

Constructing and Contesting the Post-Apartheid State: Political Discourse on the Marikana Strike

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Abstract

In August 2012, the police massacre of thirty-four workers during a strike in Marikana, South Africa highlighted the interconnectedness of political power, state violence, and capitalism. Taking as its starting point the sweeping ramifications of the Marikana strike, this article asks how the state attempted to restore its moral authority amidst a grassroots social movement. The methodology consists of a critical political discourse analysis of references to Marikana by members of the national ANC government, as well as dissenting voices in rival political movements, between August 16, 2012, when the massacre took place, and June 30, 2015, five days after the release of the Farlam Commission report. This paper argues, from a critical realist standpoint, that the power of political discourse lies not in the text itself, but in the speaker's intentions, the audience's interpretations, and the public's responses. Such a framing reveals the systems of domination underlying all discourse, such that varied, malleable concepts produce visible, violent social structures. It finds that in the aftermath of Marikana, the national ANC government, faced with comparisons to the apartheid regime, represented itself as both the voice of the marginalized and an impartial mediator between competing narratives. This approach stood in contrast to counter-discourses, particularly that of Numsa, that positioned the state in opposition to the oppressed working class. These two discourses reflect divergent understandings of the nation at large. Ultimately, the ANC's conciliatory approach failed to address many of the strikers' grievances, creating a vacuum in political discourse that increasingly is filled by anti-capitalist voices from below.

Keywords

South Africa, Protest, Political discourse, Critical realism

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Introduction

The Marikana massacre of August 16, 2012 marked a turning point in post-apartheid South Africa. With the killing of thirty-four striking mine workers, members of the South African Defence Force (SADF) perpetrated the deadliest episode of state violence since 1976. Certainly, the massacre invoked the racial terror of state violence against an impoverished Black majority. Yet the massacre was all the more alarming because it violated the post-apartheid nation's dominant idea of itself: the African National Congress (ANC) government and its then-President, Jacob Zuma, had risen to power as the party of the heretofore excluded. The Marikana massacre threw into question the idea that the nation had transformed, and that the rural poor, in particular, held any measure of political power. By extension, the massacre unsettled the legitimacy of a government that claimed to govern for, and on behalf of, the poor. The profound changes and contradictions in the nation's idea of itself played out discursively, as national ANC politicians and their rivals sought to convince constituents (and voters) of a particular interpretation of events. Given the high stakes for the government's own legitimacy, political discourse about Marikana sought to address both the massacre itself and its implications for the idea of the post-apartheid state.

This paper takes as its starting point the power-laden discursive contestation of the events in Marikana. It asks how members of the national government positioned themselves in relation to other actors, to the nation, and to history. Utilising critical political discourse analysis, this article asks, further, how the dominant discourse was received by the ANC's constituents—and how, by extension, it failed to restore the party's moral authority. Because the meaning of discourse lies in its articulation, reception, and response, this article also analyzes the counter-discourse produced by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), which emerged as a powerful critic of the ANC in the years following the massacre. Throughout this analysis, the author attends to the structures of power in a highly stratified society, and to its corresponding effects on the type (e.g. televised address versus popcorn protest) and scope (national versus community-focused) of discourse that each speaker constructs. Yet power is also fluid and nebulous, and counter-discourses take root through unexpected and subversive channels. In particular, counter-discourses infiltrate the dominant discourse through the gaps, emphases, and inconsistencies of the latter. Each of these, this article argues, was significant with regard to Marikana. Further, exclusion from the dominant discourse provided an impetus for counter-discourses, which, in turn, gave rise to rival political movements. The ANC's national discourse, and the popular rejection thereof, holds implications for competing visions of the nation.

The next section recounts the sequence of events surrounding the Marikana massacre. The article then presents critical discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological framework and lays out its approach to data collection and analysis. It argues that the ANC national government framed post-apartheid South Africa as the product of a longstanding, and ongoing, collective struggle for reconciliation. Within this framework, members of the government represented the Marikana massacre—like the violence of the apartheid era—as a threat to national unity. The state, as the democratically elected embodiment of the nation, was tasked with restoring national unity through its legal and judicial mechanisms, alongside its overarching understanding of the various actors and interests involved. Thus, in order to establish their moral authority, speakers invoked two complementary discursive themes: administration and affect. This dual approach gave rise to two corresponding calls to action: stability and peace. Yet the dominant discourse also gave rise to

counter-discourses: many mineworkers, who belonged to the ANC's conventional voting base, rejected the dominant discourse on Marikana and, with it, its conception of the nation at large. An emphasis on reconciliation, they argued, left no space for acknowledging systemic violence against the poor, which was perpetrated by the same wealthy politicians, mining companies, and police whom the ANC depicted as equal stakeholders in the nation. From this rejection of the official discourse emerged a counter-discourse, which emphasized ongoing violence and the incessant wait for truth and accountability. Increasingly, this counter-discourse has taken shape as a political platform in its own right, as the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) rallied workers by condemning both the ANC government and the mining companies for perpetrating the massacre. Their vision of a nation defined by the struggle to overthrow oppressors resonated with many at the margins, who increasingly were alienated from the dominant discourse.

