ANC. Access roads from here lead to the mine shafts and offices of Lonmin, a company that the World Bank, one of the key drivers of neoliberal reforms in South Africa, congratulated on its work to 'help improve people's lives' in 2007, and rewarded with $150m of 'strategic community investment'. According to a press release issued by the bank's investment arm, Lonmin 'is at the forefront of its industry in working with local communities to enhance the long-term value of its business operations and to ensure wider distribution of benefits from mining.' On the other side of the railway line, between the dirt road and Nkaneng, is the koppie upon which thirty-four small white crosses are now placed on 16 August every year.

'This is the new South Africa, the democratic South Africa,' says Lungisile, gesturing around us after recounting the horror of his shooting. 'And the people who have done this still haven't been arrested.' He didn't say whether the people he was referring to were the policemen, the businessmen, the politicians or the international financial institutions that assisted them.

When democracy gets filtered through the prism of neoliberalism, what choices are really left? In May 2014, a few days before the general election, I attended the ANC's final Siyanqoba campaign rally at Soweto's Soccer City Stadium, at which the president addressed the nation. It was a riot of colour, confetti and setpiece motorbike stunts. During Zuma's rambling, static speech, though, thousands of flag-bedecked ANC supporters quietly streamed out of the stadium. Meanwhile in the corporate boxes, business leaders shook hands and picked over the lavish buffet. 'I sometimes wonder about the extent to which this is all some kind of bizarre continuity,' says Catherine Kennedy. 'Everything about apartheid was a masquerade. Now we've gone from one semblance of a democratic state to another semblance of a democratic state. Words like transparency, accountability, they've become meaningless … It's a mimicry: we've traded an old grand narrative for a new one, and yet we haven't interrogated the frame.'

In many mining communities, South Africans have tired of the stagecraft. At Bekkersdal, just west of Johannesburg, the biggest local employer is Gold Fields, one of the largest multinational mining houses

in the world. Conditions here are similar to those in Nkaneng: raw sewage runs alongside many shacks, and much-publicised government investments in the settlement, paid for out of public money, have delivered nothing more than a pair of rusting goalposts and a brick factory that has never opened its doors. When Gold Fields employees demanded a living wage, the company's CEO Nick Holland labelled their demands 'crazy', adding, 'We can't continue giving double-digit increases when productivity is declining, that's not sustainable.' The previous year he accepted a personal salary raise of $1.1m. In the run-up to the 2014 election campaign, ANC officials were chased out of Bekkersdal by residents. The party's provincial head, Nomvula Mokonyane, retorted that they did not want the settlement's 'dirty' votes anyway.

In Marikana, too, the ANC was forced to keep a low profile during election season. A planned campaign stop by Zuma in Nkaneng was cancelled at the last moment. The reason, according to the provincial ANC head, was to avoid providing 'anarchists with a platform to advance their agenda.' But what alternative to the ruling party was really on offer on the ballot paper? The country's largest formal opposition, the Democratic Alliance, are even more neoliberal than the ANC. The EFF and Julius Malema have adopted the language of economic revolution, but rather than critiquing the architecture of neoliberalism their vision is couched in racial and nationalistic terms, with blame pinned conspiratorially on foreign tycoons. The party, funded in part by major businessmen who have fallen out with Zuma, is organised on strictly hierarchical lines. Malema holds the title of commander-in-chief, and despite the EFF's populist tone there is little sense of any kind of grassroots social movement behind it, something that would elevate the party beyond the realm of internecine elite politics, where the same old faces elbow each other out of the way whilst chasing a lucrative share of the state pie.

