

COLONIAL TROPES AND THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE MARIKANA MASSACRE

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Résumé

Dans cet article, je me concentre sur la façon dont la figure du «mâle noir primitif et sauvage» a été utilisée dans les médias sud-africains du "Massacre de Marikana" où 34 mineurs en grève ont été brutalement tués par les services de police sud-africains en 2010. L'objet de ma critique se base sur eNCA et SABC News que j'ai suivis pendant deux ans. En tant que chroniqueur et journaliste, j'ai également écrit une série d'articles sur divers sujets se rapportant au "Massacre de Marikana". En outre, j'ai travaillé comme cinéaste de la justice sociale à Marikana pendant une période prolongée à la fois avant et après le massacre, me concentrant sur les transgressions socioéconomiques et environnementales contre les communautés vivant autour Lonmin.

Abstract

In this essay I focus on how the colonial trope of the 'primitive and savage black male' was utilized in the South African media reportage of the Marikana Massacre where 34 striking miners were brutally killed by the South African Police Services in 2010. The focus of my critique is eNCA¹ and SABC²News, both of which I followed closely over the two year period from the strike to the Marikana Report³ released in June 2015. As a columnist and journalist I also wrote a series of articles on various topics pertaining to the Marikana massacre, the community and social justice as well as my observations around the press coverage of this event. In addition I worked as a social justice filmmaker in Marikana for an extended period both before and after the massacre occurred, focusing on the socioeconomic and environmental transgressions against the communities living around Lonmin.

1 eNCA is a 24-hour television news broadcaster focusing on South African and African stories. The broadcaster made history when it launched on 1 June 2008, becoming South Africa's first 24-hour news service, Wikipedia.

2 South African Broadcasting Corporation – the national public TV broadcaster

3 <http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/marikana-report-1.pdf>

introduction

In this essay I focus on how the colonial trope of the ‘primitive and savage black male’ was utilized in the South African media reportage of the Marikana Massacre where 34 striking miners were brutally killed by the South African Police Services in 2010. I argue that this trope was employed to gain buy-in from the general whitist chattering class to excuse the state mechanisms use of heavy-handed methods to bring the ‘wild cat’ strike under control. I also posit that the ANC serves a whitist globalised agenda in a post 94 South Africa and that this dominant discourse is still largely in the hands of white male gatekeeping. I surmise that the white buy-in and consent is of great importance to the upholding of the ANC’s increasingly neoliberal macroeconomic policy, which is why they go out of their way to appease white business, to allay white fears and to band aid national and international white neuroses. This, I argue, all becomes evidenced in the biased manner in which strikes and protests are reported on in mainstream media.

The focus of my critique is eNCA⁴ and SABC⁵News, both of which I followed closely over the two year period from the strike to the Marikana Report⁶ released in June 2015. As a columnist and journalist I also wrote a series of articles on various topics pertaining to the Marikana massacre, the community and social justice as well as my observations around the press coverage of this event. In addition I worked as a social justice filmmaker in Marikana for an extended period both before and after the massacre occurred, focusing on the socioeconomic and environmental transgressions against the communities living around Lonmin.

What follows is analysis extrapolated from these articles and interviews.

Looking Back ...

On August 16th 2012 we witnessed the Marikana massacre live on television as SAPS opened fire on 3000 men who were gathered on the Wonderkop Koppie just outside of Lonmin Mining company. This was due to a long negotiation for better wages which had culminated in a ‘wildcat’ strike. The men were gathered on the koppie as it was land outside of the Lonmin property and they had been banned from gathering at the Lonmin Stadium. It was neutral territory. Here they waited for the Lonmin bosses to meet with them regarding their demands for a living wage.

On this day instead of the mine bosses coming to meet them they witnessed police vehicles and army personnel gathering at the foot of the koppie. Within a few hours the massacre occurred in front of international media in an orchestration of violence not seen since the

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Sharpeville Massacre⁷. 3000 men were shot at, killing 34 in eight seconds in what could only be described as a snuff movie for public consumption.