1. Background: The Marikana massacre in context

Since 2012, 'Marikana' has become shorthand for any eruption of state violence that reveals an underlying pattern of systemic repression, unsettling the legitimacy of the state and the collective identity of the post-apartheid nation. Indeed, the Marikana massacre was the culmination of persistent and growing inequality, as stagnant wages, social and economic precarity, and an absence of institutional support for poor communities coincided with the liberalization of the South African economy and rising foreign investment (Bond and Mottiar, 2013; Duncan, 2016). Politically, a tacit alliance had emerged between the South African Police Service (SAPS)—an agent of racial terror during the apartheid era—and the trade unions and ANC leadership that had rallied the Black poor and working classes against the apartheid state.

The ANC's post-apartheid transition to power, and its subsequent dominance of the South African political landscape, had created a tension between its revolutionary past and its new role as the face of the status quo. As the ANC sought to maintain its traditional base of support amidst radical changes to its own power and platform, its leaders constructed a new discourse of party and nation that appealed to its revolutionary past while calling for reconciliation and cooperation in the present (Bertelson, 1998; Murray, 2013). This discourse found widespread, but diminishing, appeal: support for the ANC, while still comfortably above fifty percent, has declined steadily in every national election since 1994. Such has been the case particularly among the young and the unemployed. Alienated from mainstream politics, the marginalized took their demands into the streets, with a "rebellion of the poor" beginning in 2004 (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2014). The movement was largely decentralized and disorganized—an indication of its resonance with a broad sector of society and its emphasis on generalized, systemic injustice. Amidst growing frustration with the deferred promises of democracy, Jacob Zuma was elected President in 2009, on a platform of restoring the ANC's commitment to representing the poor and excluded. His term of office, however, was marred by corruption scandals that only augmented popular disenchantment with the state.

The platinum mining sector was, in many ways, a microcosm of the configurations of power, and the discontents thereof, that permeated South African society. Foreign investors exercised disproportionate control over the mines. Relationships between mining companies, managers, and mine workers were strained, regularly giving rise to strikes and violence (Alexander, 2013; Bond and Mottiar, 2013). Trade unions, and in particular the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM),

purported to represent workers; their representatives, however, faced criticism for collaborating with managers. This culminated in a mass defection of NUM workers to the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU)—a split that generated tension between members of the two unions.

On August 10, 2012, AMCU workers employed at the Lonmin mine in Marikana went on strike. Rock drill operators demanded wages of R12,500 per month, alongside attention to the danger and difficulty of their work and an end to the disrespectful behavior of managers (Alexander, 2013). In response, Lonmin proclaimed that the strike was “illegal”², and that as such, it was not obligated to respond to the workers’ demands. The NUM, in turn, mobilized strike-breakers. Over the next few days, tensions escalated: on 11th August, NUM shop stewards fired on a march outside of NUM headquarters, wounding two AMCU-affiliated striking workers. In a subsequent clash, four AMCU and two NUM workers, two security guards, and two policemen were killed. AMCU strikers rallied on a *koppie* (a small hill), which became the center of the strike for the following five days.

In response to pressure from Lonmin, its investors, and the NUM, and conscious of its own loss of control, the state deployed special public order forces to Marikana. On the morning of August 16, as striking workers rallied on the *koppie*, SAPS officers rolled out razor wire in front of them, and the workers began to move towards the SAPS line. It was at this point that an unknown worker fired a pistol. Upon hearing gunfire, the SAPS officers opened fire on the protesters, killing twenty and sparking a panic among survivors, who fled to a smaller *koppie*. Police pursued them, surrounded the *koppie*, and opened fire again. By the time the shooting ceased, fourteen more workers lay dead, and seventy-eight were injured.

Immediately after the massacre, SAPS spokespersons declared that the police had acted in self-defense; the workers, they claimed, had been armed with guns, and had charged on the police. Initial media coverage of Marikana reported this account uncritically (Bond and Mottiar, 2013). By framing the killings as an act of self-defense, the police account criminalized the striking workers. Thereafter, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) charged 270 striking Lonmin workers with murder. Yet independent investigations by academics at the University of Johannesburg (Lekgowa et al, 2012), the September National Imbizo Group (Fogel, 2012), and journalists from the *Daily Maverick* (Marinovich, 2012) called the police account into question. The publication of their findings generated a public outcry alongside calls for an official investigation into the events of August 10-16.

Within days, the NPA dropped the murder charges against the Lonmin miners, and President Zuma fulfilled his pledge to create an official commission of inquiry. Throughout this brief but volatile period, political discourse on Marikana was frequent and amplified: as members of the government answered to public pressure, they continued to assert control over the situation, emphasizing that truth and justice were best pursued through legal and administrative mechanisms. Most significantly, President Zuma convened a commission of inquiry, led by Justice Ian Farlam, to investigate and produce an official account of the events at Marikana. Yet across the nation, wildcat

² This was a meaningful discursive choice by Lonmin: under the Regulation of Gatherings Act, there are no “illegal” strikes—only protected strikes and unprotected strikes (Duncan, 2016). By calling the strike “illegal,” Lonmin deemed the striking workers criminals, and thereby legitimized the use of violence against them.

labor strikes and community protests, galvanized by Marikana, spread rapidly as marginalized workers and communities demanded a response to the systemic inequalities that had given rise to the AMCU protest in the first place. Post-Marikana social movements, in turn, destabilized the nation's hegemonic institutions and political parties: the decline of the NUM left Numsa as the largest constituent union in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Numsa's radical political platform clashed with Cosatu's longstanding support for the ANC—leading to Numsa's expulsion from Cosatu in 2014. Yet Numsa's detachment from political power emboldened its base. In what commentators have termed the 'Numsa moment', the union's anti-establishment platform found echoes in student protests, ongoing service delivery protests, and, ultimately, a new political party, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers' Party (SRWP). Amidst social turmoil, political discourse provides insight into how members of the national government conceived of their role with respect to the nation at large. Counter-discourses, in turn, revealed alternative visions of the nation that competed with the government for political space.

