

## ‘Understanding Marikana through the Mpondo Revolts.’

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Alexander P, Lekgowa T, Mmope B, Sinwell L, and Xezwi B (2012) *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

Kepe T and Ntsebeza L (eds) (2012) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

The Mpondo revolts in the late 1950s and early 1960s have been widely recognised as the foremost example of rural resistance during the apartheid period in South African history (Kepe and Ntsebeza, 2012: 1). The Ngquza Hill massacre of June 6<sup>th</sup> 1960 took place at the height of the revolts, during which thousands of people attending a scheduled meeting were gunned down by apartheid security forces, killing at least eleven people and injuring dozens more. In the aftermath of the massacre, thirty people were taken to Pretoria and hanged. Although focused on Bantu Authorities and Betterment Planning, the Mpondo revolts were part of a broader wave of major protests by the marginalized against an autocratic and repressive apartheid regime, including the urban-based marches of Langa and Sharpeville in March 1960. Just like at Ngquza Hill, protestors at Langa and Sharpeville were massacred and arrested by the state. However, unlike Langa and Sharpeville, the history of the Mpondo revolts has largely been neglected and excluded from the dominant nationalist narrative of ‘the Struggle’ in South African history. As a result, there are very few South African scholars attempting to draw insights from, or comparisons with the Mpondo revolts and other rural histories of resistance. This can clearly be seen in the literature on South Africa’s most recent, and first post-apartheid, massacre at Marikana on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012. Although some scholars have drawn connections between Sharpeville and Marikana, none have attempted to draw the connections between Marikana and Ngquza Hill, or any other instance of rural resistance for that matter (Gevisser, 2012: 6).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate some of the ways in which rural histories can enhance our understanding of both rural and urban resistance in contemporary South Africa. In order to do so, I will explore two books in conversation with each other, Thembela Kepe and Lungisile Ntsebeza’s edited volume *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years* as well as Peter Alexander, Thapelo Lekgowa, Botsang Mmope, Luke Sinwell and Bongani Xezwi’s *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer*. Perhaps the most important insight that can be gained from bringing the rural areas and their histories back into the discussion of urban-based instances of resistance in contemporary South Africa is of the capacity of ordinary people to collectively organize themselves against oppressive authorities and, in so doing, create the possibility for an emancipatory political project conducted at a distance from the state and other spheres of elite politics.

At first glance the two books may seem largely unrelated. Although both books deal with the topics of resistance and massacre, they do so from different perspectives and with different subject matters. *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts After Fifty Years* is an edited volume of thirteen chapters written by scholars from a wide range of disciplines (geography, history, political science and anthropology) who engage with the revolts from multiple theoretical angles and provide a broad spectrum of perspectives covering the nature and meaning of the Mpondo revolts within the broader context of South African resistance both past and present, urban and rural. Alexander et al.'s *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer*, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with labour issues and details the Marikana strike and massacre. Based on workers' testimonies, it is largely concerned with providing a 'history from below' and uses the language of class-struggle and workers' rights to counter-balance the various narratives of the massacre espoused by mainstream media outlets, which tend to demonise workers in favour of the state and big-business (Alexander et al., 2012: 11). This article addresses two key questions. The first is how can we justifiably draw on insights from the Mpondo revolts, a historically and geographically distant event of rural resistance, in order to better understand the Marikana strike, an urban based instance of resistance that took place in post-apartheid South Africa? Second, how does placing *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts After Fifty Years* in conversation with *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer* allow us to think afresh about resistance in contemporary South Africa.

### **Marikana as a Workplace Struggle**

The town of Marikana is situated in the North West Province of South Africa. On the outskirts of the town are the three Lonmin-owned mines (Karee, West and East Platinum) and alongside two of these mines is the eNkanini shack settlement where a large portion of the mineworkers reside whilst working on the Lonmin mines (Legassick, 2012). The massacre of 34 people, as well as the injury of at least 80 more, at the foot of a rocky hillock outside the eNkanini shack settlement on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012 by the South African police has become famously known as the Marikana massacre. Many intellectuals and scholars have argued that the event could prove to be a decisive turning-point in South Africa's post-apartheid history (Legassick, 2012). The massacre was the state's repressive reaction to what had been declared an illegal 'wildcat strike' in which thousands of Lonmin workers downed their tools and collectively demanded to negotiate issues of wages with the Lonmin management directly. The strike was initially led and organised by migrant Mpondo Rock Drill Operators (RDOs) who were later joined in their protest by workers from across the mining occupational categories as well as many members of the eNkanini community (mostly unemployed men) on what became referred to by the protesters themselves as 'the mountain'. The strike action at Marikana took place in the same year in which South Africa had experienced a higher national level of community protests and continuing urban unrest than ever before (Alexander et al., 2012: 189). In the months following the massacre in 2012