Devastated by the violent spectacle, my partner, social justice activist and filmmaker, Sipho Singiswa said to me in an interview for Media for Justice's Marikana Files⁸, "When marginalised South Africans demand human rights and dignity, it is met with police brutality, which is sanctioned by government and corporate giants. Women and children become collateral damage. We are no longer living in a democracy."

Over six weeks there was a count of 46 victims of the violence that unfolded in Marikana. In this dustbowl littered with substandard shacks, no services and a network of power lines, a spectacle of the abuse of state power played itself out in the form of the brutal repression of a strike. There is no doubt that the violence unleashed by the state was a vital factor that influenced the decision of the striking Lonmin miners to accept a deal offered by the mine bosses in the days after the army moved into Marikana. What was most disappointing to observe was the media's unquestioning acceptance of the official position that the "violent" strikes had to be contained.

This was evident in file footage being played repeatedly on SABC and eNCA television news programmes, which showed the close-up of a miner licking the tip of his spear with a glint in his eye. It was a sight that was likely to bring to the fore the deeply held beliefs on which white fear is premised - that of the black man as savage and a potential killer. Cut from that scene to a wide shot of thousands of men with various cultural weapons and we were given the message that masses of black men were on the loose, wild and uncontrollable and therefore needed to be contained, disarmed and suppressed.

The wider media consuming South African public seemingly bought this story hook, line and sinker and many ordinary citizens we interviewed on this topic showed signs of relief when they watched, on TV News, police going in and disarming men of cultural weapons. Those of us in the field though, were of the opinion that the weapons were symbolic and posed no real threat to us, the armed police force, the army, or the general public for that matter.

Even for the less analytical, it was surely hard not to notice the cosy partnership between the state, business and the media, as it became starkly clear in the reportage of the Marikana strike that a great effort to demonise the mineworkers was made. The word "violent" was repeatedly used to describe the strikes that spread in the region when in fact; the practically leaderless mass action was highly organized and remarkably free of violence⁹.

From where we were sitting as independent filmmakers in the field, the violence came predominantly from the police. Bringing in the army days after the massacre was the state's last-ditch attempt to portray the miners as ungovernable and out of control to justify a brutal attack on them.

It was clear to those with political knowhow that this was a total onslaught designed to smash the strike. It became a bizarre spectacle, which played out similar to apartheid era police and army raids on struggle comrades in the 70's and 80's. Only this time, the faces that spin

7 The Sharpeville Massacre occurred on 21 March 1960, at the police station in the South African township of Sharpeville in Transvaal (today part of Gauteng). After a day of demonstrations against the Pass laws, a crowd of about 5,000 to 7,000 black African protesters went to the police station. The police opened fire leaving 69 people dead and, according to the official inquest, 180 people seriously wounded. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/sharpeville-massacre-21-march-1960>

8 The Marikana Files <http://www.mediaforjustice.net/videos-by-category/category/8-the-marikana-files/>

9 Jane Duncan 'South African journalism and the Marikana massacre: A case study of an editorial failure' *The Political Economy of Communication*, [S.l.], v. 1, n. 2, jan. 2014. ISSN 2357-1705.

doctored and blatantly lied to the public about what was actually taking place were those of former struggle veterans. Trade union leaders Frans Baleni, Senzeni Zokwane, Zwelinzima Vavi to name a few, made disingenuous commentary. Jeff Radebe, Pravin Ghordan, Nathi Mthetwa and other ANC leaders joined the cacophony.

Presidential spokesperson Mac Maharaj appeared on television to assure the general public that this was not an attack on democracy or in contravention of any human rights. No, he said, rather it was a necessity to bring stability back to South Africa. He said it with a straight face seemingly unconcerned about echoing the same sentiments expressed by apartheid-era government minister Pik Botha when calling for a state of emergency almost two decades ago.

There was little sympathy for the community from which the miners came, many of whom were both traumatized and on the verge of starvation.

However, social media exploded amongst activists as we were compelled to speak of the atrocities we were witnessing, perpetrated by a party that ironically, prides itself in its struggle history.