2. Theoretical framework: critical realism and critical political discourse analysis

This article approaches political discourse through the lens of critical realism. Following Bhaskar (1975), critical realism rejects the positivist attempt to identify generalizable laws that govern every aspect of the natural (or social) world. Yet it equally rejects the interpretivist stance that because every observable reality is socially constructed, making any generalizable claim is impossible. Instead, critical realism holds that the purpose of the social sciences is to make situated causal claims about social structures (Banta, 2013; Mahoney and Goertz, 2012). These claims are not universal laws; rather, they are statements about powers that produce structures, which, in turn, are observable through their activities and interactions with other structures (Bhaskar, 1975).

Among the observable products of this process are social texts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Like other social structures, texts are the product of complex, interacting forces, and consequently, the actions that they produce are multiple and changing. Viewed this way, the object of a critical realist approach to discourse analysis is not a finished text, but the discourse through which it is created and interpreted. For critical discourse analysis (CDA), discourse functions as a causal mechanism, interacting with other (extra-discursive) causal mechanisms to produce events. Thus, CDA traces the production of discourse and extra-discursive events over time, reading an observable text in light of the social processes that both precede and follow it. This context illuminates the interests and concerns that shape the speaker's articulation of a text, the meanings that audiences ascribe to it, and the ways in which other speakers respond to it (Banta, 2013). Equally, it illuminates the systems of domination underlying all discourse, such that varied, malleable concepts (e.g. "nation") produce visible, violent social structures (e.g. ethnic nationalism) and tangible outcomes (e.g. exclusionary migration policies or police profiling of perceived foreigners) (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2002). Consequently, a particular text, voiced by a particular speaker and interpreted by a particular audience, may convey more or less power to entrench or disturb existing social structures (Wodak et al, 1999).

Framed this way, CDA is attentive to the inherently political nature of all discourse. Yet one form of CDA, critical political discourse analysis (CPDA), gives particular attention to discourse that engages explicitly with political power, its articulation, and its reproduction (Van Dijk, 2002).

Political discourse uses highly charged terms to define the object of discourse, and to justify particular policies—using “troublemakers” or “thugs,” for example, to delegitimize striking workers and rationalize their exclusion from the national body politic. These references to particular groups and events contribute to a larger frame of reference, wherein speakers define a cohesive in-group (with whom they identify, and to whom they address their speech) and a corresponding out-group (against whom the in-group consolidates its own identity) (Reicher and Hopkins, 1996). Even the most exclusionary political discourse, however, is multivocal: it always acknowledges, and responds to, counter-discourses as it appeals to a particular audience. An anti-union discourse, for example, may characterize pro-labor discourses as “unfair” or “unrealistic”. In the process, political discourse acknowledges another possibility for perceiving way of understanding and structuring the world. As it attempts to undermine counter-discourses, political discourse seeks to maximize its own base of supporters. Ultimately, the goal of political discourse is to consolidate the speaker’s authority.

It is crucial to note at this point that CPDA, like CDA at large, does not prescribe a singular method of collecting and analyzing political discourse (Van Dijk 1993). Rather, CPDA offers an ontological understanding of discourse and extra-discursive context. This shapes the research questions posed about political discourse, as well as the implications of the findings. The sections that follow employ CPDA to analyze how, following a deadly episode of state violence, national ANC politicians sought to restore their individual and collective legitimacy. They ask, further, how ANC discourse constructed a particular understanding of the South African nation. Finally, the article considers how this discourse was received, and how counter-discourses constructed the nation differently.

3. Methodology

Data consisted of all public statements foregrounding Marikana by members of the ANC national government (that is, Zuma, his ministers, and his spokespersons) between August 16, 2012 and June 30, 2015. Statements by provincial and municipal ANC officials were excluded. Narrowing the scope of data collection to the national ANC government permitted a focus on speakers and statements that spoke with the authority of the state, and frequently received national media coverage. Consequently, the discourse that these speakers produced was likely to influence public opinion and national policy. Additionally, national political figures were expected to invoke the meaning of Marikana for the nation at large more than municipal figures, who were expected to emphasize the local implications of Marikana. The date range began with the first announcements that the massacre had taken place and ended five days after the release of the Farlam Commission report—encapsulating the early, highly volatile discourse immediately following the massacre, and concluding with the state’s final, official interpretation of the events in Marikana. Within this three-year period, labor and community strikes spread throughout the country, alongside increasingly insistent demands for truth and justice. Political discourse on Marikana thus was expected to engage with this increasingly fraught political moment as the government sought to maintain its moral authority.

