



# THE MARIKANA aftermath



# Imagining a way forward after Marikana

What happened during the fatal miners' strike at Lonmin in Marikana in August 2012 did not end there.

By Niren Tolsi

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**T**here were 34 people killed in a massacre on August 16. Those miners that survived and were arrested allege torture and brutality by the police. People also died violently before and after that date also.

But, what happened in Marikana in August last year did not end there.

Families were left without husbands, brothers, sons and fathers – breadwinners. For the Masuhlo family, they had lost a daughter and mother when Pauline Masuhlo, an ANC councillor in the Madibeng municipality and a campaigner for better social conditions in the squalid informal settlements around Lonmin's shafts, died from injuries sustained during a government clampdown of Nkaneng informal settlement on August 25.

Families – the nuclear and extended ones in rural areas, and sometimes satellite “second” families at Marikana – are now bereft of wages and remittance so important for their survival. There is also the trauma inherent in the violent manner in which their loved ones died.

Rural communities have lost people who, with their wages, bought football kits and balls for the local teams they grew up in or coached. They have lost mediators, friends they drank with and elders who advised on issues affecting them. Churches have lost pastors and choir members. Shebeens have lost scallywags.

The deaths have changed families and communities, it has certainly changed how they see their relationship with a democratically elected government.

A 24-page supplement published in the *Mail & Guardian* on the one year anniversary of the Marikana massacre is the first step in a project that started in December last year and will continue for a further year at the very least. It seeks to answer the question: What happens after Marikana?

These are complex answers that cannot be fully documented by two journalists, but the project does seek to move away from the mainstream media's snapshot pictures and easy headlines. It aims to investigate the *real* cost of Marikana to families, to communities and, through this microscope of the intimate, this strange new South Africa that “Marikana” has ushered in.

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What we as a nation are still hoping to answer, are the more political and philosophical questions of who took the gun from the metaphorical “white man” and why was the first shot fired?

To do this requires being embedded in space and subject. It requires returning the journalistic form to its best traditions of immersion and social investigation. It requires time, or “slow journalism”. It requires returning.

Santu Mofokeng’s vital documentation of sharecropper Kas Maine was not an Instagram exercise.

Nor did social documentary photographer Chris Ledochowski’s work in the Cape Flats emerge from Twitter conversations and Google.

These are singular individuals with different training, drives, demons and curiosities. But their art of composition, light, drawing out texture, depth and attention to detail was honed in some way by the social documentary approach to “go back”. To return.

In doing so these characteristics of photography transmuted onto the national narrative and how South Africa understood itself. Their work shed light, added depth to knowledge, texture to understanding and brought out the detail in this country through the little-big stories they told so artfully.

Neither Paul Botes nor I consider ourselves in the league of Mofokeng, Ledochowski or the many fine writers and photographers who have documented this contradictory and sometimes cruel country with such bravery and intelligence. But, with this project, we do subscribe to what makes journalism thoughtful, responsive, empathetic and relevant.

We feel this is important in an age when journalism can be reduced to superficial instant-news. We feel it is important because we, South Africans, need to understand what happens after Marikana: to the families and, through their eyes, what is happening to ourselves and our democracy.

It is vitally important because after spending almost eight months with the Marikana families, there is an overwhelming sense that they have been abandoned. By government, by Lonmin and by their fellow South Africans.

There is scant political will to provide the financial and structural mechanisms required to ensure that a stuttering Farlam Commission of Inquiry actually delivers on its mandate to uncover the truth of the fatal strike and give closure to the families.

Traumatised families dealing with unresolved grief are descending further into poverty. Our world can never be the same. What happened at Marikana was a deep echo from our apartheid past. It was unrestrained and brutal. It was also state-administered.

The attendant imagery of Marikana is frighteningly cyclical: The massacre resurrects the killing of students by apartheid police on 16 June 1976 in Soweto and the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 when 69 people died.

The miners congregating on the Marikana koppies are reminiscent of the Pondo Revolt of 1960 and their gatherings and massacre on Ngquza Hill in the Eastern Cape, a province where the majority of the dead miners came from, as is the sight of the helicopters that hovered over the miners and the massacre last year. Jonny Steinberg, in his paper, *A Bag of Soil, A Bullet from Up High*, included in the book *Rural Resistance in South Africa*, documents a source’s retelling of the massacre at Ngquza as passed on by a previous generation: “The whites took Botha Sigcau, king of Eastern Mpondoland, up in a helicopter. They flew him to Ngquza, and there the helicopter stopped, hovering just over the rebels. Then the white commander put a rifle in Botha Sigcau’s hands, and he said: ‘Whether we end this rebellion is your decision to make. We can do nothing if you cannot fire the first shot. The choice is in your hands, not ours’. Botha Sigcau thought for a little while, took the rifle from the white man, aimed at the rebels below, and fired the first shot. It hit a man in the chest and killed him. That is how the massacre began.”

South Africans have seen the footage of the Marikana massacre. The country knows who fired the shots. What we as a nation are still hoping to answer, are the more political and philosophical questions of who took the gun from the metaphorical “white man” and why was the first shot fired?

Questions this project hopes to answer with the voices of *all* the families of those who died in Marikana.

It is a mammoth project, one that involves driving long distances into the deep recesses of rural South Africa and getting lost often. It has meant navigating the role of traditionalism and patriarchy in who gets to tell what stories and how grief is confronted. It has meant encountering the indomitable spirit of South African women often. We hope to do their stories justice.

*Paul Botes and Niren Tolsi hope to publish a book of family portraits and their verbatim accounts at the end of next year. All profits from sales will go to the families. They also hope to have a multimedia exhibition that will travel to the areas in which these families live.*



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