In response to my emailed question about why the strike was smashed, David van Wyk, chief researcher at the non-governmental organisation Bench Marks Foundation, said: "The events of 16 August as well as subsequent state repression represent an attempt to smash the strike at Lonmin's Marikana mines.

South Africa is being ruled by a corporatist state that believes that all of society should be structured to serve the interests of monopoly capital in general and mining capital in particular. Corporatism, which has its roots in Mussolini's fascist state in Italy, organises society into a tripartite arrangement composed of the state, capital and state-controlled labour.

All workers are organised into what essentially becomes a single trade union federation that takes its cue from the ruling party and the state, instead of from the working class... even if more than one federation is recognised by the law. In such an arrangement both the union bosses and the ruling party are richly rewarded and even share in the spoils of capital.

Capital welcomes the situation because they are guaranteed a passive and tightly policed working class. In effect, the working class is nationalised and sold to capital. Profits and wealth are privatised while the costs of production are socialised. What better conditions for investment can capital ask for?

The Marikana strike had to be quickly resolved or crushed exactly because workers were acting outside of this cosy relationship."

As van Wyk put it, "The Marikana victory has struck fear into hearts of corporatists who have dominated recent politics. The first horizontal movement where people represented themselves and showed their power has sent shivers down the spines of those who believe that society can only be organised in parasitical hierarchical structures."¹⁰

In this framework it is increasingly evident that the South Africa post 1994 government has long lost its direction as a Developmental State with set developmental goals that promote economic development and security for the majority of its citizens. This became clear in the collusion between NUM, Lonmin and State around the Lonmin Strike which culminated in a massacre. After this brutal show of tyranny against workers who were exercising their right to strike in order to demand a living wage, there could be no denial of the fact that we now live in a corporatist state that is captured by business interests, is not (sufficiently) concerned

10 SACSIS (extrapolated from my article The Smashing of a strike: <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1432>)

with socio-economic transformation or workers rights, and functions within the neo-liberal principles in a dispensation which is fast on its way to becoming a neo-liberal regime.

A year later ...

A year later we saw the memorial of the Marikana Massacre unfold on national television, namely on eNCA, which rolled out an entire day dedicated to the miners that died in the massacre. On the surface this appeared to be a noble gesture that could be celebrated as the middle-class public finally seeing things from the working-class perspective. The material certainly seemed to want to elicit sympathy for the miners and their wives as scenes of the brutal massacre played out over and over again throughout the day. They even showed the list of names of the men who had been murdered brutally at the hands of our police force on August 16 last year, including the four that made up the security guards and policemen killed in that period. These were no longer nameless and faceless men.

Moreover the eNCA documentary entitled The Marikana Massacre, which is a gut-wrenching journey through seven days over the strike period, had also been showing repetitively on the channel over a few weeks. Here we bore witness to the pain and emotional damage suffered by the wives and children of the miners, some of whom watched their husbands die on television in close-up and graphic detail. One woman testified how she had phoned her husband only hours before to finalise his plans for coming home to the Eastern Cape to perform an ancestral ceremony. A few hours later she saw him on his knees trying to hold onto his life, and finally collapsing. It is a chilling sight to watch him shudder, fall and die in full view of the public via television. I'm not sure it is even possible to imagine what his wife must have felt, seeing her husband die on television, which she tries to describe to the interviewer while tears roll down her face. It is an awful moment and it is impossible not to cry along with her.

The question around the eNCA coverage though, is whether it elicited empathy or sympathy for the miners in the minds of the average South African conservative society, who are mostly convinced that business is innocent of any wrongdoing and should be left to police itself — and that workers are dangerous, irrational and need to be controlled by any means necessary. Responses from this mainstream to various articles sympathetic to the workers¹¹, revealed an outlook that felt absolutely no empathy for the miners and in fact blamed them for their own death. This comment from under my article in Sacsis reveals these common attitudes:

STEF
Sept 21

All very well pointing out the police brutality. But what about the people that were savagely attacked, mutilated and killed by the strikers? For instance, I saw pictures of how they hacked away a security guard's jaw before killing him. And why strike armed to the teeth with pangas, spears, etc. if your intentions are not evil? Don't give me the lie that that was for "self defence"! What about the two policemen they savagely beat and shot to death? I don't condone violence and attacks on human rights and dignity by either side, but perhaps one can also understand the anger of the police officers who came under attack from these "dignified" thugs.