Data was sampled from the speech database of the South African Government (www.gov.za/speeches), a comprehensive archive that is searchable by keyword, category, government level, province, subject, and date. An initial search of the archive for the keyword

“Marikana” within the specified time period yielded forty-five speeches, press releases, and event transcripts by members of the national government. These items collectively produced a chronological account of the government’s representation of Marikana over the course of three years, with all of its emphases, silences, and changes across time. Of the forty-five items, fourteen were speeches by members of the government, which provided the opportunity to conduct a more detailed analysis of ANC national discourse (see Table 1).

Table 1: ANC Speeches Analyzed

Date	Speaker	Title
August 17, 2012	President Jacob Zuma	Statement from President Jacob Zuma on the Marikana Lonmin mine workers tragedy media briefing Rustenburg
August 21, 2012	Susan Shabangu, Minister of Mineral Resources	Address by Susan Shabangu, MP, Minister of Mineral Resources, on the occasion of the Special Parliamentary Debate following the Lonmin Marikana Tragedy: National Assembly, Cape Town
August 21, 2012	Nathi Mthwetha, Minister of Police	Address by Minister of Police, Nathi Mthethwa, MP on the occasion of the National Assembly Debate on the Marikana Tragedy, National Assembly, Parliament 21 August 2012
August 23, 2012	President Jacob Zuma	Appointment of Judicial Commission of Inquiry on the Marikana tragedy
August 23, 2012	Nomvula Mokonyane, Premier of Gauteng Province	Tribute delivered by the Premier of Gauteng Ms. Nomvula Mokonyane at the memorial service for the Marikana disaster held at the Johannesburg City Hall
September 2, 2012	Nomgcobo Jiba, Acting National Director of Public Prosecutions	Statement on Marikana court case by Acting National Director of Public

		Prosecutions (NDPP), Advocate Nomgcobo Jiba
September 3, 2012	Collins Chabane, Minister for the Presidency	Media statement by the Inter- Ministerial Committee on the Marikana tragedy at the briefing of the Foreign Correspondence Association
September 21, 2012	Jeff Radebe, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development	Announcement Hon Jeff Radebe, MP, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, regarding the commencement and operations of the Marikana Commission of Inquiry
August 15, 2013	President Jacob Zuma	Statement by President Jacob Zuma on Marikana anniversary
August 16, 2013	Collins Chabane, Minister for the Presidency	Chairperson of the IMC on the Marikana tragedy appeals for calm and dignity as the tragedy is commemorated
August 29, 2013	Trevor Manuel, Former Minister for the Presidency	The Ruth First Memorial Lecture 12 months on: Marikana and its meaning for the NDP Wits Great Hall by Trevor Manuel, Chairperson: National Planning Commission
August 16, 2014	President Jacob Zuma	Marikana anniversary: a day of reflection and recommitment to peace
May 10, 2015	President Jacob Zuma	Presidency on release of Marikana Commission Report
June 25, 2015	President Jacob Zuma	President Jacob Zuma: Release of Marikana Report

The fourteen speeches were imported into NVivo and coded thematically at the sentence-level. In line with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994), the data was revisited with more pointed questions and more meaningful codes in light of the initial findings. Further, since the object of analysis was the text alongside its context and consequences, the author followed Fairclough's (1989) three stages of CDA: description, which noted the explicit properties of the text; interpretation, which analyzed the text as both the product of a particular production process and a source of meaning-making; explanation, which places the text within its broader social context in order to make sense of its real (extra-discursive) consequences. Thus, at this stage, the goals of analysis were twofold: the first was to identify discursive themes in representations of Marikana. The second goal, in line with CPDA, was to understand how discursive representations of Marikana interacted with, and contributed to, larger narratives about the nation. The remaining thirty-one items established context—for example, announcements of official visits to Marikana, responses to media inquiries, and statements intended to “correct the record”. Further, as time progressed, speakers added or omitted detail, changed their own representation of the events at Marikana, or ardently defended their version of the events.

Analyzing national political discourse provided insight into the dominant discourse on the Marikana massacre. Yet through its changes over time, through its acknowledgments or refutations of other perspectives, and through its gaps and silences, national political discourse also revealed the presence of, and interactions with, counter-discourses from below. This was the case, for example, when Advocate Nomgcobo Jiba (2012), speaking in his capacity as Acting Director for Public Prosecutions, announced that the murder charge against 270 striking miners would be dropped. Jiba stated, “The NPA has noted *the concerns voiced* . . . In view of the *significant public interest* in this matter, I have decided to call this press briefing to *explain* our decisions as well as *provide direction* on this matter” [emphasis mine].

A comprehensive analysis of counter-discourses is beyond the scope of this paper, particularly since counter-discourses frequently were informal, decentralized, and lacked a national media platform. Government discourses, however, did not exist in a vacuum; as detailed above, CPDA maintains that the meaning of a text lies in the social and political context of its utterance, its reception by audiences, and its consequences. These audiences include political rivals who share the goal of consolidating the support of an in-group, and the consequences include new and altered political formations. In the aftermath of Marikana, both the ANC and South Africa's largest federation of trade unions, Cosatu (a key ally of the ANC) were beset by internal turmoil, creating the conditions that led to the rise of the Numsa. Both organizations produced counter-discourses on Marikana that engaged with, and contested, the dominant narrative of the nation. Both, further, constructed their own narratives of the nation.