Despite these flaws, the EFF has disassociated itself sufficiently from the ANC to appeal to Thembisa, Lungilise and many others like them on the platinum belt. 'To succeed in this South Africa you have to become an oppressor of black people, and the people we thought would give us our freedom have done that,' Thembisa told me one afternoon over lunch at a Marikana braai shack. 'Malema was the first one who came here after the massacre, he stood with us and he wants to bring change.' Malema's presence in Marikana, when set alongside the ANC's perceived absence—or rather their assumed place on the other side of the mine security fences, alongside Lonmin and NUM—proved to be a potent campaign tool for the EFF. At Freedom Park, another mining community a few miles north-west of Nkaneng, I stood at the back of a mobile stage and observed Malema, introduced by a compere clad head-to-toe in velvet red, elicit whoops and hollers from a crowd of hundreds in front of us who danced and filmed themselves as armoured police vans watched warily from a distance. 'The heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle didn't die for you to live in a matchbox home with no flushing toilets,' Malema yelled into the microphone, pacing back and forth to wild applause. 'Twenty years into our democracy, children are still without food and sleeping at night with empty stomachs. The children of dead mineworkers are still asking when their fathers are coming home!'

Back in Nkaneng, Malema's message struck a chord. 'Now it is over, the democracy,' Primrose Sonti, a local ANC member turned women's community activist and now local EFF parliamentary candidate, told me outside her shack on election day. 'I just know the name, democracy is not something I can see. Maybe others can see it, I don't know. But here in Marikana there is none. Juju [Malema] is bringing it again.' Sonti was one of twenty-five EFF representatives who made it to the National Assembly after the votes were counted. Her contingent has been repeatedly sanctioned and ejected from the chamber for disrupting proceedings and chanting insults at government figures. Were the EFF ever to achieve real power, though, what changes could they effect through formal channels in a country now so dependent on market forces? And what chance would they have of securing power anyway, when most political debate is framed by a media that by and large portrays anyone articulating ideas outside of the neoliberal paradigm as fanatic or a fool? As in many other parts of the world, neoliberal democracy in South Africa is proving to be a choiceless democracy: its range of legitimate discussion so paltry, the policy options offered to its people so similar. One organisation, Abahlali baseMjondolo, a national movement of shackdwellers, has termed 27 April, the anniversary of the first free elections in South Africa, as 'Unfreedom Day'. The struggle to ensure black South Africans enjoyed the right to vote was a monumental achievement—that, surely, is

incontestable. But this achievement has only afforded most black South Africans political influence over a tight and uncontested electoral landscape, rendering the expression of a common will, at least through official channels, largely trivial. That, surely, is incontestable too.

By the time results filtered in from South Africa's major cities the day after the vote, Zuma's re-election to the presidency had already been confirmed. Over the following few weeks, Cyril Ramaphosa, who had, in the aftermath of the Marikana massacre, been appointed deputy president of the ANC, assumed the same office for the country as a whole. Baleka Mbete, the ANC's chairperson who has been accused of taking a $2.2 million bribe from Gold Fields to facilitate the granting of a mine licence (an independent report commissioned by the company concluded she was guilty of corruption, though Mbete denies wrongdoing), was appointed Speaker of the National Assembly. During her speakership, she has done all she can to shield Zuma from any sanctions related to alleged financial malpractice over the expenditure of more than $20 million of public money to add a swimming pool, amphitheatre and chicken coop to the president's private home.

And so South African procedural democracy rolls on. In Marikana, meanwhile, residents have found other ways to exercise some real political choices of their own.

Rise of the Marikanas

At Wonderkop Stadium, the sports field close to Nkaneng where Marikana miners tried and failed to gather in the days leading up to the 2012 massacre, several thousand workers have commandeered the pitch. Some hold umbrellas to shield themselves from the fierce early-winter sun. Others circle the touchline in small, tightly controlled bands of political energy, toyi-toying and bobbing their knobkerries and pangas in the air. Some wear football jerseys, some wear miners' overalls, and some wear t-shirts emblazoned with slogans like 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall' and 'Phantsi ["Down with"] Capitalism!' Jim Nichol, a British lawyer who is among those representing miners at the government's official judicial inquiry into the Lonmin shootings, stands alongside AMCU president Joseph Mathunjwa on a rickety stage and addresses the crowd. 'Amandla! ["Power!"],' he bellows into the microphone. 'Awethu! ["To us!"],' roars the crowd.