11 Smashing of a Strike <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1432>

For this sector of society to witness the deaths of the miners on national television could simply have reinforced their attitudes that the miners got what was coming to them. In this case the repetitive broadcast of workers shot and killed possibly reinforces their belief that this was, indeed, the best way in which to deal with unruly workers in strike action.

Susan Sontag's writings on photography and suffering underscore this notion. "To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more — and more. Images transfix. Images anaesthetise."¹²

In the case of the eNCA coverage there is an inherent danger that this visual display of suffering and death being presented as spectacle and repeated often throughout the week could also anaesthetise the public to the brutalisation of collective workers bodies. The problem too is that this coverage failed to adequately take into consideration all the key players in this atrocity, namely the state and corporate instigators of the shooting. It focuses almost entirely on the police, as if they operated in a vacuum and randomly worked alone. There was no mention of the key players in the orchestration of the massacre that have been revealed and exposed over the year since it occurred.

In an article in the British-based Socialist Worker the shocking collusion between the state, the platinum mining company Lonmin and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is revealed. Here it becomes apparent that Lonmin came up with the strategy and that NUM officials and government allegedly backed it up as NUM requested the police presence, which was ratified by Cyril Ramaphosa, now deputy President¹³.

The absence of such vital background then makes the roll out of the devastating visuals around the massacre almost pornographic. It becomes a graphic spectacle of blood and death — a series of snuff movies in a sense, and instead of creating compassion, responsiveness and outrage from the public, it, by oversaturation, obliquely creates insensitivity towards the miners, reinforcing the message that draconian and brutal measures had to be employed to quell the dangerous workers which in turn quelled white fears.

The matter of how this impacted on the families of the victims had not been factored into this roll out of "massacre media" and they were, tragically, forced to relive the murders over and over. This feeds the process of the derealisation of the bodies of workers and the emotional well-being of their families, most of whom are poor. It speaks volumes about how the poor are often not even consulted when it comes to issues of their privacy and inner emotional and psychological world. The pain in these visuals is only really real for them — the rest of us are mere spectators.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag asserts that the failure of the photograph is to truly represent the reality of atrocity. As Sontag argues, the photograph can only document the pain — can only prove to us that the atrocity is "real" but cannot communicate pain because the viewer is unable to "understand. We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like"¹⁴.

In terms of the eNCA documentary on Marikana one could also assert that the horror of these images of atrocity, then, did not elicit empathy, but rather anaesthetised the public to the

12 Susan Sontag - On Photography, 1977

13 <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art/34117/The+shocking+collusion+behind+the+Marikana+miners+massacre>

14 Susan Sontag – Regarding the pain of others, 1977

spectacle of horror and in fact, chillingly, inure the public to the possibility of many more spectacles of this nature in the future¹⁵.

Mr X, Mining Magnates and Media

The following year (2014) the state, corporate, union (NUM) SAPS, SANDF, and media's collusion against the workers became even more clear as it culminated in the construct and reportage on Mr X.

'In 2014 the mysterious Mr X began testifying against the striking miners at the Farlam Commission, a period in which he claimed the miners engaged in murder conspiracies and flesh eating rituals. But advocate Geoff Budlender questioned parts of Mr X's claims and provided evidence that disputed his claim that Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union president Joseph Mathunjwa spoke telephonically to and visited the strikers on the koppie on the night of August 14 2012. Budlender "told Mr X that it was impossible to know which parts of his evidence were true and which were not"¹⁶. Mr X's discrepancies threw into doubt his testimony on murder conspiracies and flesh eating rituals that seem far-fetched and reminiscent of similar stories concocted by security forces in the apartheid war.