a leading socialist and labour historian from the University of Johannesburg (UJ), Peter Alexander, as well as Thapelo Lekgowa, Botsang Mmope, Luke Sinwell and Bongani Xezwi, published *Marikana: A View from the Mountain* in an attempt to provide the first academic account of the massacre.

As previously stated, the official media coverage demonstrated widespread bias in favour of government and business interests over those of the striking mineworkers; presenting the latter as frenzied, violent and criminal (Alexander et al., 2012: 171). *Marikana: A View from the Mountain* draws directly on the testimonies of the workers involved in the strike and has proven a popular and invaluable alternative account of the events for which the authors should be credited. However, Alexander et al. maintain a narrow focus on workplace issues and a rigid usage of class, and the book cannot easily be considered a social history, or history from below, in the true sense. In this way, Alexander et al.'s book raises important historiographical questions about the relationship between narrowly focused labour history and 'new' labour history or social history, especially of the Thompsonian variety (Thompson, 1971: 76-77).<sup>i</sup> Essentially the book takes the form of a case study and, true to its labour history leanings, the subject of its inquiry is the strike which took place in the mining industry.

At the core of the book are ten interviews with mineworkers in the days immediately following the massacre. Although a positive contribution as one of the very few texts produced which actually takes into account striking mineworkers' perspective, the book is limited by its adherence to a relatively narrow language of class and class struggle. The authors take their primary subject matter as the 'striking mineworkers' and pay little if any attention to other people involved in the resistance at Marikana. Thus, the authors seem to imply that the unemployed people and members of the eNkanini, who are not mineworkers, but who were directly involved in the resistance forged on the mountain, are not part of the working class and are, as a result, left out of the narrative. For example Thembinkosi Gwelani from Lusikisiki in eastern Pondoland<sup>ii</sup> was just one of the hundreds of unemployed men and women from the Eastern Cape who were actively involved in the strike at Marikana by providing assistance and solidarity to those on the mountain (Fuzile, 2012). Gwelani was shot and killed during the massacre whilst failing to escape police bullets after bringing food to the strikers and, as he was not a full-time Lonmin employee, his family has been left back in Pondoland without any prospect of compensation (Fuzile, 2012). Zitha Soni from Ngqeleni, another unemployed man who was involved in the strike, commented that '[t]his is just a struggle for us here. We were there when these miners were killed, we were there in the meetings they held in Wonderkop Stadium... Now we are just forgotten heroes' (Fuzile, 2012). In a troubling formulation, the authors interpret the events at Marikana as an example of 'raw working-class power – unhindered by the tenets of existing collective bargaining and middle-class politics' (Alexander et al., 2012: 9), meaning that the nexus between community and workers' struggles is not addressed and, the very nature of the

struggle at Marikana is associated with some kind of 'raw' power as opposed to a disciplined political praxis of the poor.

Of greater importance is the way in which Alexander et al., manage the rural. It is only in the final ten pages of *Marikana: A View from the Mountain* that the authors acknowledge that the majority of people involved in the strike were oscillating male migrant RDOs from Pondoland, and they offer no serious engagement with the significance of these known rural connections in influencing the resistance at Marikana (Alexander et al., 2012: 190). Aside from this fleeting sentence at the end of the book, the rural areas are marginalised throughout. In almost every interview presented in the book, the striking mineworkers stress the importance of life and the conditions 'back home' (both positively and negatively) in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape. However, the authors do not substantively engage in a meaningful discussion regarding the influences of these rural connections on the motivations and actions of migrant Mpondo mineworkers at Marikana. In spite of a rich body of literature dealing with migrants and their political and workplace traditions, the authors do not discuss the complex relationship between urban and rural influences and the way in which the entanglement of both were significant in shaping the resistance at Marikana, or in the platinum industry more generally. As rural influences, or connections are not considered of any importance, the rural becomes marginalised.