It is May 2014, and amid all the electioneering, South Africa's platinum belt is on strike once again. This time under the banner of AMCU, Lonmin miners have joined forces with workers at the region's other major companies, Implats and Anglo American, to demand a basic monthly living wage of R12,500 (approximately $1,000), and platinum production has ground to a virtual standstill. NUM, increasingly now a marginal presence in Marikana ('We are a victim of our own successes and our refusal to be populists,' Frans Baleni tells me in Johannesburg), has condemned the strike, as have business analysts, mining executives and members of the government, including the president himself, who dismisses the labour action as 'irresponsible'. The companies affected have joined together to wage a high-profile propaganda campaign that receives extensive coverage in the mainstream media. Across newspaper columns and radio talk shows, the unaffordability of the miners' demands and the violence allegedly meted out by AMCU union representatives—several miners have been killed in episodes seemingly related to the strike, though the affiliations of the perpetrators are so far unclear—are regularly flagged and debated. The unaffordability of the financial compensation claimed by corporate managers such as Lonmin CEO Ben Megara, who was paid almost $2m in cash and shares in 2013, is rarely discussed. Nor is the structural violence of poverty among mining industry workers. And nor is the violence meted out by police against strikers here in the very recent past given much airtime. Yet against a panoply of hostile forces, the miners are holding on. This work stoppage has now outlasted even the great mining strikes of 1987 that helped bring apartheid to its knees. By this afternoon, in fact, it has become the largest and longest strike in South African history.

'The memory of 2012 is what keeps us going,' says Bob Ndude. '[The mine bosses] think that because we are black, we are dumb and stupid. Maybe mineworkers were dumb and stupid back in the days when my father was here, but not now. It is late now. We can do the maths, and we can count out the injustice. You work so hard for twenty years to make them wealthy, and at the end you have nothing to show for it. Now, this ends. This strike will end that.'

Today, the platinum companies have announced they will break the strike. In 2012, when NUM were the main labour representatives in town, bosses refused to communicate with workers directly and

insisted that all discussions must be routed through the union. Now that NUM has been usurped by AMCU, the companies have changed their minds and are attempting to bypass unions altogether. Plans to scale back long-term production and close certain shafts have been announced unilaterally in an effort to pile pressure on the workforce. Text messages have been sent to most miners informing them that if they do not return to their stations this morning, they will be fired. Armoured hippos rumble slowly through Nkaneng, and around the stadium. At the entrance to the Rowland shaft, official police contingents mingle with private mine security officers and roll out razor wire. Behind rows of identical gun holsters and dark shades, it is hard to distinguish between them.

Despite the hunger and hardship they were enduring, and the intimidatory atmosphere under which they met, Marikana's workers voted to continue their strike on that hot May afternoon. By June, as the stoppage entered its fifth consecutive month, employees had collectively forfeited over a billion dollars in wages. The financial damage to employers was double that figure. And yet, still, both sides held out. The sense that this was far more than a mere quarrel over pay, that it had become a proxy war over whether or not those stuck at the wrong end of the new South Africa and its democratic spectacle could muscle their way on to the stage, loomed larger with each passing week. Mazula's shebeen was fuller than ever with miners who relied on her brew to dull the pangs of empty stomachs. Thembisa wandered the roads of Nkaneng and drank in a strange atmosphere of crouched expectation, past desperate people trying defiantly to mask their desperation. 'People are interested in self-worth and dignity,' Jim Nichol, the British lawyer, told me, when we met to talk about the strike. 'For the workers, going on strike for this long is economic suicide. But it's about saying, "Actually, I'm worth something." And in South Africa today, that's an incredibly important statement.' Nichol is the son of a Tyneside miner, and he remembers the pit villages where locals lived in fear of the company hooter sounding four times, the signal for a fatal accident. From England's north-east to the Bushveld Igneous Complex around Marikana, he sees an unbroken line that binds together the same flows of oppression that he grew up with, and of resistance. 'It doesn't matter where you come from, whether it's Brazil, China, England or Africa,' he insisted. 'When you go down the pit in Brazil and you come up at the end of your shift, you are black. When you go down the pit in China, you come back up black. When you go down the pit in England, you come back up black. In Africa, you go down the pit black and you come back up black. We are all the same, and we are all exploited by the same people.'