Speeches by Numsa officials were sampled from the union's official website (www.numsa.org.za). An initial search for the keyword “Marikana” in the Numsa news archive between August 16, 2012 and June 30, 2015 yielded sixty-nine results. Of these, sixteen were speeches or official statements by national Numsa officials that pertained primarily, or significantly, to the Marikana massacre. As with the ANC, the remaining results established useful context for Numsa's representation of Marikana. The resulting dataset, which provides insight into a dynamic, politically salient counter-discourse on Marikana, is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Numsa Speeches Analyzed

Date	Speaker	Title
August 17, 2012	Castro Ngobese, Numsa National Spokesperson	Numsa Sends Condolences to NUM and Families of Workers Who Lost Their Live!
August 28, 2012	Cedric Gina, President of Numsa	President Cedric Gina's Opening Address to Numsa Central Committee Held in Birchwood Hotel
October 22, 2012	Cedric Gina, President of Numsa	Comrade Mtutuzeli Tom's Memorial Lecture Delivered by the President of Numsa, Cde Cedric Sabelo Gina
November 14, 2012	Karl Cloete, Deputy General Secretary	Numsa DGS' Input to the National Motor Shopstewards Council (NSSC)
November 28, 2012	Karl Cloete, Deputy General Secretary	DGS' Input to the Numsa Pre-National Bargaining Conference
November 28, 2012	Andrew Chirwa, First Deputy President	Numsa National Pre-Collective Bargaining Conference
December 12, 2012	Cedric Gina, President of Numsa	2012: Notable Year
December 12, 2012	Cedric Gina, President of Numsa	Letter from the President
January 18, 2013	Irvin Jim, General Secretary	Reflection on the Cosatu Congress
August 19, 2013	Numsa National Office Bearers	"Tell No Lies—Claim No Easy Victories"
October 22, 2013	Irvin Jim, General Secretary	Numsa General Secretary, Comrade Irvin Jim Input During Joe Slovo Memorial Lecture
December 18, 2013	Andrew Chirwa, First Deputy President	Opening Speech by 1 st Deputy President, Andrew Chirwa
February 11, 2014	Irvin Jim, General Secretary	Numsa General Secretary Presentation to the Cape Town Press Club
March 12, 2014	Irvin Jim, General Secretary	Numsa General Secretary Presentation to Unifor
February 13, 2015	Mazibuko Jara, Spokesperson for the United Front	Alternative State of the Nation (SONA) Delivered by Comrade Mazibuko Jara on Behalf of the United Front – A

		Just and Corruption-Free South Africa Is Possible
April 17, 2015	Irvin Jim, General Secretary	Numsa General Secretary Irvin Jim's Political Input to the Conference for Socialism – Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre

4. Findings I: Discourses of the nation

A CPDA of the fourteen speeches identified above revealed that speakers situated the Marikana massacre within the historical context of the South African nation. Consequently, when speakers made claims about the Marikana massacre, they also made claims about the ANC government and the South African nation at large. Speakers constructed an overarching framework of historical struggle, within which were two overlapping discursive themes: administration and affect. Each of these discursive themes was supported by normative claims and characteristics. Each, in turn, gave rise to particular policy priorities. This framework is visualized in Table 3 and detailed below.

Table 3: ANC Discursive Framework

Discursive Framework: Historical Struggle for Reconciliation	
Discursive Theme: Administration	Discursive Theme: Affect
Government as embodiment of the state Government as bearer of history and memory Government as mediator between stakeholders	Government as empathetic with victims Government as empathetic with the poor Government as national mourner
Specific mechanisms: legal framework, judiciary, Constitution	Specific references: 'tragedy', families, grief
Generalized norms: unity, equality, fairness	Generalized references: violence, poverty
Prescription: stability	Prescription: peace

4.1. Historical struggle for reconciliation

Zuma, his Ministers and spokespersons made sense of the Marikana massacre as a tragedy for the nation at large, situating it within the continuity of the nation's history of collective struggle to overcome division. They framed the national present, in turn, as the progressive, ongoing expansion of an imagined non-racial, non-sexist society. At an August 23 memorial service for the Marikana victims in Johannesburg City Hall, in the presence of victims' families and of ANC officials, the premier of Gauteng Province, Nomvula Mokonyane, acknowledged that the nation at large sought an explanation for the "tragedy". Yet she cautioned against "finger-pointing," arguing instead that the nation should draw lessons from the overthrow of apartheid and reaffirm its commitment to unity. Such a response to Marikana would strengthen the nation at large.

Mokonyane continued, “It is a mere eighteen years since we have emerged as a *united democratic country*. Ours has been celebrated by the nations of the world as the ‘miracle’ political settlement based on *true values of reconciliation, peace, justice and freedom*” (Mokonyane, 2012) [emphasis mine]. By making sense of Marikana as an eruption of fragmentation amidst the ongoing work of reconciliation, Mokonyane called upon her compatriots to continue the work of nation-building—a collective task emphasized by her use of the first-person plural. In so doing, she and her fellow South Africans would emulate their forbears in the anti-apartheid struggle.

According to this framework, nation-building would entail reconciliation with former enemies—a process to which all citizens were equally bound. Nation-building would not entail ascribing blame or calling for retribution; doing so would serve only to fracture the nation further. Positioning fragmentation—rather than oppression—as the greatest obstacle to nation-building enabled speakers to court sectors of the population with oppositional demands and freed them from identifying the neo-colonial facets of the post-apartheid state.