Perhaps the most notable example of this marginalization is found in Alexander et al.'s explanation of the 'five madodas' (2012: 31) and their role in representing the protesters on the mountain in negotiations with police and trade union representatives. The authors make a special effort to mould our understanding of this term 'five madodas' to its literal meaning of 'five men' so as to prevent any association of this group of representatives with 'self-selected or traditional leadership' as they insist that this would imply 'a certain "backwardness", in contrast to trade unions' (Alexander et al., 2012: 31). The authors appear to support a grand narrative of modernisation which relegates anything associated with the rural to the realm of the pre-modern and particular. This is not to suggest that the 'five madodas' should be associated with the system of traditional leadership found in the rural countryside of South Africa. Instead, what is being suggested is that the authors' effort to disassociate the form of leadership which emerged at Marikana with any connection to rural modes of collective-organisation and self-selected representation is problematic.

Just as was the case with Alexander et al.'s account of the massacre itself, the historical contextualization of Marikana is based on using dead bodies, and their spatial and temporal contexts, as the primary reference points for making historical comparisons. This is done in order to ultimately prove the event's exceptionalism within the South African context. Alexander et al. begin their analysis by claiming that the Marikana massacre was 'an exceptional event, at least for South Africa' (2012: 169). Citing the examples of the 28 anti-apartheid activists killed by the Ciskei Defence Force in Bhisho in 1992, as well as the

‘celebrated strikes by black mineworkers that occurred in 1920, 1946 and 1987’, Alexander et al. highlights that there were significantly fewer fatalities in these instances compared to Marikana (2012: 169). The 40 deaths at Boipatong in 1992 are explained as being different to those at Marikana because the ‘main culprit’ in that case was the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and not the state. The Rand Revolt in 1922 is identified as the last time that so large a number of striking workers had been killed. However, the authors stress Marikana’s difference as a ‘massacre’ and not a ‘revolt’, hence maintaining their stance that Marikana is somehow exceptional (Alexander et al., 2012: 169). This has been a dominant and lasting trend within South African historiography: to explain events in an ultimately isolated way by claiming their ‘exceptional’ character. The negative consequence of this is that the book has inadvertently provided an analysis that acts so as to prevent further discussion and investigation into the past connections and potential future influences of Marikana that go beyond the scope of the urban workplace.

In regard to discussions about working conditions, wage disputes, union rivalries, state repression, and the labour relations regime, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain* is a fundamental contribution. However, it is in no way a definitive study of the events at Marikana and, as has been discussed above, there are significant limitations to the scope of the text and the understanding of the events and meanings of Marikana that it provides us. In order to overcome these shortcomings and enrich our historical understanding of Marikana this article turns once again to the edited volume *Rural Resistance in South Africa*. As an in-depth exploration of the context, character, actors, ideology and political practices of the Mpondo revolts, *Rural Resistance in South Africa* has provided us with the conceptual tools with which to draw parallels between historical and contemporary forms of power and resistance. Much more research still needs to be done- and is in the process of being conducted. But the re-examination of rurally based protest and repression assists us in identifying some of the suggestive links, particularly in regard to the transmission of repertoires of struggle, between the Marikana strike and the Mpondo revolts, and more specifically the Marikana massacre and the Ngquza Hill massacre.

### **Contesting the Marginalization of the Rural**

The failure to take rural areas seriously, which is largely a product of the politics of knowledge production in South Africa, is entirely divorced from the lived reality of over fifty per cent of the South African population who continue to hold their regular homes in the rural countryside (Kepe and Ntsebeza, 2012: 5). And as such, the editors of *Rural Resistance in South Africa*, Kepe and Ntsebeza, argue that ‘conditions in the rural areas are not insignificant and should be told again and again, as well as from multiple angles where possible’ (2012: 5). The usefulness of this insight is that it invites us to consider the direct and indirect influences of rural experiences and histories of resistance on the actions of migrant workers in urban areas. This has particular significance for Marikana. It was, after all, the migrant Mpondo RDOs at Marikana who were the driving force behind the strike

action. With this in mind it becomes even more apparent that investigating the nature and significance of the Mpondo revolts would be extremely helpful in nuancing our understanding of what happened at Marikana.