In 2014, as they did in 2012, albeit at a terrible human cost, the miners hung on, and triumphantly saw out their strike to something that looked like victory. In late June, the platinum companies reached a settlement with AMCU that met the R12,500 salary demand for most categories of workers, and increased wages by up to 40% for the platinum belt's lowest-paid. Financial analysts and economists sliced and diced the figures in different ways and reached different conclusions on who 'won' the standoff. But many missed the point. Beyond numbers on a spreadsheet, the 2014 strike had pitted miners against the combined heft of the most powerful players not just in the industry but the country, and had taken workers to the brink. Yet they emerged from the experience relatively unscathed and forced critical concessions from employers who had claimed throughout that such concessions would never be possible. Potentially, their determination could inspire millions more. 'For workers, overcoming the informal alliance between business and government meant that victory was an even bigger achievement,' observed Peter Alexander, sociology professor at the University of Johannesburg, once the settlement was made. 'Without understanding this fuller picture, it is impossible to appreciate why workers were jubilant. While AMCU could claim a victory (though they did so modestly), the employers did not, and could not, make the same assertion. Why is the issue of victory important? Because it will affect whether other workers have the confidence to challenge the massive inequality and injustice that exists in South Africa.' Stephen Grootes, a political commentator, called the strike outcome a 'game-changer' and suggested it could represent the beginning of the end for the ANC. 'This strike has its roots in politics, in inequality, in poverty, in apartheid, and in the Marikana massacre,' he argued. 'It's about the lack of change, a lack of trust, and a lack of something to lose. Workers and their families lived with no money, believing that this was a fight they had to win for the future. It was funded, if you like, by their hope, their hope for change.'

The ANC once claimed to carry the hopes of black South Africans on its shoulders. Now, black South Africans had actualised change not just without the party, but in direct opposition to it. What that might mean for South Africa's future is still an open question. 'This is the first big action taken by a non-ANC force in which black people were in the van that led to very real change,' Grootes added. 'This is a very real demonstration of political power by an organisation that is black, and not a part of the ANC.' New formations are already barging their way onto the formal political map: just before the election, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) withdrew from the ANC-allied COSATU federation and announced it was exploring the possibility of forming a new institutional alliance, one that would place workers at the heart of decision-making. Other unions have since followed suit. It remains to be seen whether this initiative could one day evolve into the genuine, radical political alternative to the ruling party that the EFF has so far failed to be.

Political parties, however progressive, can only be one component of the battle for change that is set to disrupt and ignite South Africa in the years to come. The same is true of unionised workers. Their latent potential is massive. Since the Marikana massacre, each time miners have laid down their tools, strikes have also mushroomed elsewhere across other industries and workplaces around the country. Yet anyone with full-time work does not count among the very poorest in the nation. Statistically speaking, most platinum rock-drillers rank in the seventh or eighth income decile, making them better off than around two-thirds of the population. Given the privations of Nkaneng and other hardscrabble settlements like it, that fact speaks volumes about how grossly divided South Africa's population has become. But it remains the case that for a huge proportion of the black population, a full-time mining job and membership of a union would represent a staggering advancement of their status; instead they are simply members of the precariat, living insecure, unstable lives with access to piecemeal, temporary work at best, or joblessness at worst. Under neoliberalism, that category of citizen is growing in most developed countries, where enervated social rights and zero-hours contracts are increasingly the norm.

In light of the relatively privileged position of those lucky enough to have stable jobs on the platinum belt, it would be easy to dismiss strikes in Marikana as somewhat disconnected from the rest of the country's strife; an important struggle for the mineworkers themselves, no doubt, but hardly consequential to the millions of South Africans who are unemployed, or homeless, or fighting eviction, or just generally existing in a zone of uncertainty where each day teeters on the very pivot-edge of survival. But any such dismissal would be dangerously shortsighted. To appreciate why unrest here matters, you only had to hang around in Marikana on the evening following that workers' rally in Wonderkop stadium, once the pitch had emptied out and dusk had fallen. Behind the silhouette of the Rowland shaft machinery, fires soon appeared above the main road linking Marikana to the N4 highway. Residents of a settlement called Mmaditlokwe who had been forcibly relocated there by a nearby platinum mine the previous year, were protesting at their continued lack of services and their apparent inability to get either the mining company or government officials to take their concerns seriously. Sharp cracks echoed over the surrounding scrubland as demonstrators dragged burning tyres in circles across the asphalt and security forces fired rubber bullets into the air to try to disperse the crowd. At that same moment police were also patrolling a few miles to the east, in the small towns of Bapong and Majakeneng, where local rebellions against economic deprivation had erupted several times in recent weeks. Residents say a three-month old baby died in the unrest after inhaling government tear-gas. 'The older generation have been hypnotised by the ANC,' an eighteen-year-old youth in Majakeneng told me by the roadside. 'Our generation can think for ourselves.'