4.2. Administration

In order to make the case for reconciliation as nation-building, national ANC speakers appealed to two discursive themes: administration and affect. As a discursive theme, administration highlights the role of the ANC government as the embodiment of the state and its institutions, the bearer of the nation’s history and memory, and the impartial mediator between stakeholders. Thus, on the second anniversary of the massacre, Zuma (2014) issued an official statement proclaiming that:

We have the *laws, institutions and many instruments* to deal with disagreements and find solutions. Our progressive *labor relations framework* in particular, includes *mechanisms* of solving disputes. These should be utilized so as to avoid senseless loss of life during labor disputes.
[emphasis mine]

By appealing to administration, speakers proclaimed that the national government sought to reconcile citizens across socially salient divisions—including, in this instance, inter-union rivalries. Yet speakers also acknowledged the contradictions between stakeholders’ interests and upheld the government as the only actor capable of arriving at a mutually beneficial resolution. Any alternative approach would risk violence and menace the integrity of the nation. Taken together, these values and mechanisms construct the government as the legitimate interpreter and implementer of a legal and normative framework that would strengthen South Africa as a nation.

Framing the government as an impartial arbiter and framing the state and its institutions as a resource for all citizens, gave rise to more generalized calls for stability. Amidst widespread distrust of the police and elite politicians, and a growing wave of labor and community strikes, stability would entail placing confidence in the Farlam Commission to produce a complete and impartial account of the events that had unfolded in Marikana. Workers, by extension, were encouraged to place their trust in the state and its institutions, rather than defecting to anti-establishment parties and trade unions. Mining companies and foreign investors, likewise, were reassured that the state could provide a stable environment in which to continue mining operations. As Collins Chabane of the Inter-Ministerial Committee proclaimed at a September 2012 press briefing:

The tragic incident at Marikana is not a reflection of the business environment in South Africa. We would like to *reassure* all stakeholders and the international community that mining operations *continue unhindered* in other parts of the North West province and throughout the country. Government remains *in control* of the situation and *law and order* continues to prevail (Inter-Ministerial Committee, 2012). [emphasis mine]

Here, Chabane appealed to administration in order to assert the government's uncontested authority. Speakers also invoked stability more generally: they called for normalized relations between all sectors of the population, which would be possible only if everyone were to adhere to law and order and respect the political system.

4.3. Affect

A second discursive theme, affect, complemented the emphasis on the state's administrative mechanisms with an assertion of empathy with marginalized citizens in general, and with the victims of the Marikana massacre in particular. In so doing, speakers frequently invoked the anti-apartheid struggle, reminding audiences that the ANC continuously had stood on the side of the oppressed. Thus, when speakers referred to Marikana, they overwhelmingly characterized the events as a "tragedy," and proclaimed their solidarity with the victims' families (n.b. Alexander 2016 for the semantic choice of "tragedy"). More generally, they appealed to affect by invoking the tropes of violence and poverty, whose perpetrators were either unnamed or consigned to the past, even when their legacies were violently manifested in the present. Thus, Minister of Mineral Resources Susan Shabangu (2012) proclaimed, "The causes of the Marikana *tragedy* are long in the making, going back at least a few centuries. The underlying causes of the *tragedy* stem from a history of *colonial oppression* overlaid with the *exploitation* of natural resources . . . leading to one of the highest levels of *inequality* in the world" [emphasis mine]. In these references, the plight of the poor was aligned with the plight of South Africa at large, and the state was positioned as the representative of the poor.

Just as administration gave rise to appeals for stability, so did affect give rise to appeals for peace. Peace, in turn, entailed both specific responses to the massacre and more generalized desires for the nation. In particular, workers were encouraged to strike peacefully, to negotiate with employers, and to refrain from inter-union violence. When appeals for peace were abstracted and directed at the nation at large, they dovetailed with calls for reconciliation as a nation-building project. Thus, Zuma declared upon the release of the Farlam Commission Report, "We should, as a nation, learn from this painful episode. We should use it to build a more united, peaceful and cohesive society" (Zuma, 2015). This project of reconciliation precluded any ascription of blame, any acknowledgment of neo-colonialism, or any call for systemic change. Instead, calls for peace, alongside stability, effectively strengthened the elite institutions that had perpetrated the conditions underlying the Marikana massacre.

5. Findings II: Counter-discourses of the nation

National leaders of the ANC represented Marikana as a violent manifestation of fragmentation, which threatened the integrity of a non-racist, non-sexist rainbow nation. By extension, they framed South Africa as an ongoing project of reconciliation and called upon citizens to respond to the massacre by uniting across race, class, and institutional lines. Leaders, further, sought to restore their own moral authority by presenting the ANC-led government as the legitimate mediator between the frequently antagonistic, yet equally worthy, stakeholders of the nation. Within this discursive framework, there was no single perpetrator of the violence at Marikana, nor single oppressor who had created the conditions underlying the protest. Rather, disunity was the source of inter-union and police violence, and the threat that the nation must collectively overcome.

At certain pivotal moments, the state altered its discourse and policy—namely, when the state dropped murder charges against 270 striking miners and established the Farlam Commission. More frequently, speakers emphatically adhered to the dominant discursive framework, insistently calling for unity, and assuring that the nation’s legal and judicial framework would secure truth and justice. With their gaps and emphases, both approaches pointed to the existence of emergent and growing counter-discourses.