Kepe and Ntsebeza remind us that there is a strong tendency within a significant amount of South African scholarship to dismiss the importance of the rural imprint in urban struggles, as well as to ignore the on-going importance of migrancy. A primary reason for the current lack of scholarly engagement with the rural areas must be attributed to the perceived division between the urban and the rural that has been embedded within many trends of the various schools of South African thought. Scholars, such as James Ferguson, have argued that this is no doubt in part a persisting consequence of the liberal school of Southern African historians who knowingly choose not to explore the relevance of urban worker's rural influences and sustained linkages to the rural areas in an attempt to take, what they see as, a 'necessary political positioning... within the terms of the modernist grand narrative' (1990: 619). Ferguson argues that a characteristic feature of the liberal school was its commitment to 'a grand narrative of progress, according to which the native population was moving rapidly along an avenue leading to "civilisation", later styled "Westernisation" or "modernisation"' (1990: 617). As such, in writing in response to conservative, colonial historians, who maintained that black Africans were inherently 'backward' or 'primitive', liberal historians argued that whilst this conception of black Africans was not incorrect, it was in fact out of date. Instead they argued that the urban African was part of the modern 'permanently urbanised townsman', no longer a 'migrant-labouring tribesman', and hence no longer primitive (Ferguson, 1990: 617). This same eagerness to equate the rural with backwardness and the urban with modernity is also demonstrated in a number of works belonging to the revisionist, Marxist and labour historian approaches. Understanding this ideological context is of fundamental importance to understanding why it is that so many southern African scholars commonly recognised as 'progressive' have actively discouraged the study of rural attachments and connections to urban life.

Although, having said this, it must be acknowledged that it would be an unfair generalisation to suggest that all South African labour historians, Marxists, revisionists, and liberal historians, are guilty of neglecting the rural areas or the significance of their influence in urban settings embodied in the experiences of migrant labourers; in fact there can be found in each of these disciplines several scholars who have actively encouraged this line of thinking. For example labour historians such as Breckenridge, Moodie, Bradford and van Onselen; liberal historians such as Simkins and Wilson; and revisionist scholars such as Arrighi, Bundy, Beinart, Delius, Morris, Wolpe and Legassick; have contributed to a body of literature which stressed exactly this point about the articulation of the rural to the urban through migrant labour. However, it can be argued that the majority of this literature is primarily concerned with demonstrating the ways in which the rural was profoundly

affected by ‘modernisation’ and its influences emanating from the urban over and above the discussion of how the rural was, and continues to be, influential in shaping the urban.

In sharp contrast to the book on Marikana, *Rural Resistance in South Africa* completely challenges this grand narrative of modernisation and urges us to take as seriously the rural areas, their histories, and their people, as we do the urban. Two chapters in the book, the first by Dunbar Moodie and the second by Ari Sitas, destroy this modernist myth by demonstrating the various manners in which the organisational capabilities and actions of trade unionists and activists in the urban areas of apartheid South Africa were enhanced, and to a large extent shaped by the memory and influences of the rural based Mpondo Revolts (Kepe and Ntsebeza, 2012: 12). The work of both Moodie and Sitas are important for their stress on the entanglement of the rural and the urban, which is the key tenant of an alternative tradition in labour history and revisionist scholarship of which they are part and upon which this paper seeks to build. However, it must be noted that of all the contributing chapters to the book, these two seem to be the ones that have provided more questions than answers, and have thus opened the gates for future scholarship to address the issue of Mpondo resistance in trade unions and urban spaces throughout the apartheid era. Sitas demonstrates the role played by the ‘rural in the urban’ in constructing an ‘antinomic consciousness in the labour movement’ in industrial KwaZulu-Natal (2012: 173). Commenting on the character and role of Alfred Themba Qabula, Sitas states that: ‘The rebellion against Bantu Authorities was so deep in his bones that it affected everything, his politics and most importantly his craft’ (2012: 173). Sitas then goes on to quote Qabula directly saying:

I reject the idea of praising the kings and rulers because in most instances in the past the kings and chiefs proved themselves most willing to be co-opted by the colonial rulers at the expense of their subjects... (2012: 173).

Again in contradiction to Alexander et al. on Marikana, Jimmy Pierse’s chapter, ‘Reading and Writing the Mpondo Revolts’, encourages us to deal with the unwitting, yet nefarious, consequences of South African exceptionalism (2012: 63). He notes that this exceptionalism prevents the Mpondo revolts from being examined as part and product of wider colonial patterns on the African continent, and prevents scholars from drawing connections and comparisons from other international instances of resistance and oppression (Pierse, 2012: 63). As such, Pierse’s insights are extremely helpful in understanding why it is that so many South African scholars have been eager to draw insights from and comparisons with Sharpeville, the Soweto Uprising and a host of other urban-based instances of resistance in dealing with the events at Marikana and yet none have endeavoured to uncover the connections between Marikana and historical forms of rural resistance (2012: 63).<sup>iii</sup> By providing an in-depth exploration of the ideology and political practices of the Mpondo revolts, *Rural Resistance in South Africa* has provided us with the conceptual tools with which to draw parallels between historical and contemporary

forms of power and resistance, and in so doing, it allows us to garner a better understanding the significance of resistance of the past in shaping resistance of the present and future.