Disturbingly, Mr X's testimony all too easily fuelled the imagination of the South African public and served to step up the state-biased and business-friendly mainstream media campaign against the miners – a campaign that set out to demonise and inferiorise the miners back in 2012 right before and just after the massacre. Here we saw this partiality in the repetitive close up shots of a mine worker licking the blade of his machete as squadrons of men in warrior formations holding knobkerries, sjamboks and machetes filled the TV screens in our own homes, creating the subliminal impression that we too may be invaded by marauding troops of Black men with pangas and spears and fueling the latent nightmares of those not Black and African. These images stoked the rudiments of the 'us and them' scenario.

The depiction of Black male collective body in 'Impi' (warrior) formations fed right into the colonial myth of the 'savage Black man' which is already manifest in the wider collective white imaginary – as this inherited colonial construct became reconstituted in a contemporary setting. The rationale behind this construct remains the same as that used in the days when Europe set forth to 'civilise' darkest Africa and the 'demonic' Black male expanded the 'monstrous human' archetype already alive in the European collective consciousness. Frantz Fanon in his seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks*, explores this dark fear and negativity towards the "negro" in his writings on European civilization. He points out that this negativity is "characterized by the presence of an archetype: an expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man¹⁷." He called this "negrophobia" – and recognized it as an embedded fear in the European psyche.

On first meeting so-called Black 'savages,' the darkest imaginary fears of the European collective conscious, expressed in mythical monsters, witches, ogres and Satan himself, were

15 <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/gillianschutte/2014/07/08/mr-x-versus-the-marikana-miners-2/>

16 <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-07-02-marikanas-mr-x-called-a-liar>

17 F Fanon *Black skin, White masks* (1967).

readily augmented by the “Myth of the Negro” and his “inherently evil nature”. According to colonial logic the black man had to be repressed, oppressed and controlled lest he wreak his evil onto white people of ‘Godly’ stature. This constructed narrative fed the systemic framework that allowed the shackled Black body to become an abused commodity, enslaved and used as free labour to build up a capitalist empire exclusively for white enjoyment and benefit.

How is this much different to what was playing out in the Farlam Commission¹⁸, where the matter of who was responsible for the killing of 34 miners was legally deliberated in a protracted deliberation that placed a heavy burden on the families of massacred workers who were forced to attend this process and relive the massacre over and over again? Their husbands or fathers or brothers were workers who were merely striking for better wages and a human standard of living, but were brutally mowed down by the South African Police Force with live ammunition on instruction from a corporatist state. It seems that those who survived this massacre were now being demonised and cast in the light of uneducated primitives capable of unspeakable acts of violence, as a way to justify this state and corporate brutality. In this framework, Mr X’s dehumanizing testimony could well be read as another neo-colonial construct being utilised to debase the miners even further as images of cannibalism and chopped up body parts flooded Mr X’s narrative, ensuring that the wider community of newspaper readers and television consumers applauded the harsh treatment of strikers, both then and in the future. It is an easy move to pull in a Settler society because “negrophobia” is still the premise for racism and manifests in the lack of empathy for Black body from the wider white public. This white disconnect to suffering of Black body signifies the embedded racism in the white collective as there seems to be an almost complete lack of empathy for brutalised Black body in our public spaces. This was most clearly seen in the lack of white public outrage around this Marikana massacre. Of course there was outrage by leftist and progressive whites, but the majority endorsed the massacre via their silence.

As argued earlier whitist fear of the “Black male savage” construct still lurks in the white imaginary and shows itself in what people write and say about the Black male’s so-called inherent violence. It is indeed, a phobia in the larger non-Black African community and is evidenced in 12-foot walls and high security investments in wealthy neighbourhoods – all to keep the threat of the ‘violent and economically poor Black male’ at bay.

Fanon argued that because the white fear of Blackness becomes a phobia “its affect has a priority that defies all rational thinking”. “More than just this,” he writes, “in a proper phobic reaction, one endows the object of evil intentions and ... the attributes of a malefic power¹⁹.” And this is exactly what played out in Mr X’s testimony, when he described the malefic, cannibalistic nature of the miners, who, he testifies, ate the flesh on one of the murdered security guards in a ritual led by a certain Sangoma -while the general public lapped this up as an indisputable truth about Black men.