Indeed, the dominant vision of the Marikana massacre, and of nation at large, was rejected by many mine employees in Marikana and striking workers elsewhere. Like the ANC speakers, these dissenting voices perceived South Africa as the product of a historical struggle. Unlike the ANC, however, they viewed the present government as the successor to the apartheid state, serving the interests of the powerful at the expense of the still-marginalized. These counter-discourses were not univocal; speakers constructed a narrative of the massacre that reflected the political standpoints and rivalries of particular parties and trade unions, which changed markedly in the three years following the massacre. Of particular significance was one shifting, interacting counter-discourse: that of Numsa. Analyzing Numsa’s counter-discourse, and tracing its relationship to the national ANC discourse, illuminates South Africa’s post-Marikana political landscape.

5.1. Rebutting the historical struggle for reconciliation

Immediately after the massacre, Numsa spokesperson Castro Ngobese expressed his condolences to the mineworkers in Marikana—and, in particular, to the NUM, Numsa’s sister union and fellow Cosatu member. In line with national ANC leaders, Ngobese invoked the specter of the apartheid era, stating that Marikana had “brought back *ugly memories* of the past, where workers were slaughtered during the *apartheid-sponsored violence* in hostels and townships” (Ngobese, 2012) [emphasis mine]. Thus, like his rivals, he situated contemporary South Africa within a context of historical struggle. The nature of that struggle, however, was ambivalent: while Ngobese condemned police violence, he also explicitly condemned inter-union violence and refrained from characterizing the strike as an eruption of systemic state violence. Cedric Gina, President of Numsa, made the latter point even more explicitly during an October 2012 address: paying homage to his predecessor, Gina recalled, “Comrade Tom played a prominent role in convincing NAAWU and SAAWU comrades to join a *united metalworkers union*, the coming of Mercedes Benz SAAWU comrades into the 1989 merger Congress was largely as a result of the work that Comrade Mtura did in Mercedes Benz. He defended with his life, the decision of the *national union* to negotiate at

a *national level*.” [emphasis mine] As he described a strike that brought metalworkers together with the ANC and SACP, Gina continued, “I can already visualize the similarities between the Koppie in Marikana, the Mercedes Benz sleep-in and the Gompo Hall meetings in Duncan Village! Do I have your attention comrades?” For Gina, the strength of the union lay in its commitment to solidarity—which, in the late apartheid era, had extended to the ANC and SACP. Though the configuration of power had changed, solidarity remained Numsa’s priority. In the initial aftermath of the massacre, Numsa thus echoed the state in its calls for unity and reconciliation. Because its audience consisted of union members rather than the citizenry at large, Numsa officials emphasized inter-union solidarity, and looked to the government as a partner in negotiations. Explicitly anti-government voices were condemned by Numsa as politically opportunist.

This cautious approach changed within months: subsequent statements by Numsa leaders increasingly framed the Marikana massacre as symptomatic of the inherent violence of global capitalism. The ANC-led state, by extension, was condemned as the instrument of global finance rather than the representative of the poor and oppressed. In January 2013, then-spokesperson and subsequent General Secretary Irvin Jim reflected on the broader implications of Marikana, arguing that the massacre had “proved once more that in a capitalist mode of production the state will always protect and act in the interests of the dominant, capitalist class in society.” He continued: “The tragic crime of Marikana has shown us how far this protection goes. The forces of the state are capable even of murdering workers if we show signs of revolting against our *historical chains of colonialism of a special type*, if we are willing to say no to *modern slavery*” [emphasis mine]. As the relationship between Numsa, Cosatu, and the ANC grew increasingly fractious, Numsa’s political discourse increasingly disavowed unity with more powerful institutional actors. Instead, for Irvin Jim, the post-apartheid state—and, with it, the ANC government—was only the most recent manifestation of the capitalist superstructure, which previously had included slavery and apartheid.

5.2. Rebutting administration and affect

By rejecting the ANC’s framework of historical struggle for reconciliation, Numsa speakers equally rejected the state’s discursive appeals to administration and affect. The state, as a proxy for global capital, could not claim to stand for law and order. Thus, in December 2012, President Cedric Gina wrote that “the Marikana debacle has also posed questions about the *legitimacy of the state* as the official bearer of *law and order*, expressed in the form of the police” (Numsa Press Office 2012) [emphasis mine]. Elsewhere, speakers expressed apprehension that a state not bound by law and order could deliver justice. Thus, beginning in August 2012, speakers called for an independent inquiry into the massacre (Gina 2012). With the release of the Farlam Commission report, a Numsa press release acknowledged its findings while arguing that the report’s embeddedness in the ANC government had compromised its integrity: “Even this *inadequate* commission has exposed the collusion of the mine bosses and their police, elements placed high in the ANC, and the ANC government itself” [emphasis mine].