### **Reflections of the Mpondo revolts at Marikana**

Perhaps the most striking of parallels to be drawn between the events at Marikana and the history of rural resistance culminating in the Mpondo revolts is the featuring of mountains as sites of resistance and spaces for politics to be conducted at a distance from the state.

Alison Drew's critical examination of Govan Mbeki's 'The Peasants' Revolt' explains the symbolic and practical significance of mountains in Pondoland during times of social unrest and resistance:

Mountains, spiritual places where rituals were performed, provided protection during wars and were places where people could meet undisturbed. Well before the revolt, the Mphondo met in mountains to show their dissatisfaction with decisions taken by the *Bhunga*, particularly those concerning the concentration of power in the hands of chiefs, who could attend mountain meetings *only if they came as an equal, a commoner, not a chief*. (2012: 76; emphasis added)

According to Drew the *Intaba* (also known as the *kongo* or mountain movement) became 'an alternative site of political imagining' that, quoting the words of Clifton Crais, 'began to elaborate a structure of authority – polity even – that stood in opposition to the chief and, ultimately, to the apartheid state itself' (2012: 71). Drew explains that the first mountain meeting took place in Bizana at Mount Nonqulwana and soon after meetings proliferated to three other mountains, Nqindilili, Ndlovu and Ngquza, signalling the spread of the revolt from Bizana to Lusikisiki and Flagstaff. Class played a defining role in the movement's social composition as the membership attending mountain meetings were the poor and working class – those who suffered most from the impact of Betterment Planning and Tribal Authorities – while wealthy individuals (such as traders) were expected to provide financial aid to the movement. Those wealthy individuals, chiefs, or local authorities who did not offer their solidarity to the mountain movement were often made the target of boycotts and in extreme cases kraal burning. Kraal and hut burning was a tactic which was employed by the mountain movement in April 1960 after the mountain committees discovered that 'government agents' had infiltrated their membership and needed to be dealt with. The Bizana mountain committee advised its members that 'we should not start burning immediately... we should first go to the chiefs, headmen and Tribal Authority Councillors and invite them to the mountain' only those people who refused after being asked twice would have their kraals burnt (Drew, 2012: 78). Drew claims that:

Mbeki describes the mountain committee as disciplined and moving systematically from one method of struggle to the next... seeing armed struggle as a means, rather than as an end in itself. Mbeki emphasises the avoidance of random terror: "even at the height of the hut-burning



campaign, those who waged the struggle against Bantu Authorities *did not shed their humanity...* On the whole the burning of huts was a warning, if harsh, that the owners should mend their ways... This is the difference between a people's organized force and a band of thugs collected for the sole purpose of sustaining a tyranny that lives in perpetual fear of its own failure" (Drew, 2012: 78).

Chapter Ten by Liana Muller goes on to use the idea of the 'art of memory' to explore the role of the Ngquza Hill massacre in influencing how the Mpondo revolts are remembered. Muller places her focus on the biophysical environment and the ways in which meanings and values are attributed to certain landscapes by a particular community or society (2012: 210). As such, these socially derived meanings and values can often be hidden to 'outsiders' who do not have the conceptual tools with which to understand the social importance of a certain landscape. She explains how the choice of Ngquza Hill as the location for the meeting of the mountain movement was both strategic and symbolic. On the strategic level, the Hill geographically represented the centre of Pondoland. Symbolically, the Hill held numerous cultural and ritual meanings for the Mpondo who believed that their ancestors, who inhabited the Hill, would provide protection to them while they fought against what was understood as a worthy cause (Muller, 2012: 220).