The tragedy inherent in this construction is that even if a small group of miners did partake in this alleged ritual, the entire community of Black strikers has been implicated by association,

18 The Marikana Commission of Inquiry (Commission) or Farlam Commission was appointed by the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma, in terms of section 84(2)(f) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, on 23 August 2012. - See more at: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za/#sthash.EkL1ea8B.dpuf>

<http://www.marikanacomm.org.za/>

19 F Fanon *Black skin, White masks* (1967).

and are thus collectively dehumanised and satanised. This creates a massive empathy chasm between the public and the miners as the focus becomes fixated on the act of savagery and is deflected from the loss and trauma the mine workers experienced at the hands of the state and state mechanisms. It cancels out the human narratives of mothers who cannot afford to fulfill their aspirations for their child's education because of low wages – or husbands who want to build homes for their wives or buy a car or further their education. It cancels out the pain and frustration felt by people who live without toilets and taps and whose babies often do not live beyond five due to environmental related disease or opportunistic infections caught in unsanitary conditions. It does not speak to the inadequacy of low wages to feed and nourish families and does not begin to imagine that depression and stress and anxiety are conditions experienced by people coping with loss and abuse – or acknowledge the bravery, the tenacity and strength of the mine worker community as they held out for five whole months from going back to work in order to change the rules of economic justice for the wider South Africa. It deflects entirely from the issue of economic justice and the humanity of the mineworkers.

What Mr X's narrative also did was shift the focus from the systemic and monstrous corporate exploitation of human beings and the reality of a modern day slavery onto the alleged barbarity of the workers, and plays down the actual savagery of the police brutality meted out on the working class in a corporatist state that honors wealth over social justice.

In short it shifted the blame to the victims and one man's seemingly fallacious and unlikely testimony is what could well have played a major role in sealing the fate of the miners and their families as well as the future of justice for workers who strike in this country.

The Marikana Widows

August 2014 marked two years after the Marikana massacre. The widows of the workers killed by the South African Police Service in 2012 had received their deceased husband's provident fund dues, but were still awaiting justice whilst the media and public attention had long since transferred from their plight to the Farlam Commission.

The focus at this point had been on the prolonged strike action on the Platinum belt as well as Mr X's sensational testimony alleging that body parts were used in flesh eating rituals by striking miners back in 2012. This is what had gripped the imagination of the public, many of whom were quick to believe this anti-black narrative – a similar narrative that was used by the apartheid era South African Defense Force about black soldiers in the border wars when they spoke of bloody rituals used to turn bullets into water.

Meanwhile the widows had been all but forgotten and though the mining company Lonmin had taken on the responsibility of their children's education and also offered a male member of the families of the deceased a job on the mines to replace the breadwinners slain by the police, they reported that they had not been adequately compensated for their loss²⁰.

20 Marikana Widows shed tears in women's month: <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/2096>

Whitist Complex

There is a complex symbiotic relationship between white South Africans and the ANC that is not recognized by racist conservatives or moderate whites who have instead, constructed a narrative of victimhood in relation to what they perceive as a black anti-white and inept government. Despite the fact that their needs are put before all other race groups, making the wealthy whites grow exponentially richer under the ANC administration whilst the poor have gotten poorer, they are still the most dissatisfied with the socio-economic status quo.

This 'whitist' synecdoche – anti-black narrative in which whiteness becomes the normalized standard for all behaviours – has, unfortunately, also been adopted by moderate or depoliticized Indian, Coloured and Black groups as an 'enlightened' response to matters that pertain to black incompetence/corruption/ignorance.

Frantz Fanon writes of this phenomenon in his psychosociopolitical book *Black Skin White Masks* in an agonizing way: 'However painful it is for me to accept this one conclusion, I am obliged to state it. For the Black man there is only one destiny and that is to be white.'

He goes on to contextualize this within the framework of the 'effective dis-alienation' of the black subject via colonial history, which he says, "entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex it is as the outcome of a double process: Primarily economic. Subsequently the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization of this inferiority."

Fanon speaks of this state as a neurotic disorder, which he points to as almost inevitable in a world order skewed along skin hues, with historical access to power and privilege for those with white skins; and the historical absence of both power and privilege for those with black skins.