In early 2011, as anti-government uprisings sparked initially by the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia, roiled through the Arab world, Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of the former president, predicted that if things in South Africa continued as they were, the country would face its own 'Tunisia Day' some time in 2020.He may not have to wait that long. Far away from the platinum belt, from Cape Town to Potchefstroom to Durban, there are communities that, following the 2012 massacre, have renamed themselves Marikana; a linguistic rejection of the new, neoliberal South Africa and an avowal, in some form, to wage resistance. Those living in these communities are not miners and have nothing to do with platinum, yet what the miners on the platinum belt have done has nonetheless energised them into an

economic and political confrontation that is increasingly seen as shared. In Marikana, Philippi East, residents have rebuilt their homes three times since the local municipality destroyed them. At Marikana, Cato Crest, locals have blocked roads to demand housing justice. The killing of two leading protesters, described by campaign groups as 'assassinations', have done little to dampen resolve. 'They say it would be better to die once, than to die slowly,' one activist said. South Africa's atlas of revolt remains fragmented. The same was true, however, for anti-apartheid protests in the early 1980s, shortly before they knotted together and hauled down the system from within. Whatever oppositional formations blossom in the years to come, they will rely on many different actors and many different strategies. The story of Marikana, though, is certain to be woven through their core.

The choicelessness of South African democracy echoes the choicelessness of neoliberal democracies the world over, just as top-down violence in Marikana is a microcosm of state violence whenever capital is threatened by popular resistance. So too is the opposition of mineworkers and of settlements like Nkaneng an emblem of something wider. The refusal of individuals like Thembisa, or Bob, or Lungisile, to be cowed into accepting someone else's definition of democracy is emblematic of a fightback that extends well beyond the outer fringes of Nkaneng. As Thembisa's story indicates, despite their invisibility in many accounts of tumult on the platinum belt women are at the forefront here. They not only form the backbone of communities on which the existing mining industry, and South Africa's revolt against it, rests, but are also leading the way in pursuing innovative forms of political protest. Thembisa is now a member of Sikhala Sonke ('We Cry Together'), a women's movement in Marikana that has collected donations for striking miners, conducted marches to police stations and held cultural events to raise political awareness in the community. Outside of South Africa, the question is whether those of us carrying platinum in our pockets, mined from the ground below Thembisa's home, will seek out our own camera angles through which that fight-back looks like more like hope, and less like irrelevance, or fear.

As Rehad Desai, a South African filmmaker who made a documentary exposing the falsity of the official Marikana massacre narrative as seen through those initial sixty-nine seconds of video footage, insists: 'Marikana is at the centre of a rage right now, a rage driven by exclusion and the contempt that such exclusion brings.' His words could apply to communities in many corners of the planet. Perhaps South Africa, in a manner few could have predicted when apartheid came to an end more than two decades ago, may yet prove to be an inspiration far beyond its borders once again.

Electricity pylons surrounding the Lonmin platinum mine, Marikana.

Marikana residents queue to vote in the national elections.

Electricity pylons surrounding the Lonmin platinum mine, Marikana.

Striking platinum miners queue for transport home after a rally in Marikana.

Striking platinum miners during a rally in Marikana.

Electricity pylons surrounding the Lonmin platinum mine, Marikana.

EFF supporters listening to leader Julius Malema, Freedom Park.

Electricity pylons surrounding the Lonmin platinum mine, Marikana.

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