Thus while Alexander et al. seek to associate the type of leadership and collective organisation that emerged on the mountain at Marikana solely with trade unions, a reading of *Rural Resistance in South Africa* allows us to explore what suggests a much broader association between the rural and urban political resistance, especially with regards to the form of the *Intaba* and the political praxes of the mountain movement in Eastern Pondoland. Sitas and Moodie have explored the direct relationship between those involved in the Mpondo revolts and trade union struggles of the 1970s and early 1980s. We can extend this analysis and ask: are there any linkages between the memory of the Mpondo revolts and massacre and working class struggles today? Evidence suggests that the general age of the Mpondo RDOs who were the initial driving force behind the strike action at Marikana was between 45 and 55 years old (Hartford, 2012). As such these people would have formed part of the generation whose parents were either directly or indirectly involved in the Mpondo Revolts. Was this generation schooled in rural traditions of resistance established during the Mpondo revolts? What were they told by their parents and teachers? Did the practices and lessons drawn from the Mpondo revolts influence their actions at Marikana? Was the relatively egalitarian practices centred on the mountain in Marikana in anyway a reflection, or an extension of the strategies developed during the Mpondo revolts?

A second important parallel which can be drawn between Marikana strike and the Mpondo revolts pertains to the featuring of massacre in both instances. Diana Wylie's chapter notes that the violent act of a massacre has the power to both destroy and to

galvanize (2012: 205). In the case of Ngquza what were destroyed were the lives of at least eleven people who were killed by government forces as well as 'the traces of trust that had once characterised the paternalistic form of colonial government in the Transkei' (Wylie, 2012: 205). What was gained was a sense of collective pride in their ability, as ordinary Mpondo people, to 'defy fiat from above' (Wylie, 2012: 205). This gain was due to the fact that the Ngquza massacre was in no way an event that signalled an end to the struggle, instead it 'strengthened and broadened resistance' throughout Pondoland (Drew, 2012: 77).

Similar observations can be made of the Marikana massacre. It can be argued that the shock felt by the striking mineworkers after witnessing the killing of their co-workers by NUM officials and the police destroyed the, somewhat ironic, paternalistic relationship that has come to exist between the bulk of the working class and the trade unions. The relationship is ironic because while trade unions during the apartheid era, such as NUM, were by-definition against any form of paternalism, in the post-apartheid era trade unions have taken on the paternalistic role of trying to further the interests of the state and big business while keeping the working class in line and at bay (Figlan, 2013). The data observed in this paper suggests that it was after the NUM shootings on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August that ordinary people adopted modes of protest and organisation strikingly similar to that seen in the Mpondo revolts and 'decided to stand together and resist [*ukwayo*] government, *to take a step so that government would listen to our grievances*, not to have anything to do with laws of government, to go to the hills like people without homes' (Wylie, 2012: 203). In other words, in the contemporary era, NUM has fallen into a mode of corrupt representational politics that fails to act on behalf of the will of its membership. This argument is supported by a recent article written by Lindela 'Mashumi' Figlan, the Vice-President of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack dwellers movement, which states that, '[t]he time when NUM was on the side of the workers has passed... NUM aligned itself with the bosses and with imperialism. NUM was oppressing the workers. It was NUM that started the violence in Marikana' (Figlan, 2013). Thus, one of the most important meanings to be attributed to Marikana should be that of ordinary peoples' ability to collectively organise themselves and take command of their lives at a distance from, and in opposition to, both the state and trade unions that have become corrupted such as NUM.

Significantly, there are traces of a continued commitment to this egalitarian and democratic political praxis associated with the mountain in some of the mineworker's testimonies detailed in *Marikana*. According to the testimonies of Mineworkers 1 and 10<sup>iv</sup>, a reoccurring theme was the refusal of those protesting on the mountain to negotiate with authority figures that did not engage them as equals. This was most evident when the president of NUM, Senzeni Zokwana, failed to show the protesters the respect they felt they deserved when he refused to step outside the armoured police vehicle he had arrived in and address the crowd face to face. Mineworker 1 explained that, 'He [Zokwana] was not in a right place to talk to us as a leader, as our president, this thing of him talking to us while he is in a Hippo. We wanted him to talk to us straight if he wanted to' (Alexander et al., 2012:

32). This is reiterated by the testimony of Mineworker 10 which states that '[h]e was supposed to get off the Hippo, come down and address the people' (Alexander et al., 2012: 164).