In a South African context this dominant whitist discourse becomes an inevitable outcome of around 350 years of brutal white domination and repression of blackness. Add to that the three-tiered raced apartheid hierarchy which bestowed varying levels of privilege and power in the hands of Indian and Coloured folk over the Black African subject. This systemic manipulation of race and power gave rise to multiple neurotic raced attitudes of superiority and inferiority in relation to the master signifier of whiteness.

Unless politicised and schooled in black consciousness, or black pride, many are likely to think along the lines of a society that still remains in the grip of white norms and collective aspirations to whiteness. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, they have internalised racism and the manufacturing of whitist standards through popular culture, political economics and all forms of media in South Africa. The unfortunate thing in this country is that this is yet to become part of the public debate. Instead what has become prominent in our public debate are multiple disingenuous ways to obfuscate this debate through the whitist narrative that has acquired specious moral authority from the failures- perceived and otherwise- of the ANC government that is treated as just another demonstration of black inferiority by whitist synecdoche.

Frances Henry and Carol Tator make an apt observation in their book *The Colour of Democracy* by saying: 'Whiteness,' like 'colour' and 'Blackness,' are essentially social constructs applied to human beings rather than veritable truths that have universal validity. The power of Whiteness, however, is manifested by the ways in which racialized Whiteness

becomes transformed into social, political, economic, and cultural behaviour. White culture, norms, and values in all these areas become normative natural. They become the standard against which all other cultures, groups, and individuals are measured and usually found to be inferior.”

Though whiteness has retained its dominant position in South African society this is not a blanket reality as there are other more radical and politicized responses to whiteness. However, with the ANC responding to and managing white monopoly capital and favouring foreign direct investment and profits before its own people, they too have become part of a whitist discourse that dominates our socioeconomic and psychopolitical landscape which has helped to keep the white master narrative entrenched.

The whitist response is also not homogenous. Joel Kovel in his book *White Racism – a psychohistory*²¹ explains the diversity in white views as he categorises different types of racists. In a nutshell he begins with dominative racists which he describes as explicitly racist right wing bigots and supremacists; and aversive racists who are implicitly racist and believe in white superiority but disassociate with their own prejudice. They tend to avoid interaction with other races; and Metaracists who buy into mass illusions about transformation and non-racism but continue to practice racism unconsciously.

Putting this framework into the revealing scenario of the Marikana Massacre, we witnessed the dominative racists openly approve of the massacring of Black strikers. They showed their utter contempt for blackness in social media hate commentary using the purported superstitious behavior of miners who relied of powers of a sangoma and are thus primitivised. Aversive racists, on the other hand, kept their voices out of the public debate, but one can assume that their lack of outrage around the massacre spoke of silent complicity, possibly even unconscious relief that the ‘inferior’ blacks had been controlled and suppressed and thus no longer posed a threat to them. Metaracists immersed themselves in the noble savage archetype, attaching heroism and warrior tropes to the man in the green blanket, almost hybridizing their own inner hero with that of the slain mineworkers. The man in the green blanket emblem became the flag to rally after in promotion of their immature radical politics but they did not deal adequately with the structural racism that created the conditions for the strikes. Mgcineni Noki (34) also known as “Mbush” was a worker who hailed from Thwalikhulu in Mqanduli, Eastern Cape²². He was “The Man in the Green Blanket” who took a leading role in the strike negotiations and ended up bullet riddled on the day of the massacre. Many thought of his death, and the bullets in his head and body, as a clear sign of an assassination. Before his name was known his image was used as the flag to rally around in promotion of reactive and immature radical politics in the same manner as Che Geuvara’s image was printed on T-Shirts. Though deeply symbolic to those in the struggle, the image became somewhat popularised and overused on social media platforms in a manner devoid of indepth understanding of the workers living conditions and the whole of the struggle – but became more concerned with the hipness of being associated with the Marikana Struggle.