For Numsa, because the state lacked legitimacy as the representative of the marginalized, it could not claim to empathize with them. Numsa consequently rejected the ANC’s appeals to affect. Speakers did, however, appeal to the same affective tropes—particularly violence and poverty—in their own discourse. Such was Irvin Jim’s lament in October 2013 that “We see social protests

every day. *Violent crime* is on the rise. *Our babies and boys and girls* are no longer safe in our communities because of *violent crime* propelled by *massive poverty*, unemployment and inequalities" [emphasis mine]. Here, Jim, alongside ANC speakers, empathized with his audience by using the first-person plural to describe the plight of the poor. Whereas ANC speakers invoked affect to shore up support for the state, however, Numsa speakers used affect to emphasize the distance between the capitalist state and the working class. Notably, Numsa appeals to affect diminished as the immediate shock of the massacre receded into the past. While condemnations of organized violence were still widespread, these increasingly were abstracted from the events in Marikana. Rather than framing the violence as a clash between police and striking miners, Numsa speakers situated Marikana within a global crisis of capitalism. Deputy General Secretary Karl Cloete's November 2012 speech to the National Motor Shop Steward's Council is instructive here: he states that "this is the global and national context which explains the Marikana massacre – a deteriorating global and local capitalist economy which increasingly will resort to bloody violence to 'discipline' the working class in order to defend its falling profits." Abstracting from the immediate context of Marikana enabled Numsa speakers to call for systemic change.

In February 2015, Mazibuko Jara, speaking on behalf of the United Front, proclaimed: "The Marikana massacre [and subsequent social movements] are all important developments which mark the beginnings of a *deep rupture* with the post-apartheid social consensus. These are serious challenges to the ANC as the *glue that holds society together*" [emphasis mine]. Jara's statement drew Numsa's discursive framework to its logical conclusion: if South Africa's history since the advent of European colonialism was fundamentally a history of struggle against oppression, if the contemporary state was the agent of global capitalism, and if the oppressed were the recipients of violent 'discipline' in the service of global capitalism, then the oppressed were not obligated to recognize the authority of the state. Rather, they held an obligation to history, to the nation, and to their working-class comrades worldwide to reject the legitimacy of the capitalist system and the institutions that supported it. The new, anti-colonial, socialist South Africa that they invoked would revolt against the post-apartheid state alongside its colonial and apartheid-era predecessors.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Marikana massacre, many citizens and institutions composing the ANC's conventional heartland rejected the government's discourse of reconciliation. Calls for unity between workers, mining companies, and police presented each group as an equal constituent of the nation. This discursive approach rang hollow for workers who knew the other institutions not as compatriots but as oppressors. Rejecting the national ANC discourse did not entail presenting a singular, cohesive counter-discourse; indeed, Numsa's discourse changed over time, and speakers repeatedly criticized another critic of the government, Julius Malema, as an opportunist exploiting a massacre for his own political gain. Yet the two discourses increasingly diverged in three fundamental ways: in their intended audiences, in those whom they represented as Others, and in their respective conceptions of the nation. Ultimately, these distinctions between the national ANC discourse and a powerful counter-discourse yielded different policy approaches.

Both ANC and Numsa speakers sought to consolidate the largest possible group of listeners into a national in-group, and invoked or rebuked various discursive themes in order to do so. The ANC appealed to audience members as citizens and stakeholders, who fundamentally sought peace,

stability, and unity. Numsa appealed to listeners as workers and members of the global proletariat, who fundamentally sought the overthrow of capitalism. In each case, constructing a collective in-group necessarily entailed constructing an out-group, against which the in-group might define itself. In the case of the ANC, an unnamed, and unspecified, Other threatened disunity. Historically, the Other had taken the form of the apartheid state, which fragmented the nation along racial lines. More recently, the Other was a shifting configuration of individuals and groups who menaced the integrity of the nation. In the immediate aftermath of Marikana, the Other, held responsible for violence, consisted of the two hundred seventy miners charged with murder. Following the withdrawal of charges, and with the convening of the Farlam Commission, the Other became less tangible—such that by the time the report was released in June 2015, signaling the government’s final word on the events at Marikana, its perpetrators were abstracted. The report named both police and union officials as perpetrators of the violence yet refrained from either charging individuals with criminal offences or identifying systemic problems within any institution. The shortcomings of this approach are evident in its contrast with Numsa’s counter-discourse: for Numsa, an initial reticence to name the Other gave way to an explicit denunciation of global capital—of which the ANC state was an agent—as the most salient Other. This discursive shift, in turn, permitted the consolidation of Numsa’s intended audience, and heralded the ‘Numsa moment’ in South African social movements.

By appealing to contrasting audiences, and by constructing contrasting Others, ANC and Numsa speakers also invoked contrasting discourses on the nation. For the ANC, contemporary South Africa was an ongoing project of ever-broadening and -deepening reconciliation. Its fragmentation was both continuous with its history and an obstacle to be overcome. The goal was the attainment of a non-racial, non-sexist nation, which had never before existed. For Numsa, contemporary South Africa was an ongoing project of resistance to oppression—and to oppressors. The working class was tasked with uniting across sectors and institutions to take up their historical, revolutionary role. Whereas previous generations had fought the apartheid state, the contemporary working class was to fight its successor, in the form of international capital and its agent, the post-apartheid state.

With the publication of the Farlam Commission report, Marikana has receded from public attention. Its implications for South Africa’s political landscape, however, endure: Marikana is now widely read as a ‘turning point’ in South African history (Alexander 2013). This extends to political discourse: for the ANC and its resurgent rivals alike, ‘Marikana’ now signifies the eruption state violence that undermines confidence in existing configurations of power. Even more notably, ‘post-Marikana’ has come to signify diminished confidence in the government in the aftermath of the massacre. The immediate consequence of this diminished confidence is an increasingly plural political landscape. Yet the political discourses of the ANC and Numsa indicates that something greater is at stake: the idea of the South African nation.

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