It was really the more mature Leftists and the far Left activists that threw themselves collectively into a social media organised backlash and activism to express their outrage, mostly against the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa and the South African Police Service (SAPS) as perpetrators of unmerited violence against the Lonmin strikers. Some pointed to the role that white monopoly capital played in this event – namely Lonmin’s insensitive disregard of their

21 White Racism: A Psychohistory – May 6, 1984

22 <http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Remembering-Marikana-The-man-in-the-green-blanket-20150429>

workers concerns and refusal to respond to worker's ongoing requests for a process of negotiation.

Only months after the massacre occurred did the mainstream media begin to cover the backstory to the strike, and point the public to the multiple social injustices in corporate and state transgressions that plague communities living around extractive industries. This helped to contextualize the reasons why mineworkers were on strike and were refusing Lonmin's terms of settlement. Until then the media played into the middle class whitist fear of the irrational black savage trope and it was in this crucial period that the public consent for the brutalization of the workers was manufactured.

That it ended in a massacre of 34 men in 8 seconds in which 83 men were also injured - and the overall death of 46 people in a matter of weeks, was cognitive dissonance to many South Africans – but again – the lack of public outrage around the massacre spoke volumes about the prevailing attitudes in South Africa and the depersonalization of black body and black struggles by our wider middle class that is desensitized by the dominant whitist discourse.

Conclusion

The Marikana Massacre exposed the powerful construct of whiteness at play as the major player in South Africa's national narrative. It put under scrutiny, in particular, black people who, for private gain, willingly act on behalf of white monopoly capital to promote and protect whitist privilege at the expense of the real national interest and legitimate popular dispensation.

Further to this, the ease at which black leaders wreaked violence onto black and poor citizens brings to mind Paul Kivel's assertion that: "Whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white²³." From all this one cannot but surmise that the ANC, in its willingness to subjugate black citizens for the protection of whitist privilege, is a puppet government placed in power to serve a white globalist agenda and not its own people.

In the event of the Marikana Massacre, they used all the mechanisms of power at their disposal, economic, social and state power, to gain favour from their corporate puppet masters, and ended up inflicting heinous violence against its own people. Because of that they have earned the permanent distrust of their own people, in particular the working class and the marginalised poor against whom brutal state power is constantly employed to silence their voices, and quash their potential collective power. The Marikana tragedy might have been avoided had the governing elite not been under capture of big white mining capital, freeing it to pay sufficient attention, especially to the living conditions of miners. They may also have been less inclined to assist so enthusiastically in the manufacturing of the 'savage' black male trope. But as partners, shareholders and investors in the lucrative mining sector, the governing elite have become beneficiaries of white monopoly capital and are thus

23 Kivel, P. (1996). *Uprooting racism: How white people can work for racial justice*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Press.

stakeholders in the industrial complex that exploits cheap labour and brutally oppresses the masses.

That the Marikana Report has exonerated those who were exposed by independent reports to be most responsible for the massacre, as in State and Lonmin, is not surprising. The media machinery gave us clues over the entire commission period that this would be the inevitable outcome and that workers would be blamed for the ‘savagery’ such as comments like this one, found under my Mail and Guardian article on the Mr X construct, reveal.

Momma Cyndi • a year ago²⁴

Before the Marikana massacre occurred, we knew that those who were killed had parts of their bodies cut off. I specifically remember the lips of one of the security guards being removed.

Many people commenting on this case use this incident as an example of the so-called savage primitive nature of the workers and as justification of the massacre – as if 3000 people were responsible for one alleged muti-attack.²⁵

It is now incumbent on the citizens of South Africa to see through the manipulation of their values by a largely whitist media machinery in collusion with a ‘white monopoly capital friendly government’ and unite in a show of people’s power to demand justice for the people of Marikana and the people of Mzansi (South Africa).

It is also time for the general middle class to understand and obliterate the constructed myth that the black and poor of this land are unrestrained violent primitives against which live ammunition needs to be used, and begin to pick apart the barbarity of the whitist capitalist patriarchy that retains a hold over what was meant to be a democratic and equal land for all who live in it.



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24 <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/gillianschutte/2014/07/08/mr-x-versus-the-marikana-miners-2/>

25 Muti – is a word commonly used for traditional medicine in South Africa.