Just as was the case with the Mpondo revolts the protesters on the mountain at Marikana democratically elected a mountain committee to represent them and maintain 'peace and order' during times of resistance; displaying a strong commitment to the avoidance of random terror and the fostering of strong collective solidarity in the face of increasing threats of force from the state (Alexander et al., 2012: 22). This refusal to be subjected to fiat from above and the accompanying demand to be treated as equals, especially in the space of the mountain, needs further exploration and research. What does this political praxis in the case of Marikana mean? Can we see this as part of a longer history of egalitarian and democratic politics of resistance rooted in the rural areas of South Africa?

### **In Fidelity with Marikana**

Just as the Ngquza Hill massacre led to a strengthening and broadening of resistance throughout Pondoland in the 1960s, so too did the Marikana massacre result in an intensification of resistance that spread throughout the mining sector, into other South African industries, and areas beyond Rustenburg. Alexander et al. explains that after the events at Marikana, strike action "spread like wild fire, raising new possibilities for workers" (2012: 191). Interestingly, it does not appear to be academics or politicians (socialist or otherwise) who are making the connections between Marikana and the broader struggle for social justice in South Africa, as Alexander et al. contend (2012: 191). Rather, it is the marginalised and poor who continue to fight for the realisation of their basic human dignity that are making these connections by creating facts on the ground by associating their struggles with the events of Marikana. The first example of this was in October 2012 when thousands of farmworkers in the Western Cape, inspired by events at Marikana, collectively went on strike demanding increases in their wages from roughly R 69.00 a day to almost double that figure – which remains nowhere near the amount required for a living wage (Gerson, 2013). Mazibuko Jara of the Democratic Left Front believes that at the core of the farmworkers' strike is a problem within the South African state's agricultural policy (Gerson, 2013). However, the farmworkers themselves have demonstrated, by making frequent reference to the struggle for a living wage at Marikana, that although some of the immediate problems may be different, the struggle they were fighting was the same as that fought at Marikana.

A further example can be found in the less well-known resistance carried out by shack dwellers in the Western Cape during May 2013. eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) reported on the struggle being waged between law enforcement officers and shack dwellers in the township of Phillipi showing video footage of shacks being destroyed by anti-land invasion units from Cape Town and then rebuilt by the determined new residents of the land referred to by the shack dwellers themselves as Marikana. An interview with shack

dweller Simphiwe Winston reveals that the name was chosen because of its meaning and significance for this community of shack dwellers in their struggle for land:

We say this is Marikana because we believe that some people might die here fighting for this land, like it happened in Marikana where the people, our fathers, were fighting for the mine there, to get money to feed us. That is why we decided to call this place Marikana (Macleod, 2013).

What these two examples highlight above all else is that the consequences and influences of Marikana, as an event reflecting an emancipatory politics of struggle, are still being seen today in 2013 as communities and workers continue to invoke the meaning and significance of Marikana in their own struggles around the country. The third, and perhaps most significant example is the occupation of vacant land in Sherwood, Durban, by people illegally rendered homeless after their shacks in Cato Crest were destroyed by police and city officials in the name of 'delivery' (Pithouse, 2013). While it is common in South Africa for most of the struggles waged by the organised poor to be stripped of their radical political content and simply explained away as 'service delivery protests' Richard Pithouse has revealed how the coming of 'delivery' is 'frequently a tool for assuming control and effecting exclusion rather than meeting people's urgent needs' (Pithouse, 2013). This is most clearly seen when 'delivery' involves the demolition of shacks, under the pretence that residents are given replacement houses by the government or placed in transit camps, but in most cases tenants are left homeless or forcefully removed to peripheral sites referred to as 'dumping grounds' (Pithouse, 2013). When this disastrous process of 'delivery' was experienced in Cato Crest in early march this year it spelt mass eviction for tenants whose homes were illegally destroyed. However, around two weeks after the fact a number of people who had been rendered homeless occupied vacant land in Sherwood and called their occupation Marikana. In response to the occupation the Municipality called upon the police; however, perhaps due to the Marikana massacre and the increasing number of publically exposed instances of police brutality which have recently frequented the South African press, they also requested the presence of politicians to try negotiating a solution. According to Pithouse (2013):

The politicians appear to have done little other than to tell the occupiers that their occupation is illegal and to appeal for them to wait patiently for housing to be 'delivered' rather than taking matters into their own hands. This has not been well received.

The consequence was that on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March the home of Mzimuni Ngiba, the local ward councillor, was attacked by a crowd of 500 people armed with pangas and spades, causing the councillor and his family to flee from their home the next day (Pithouse, 2013). What is significant about this example is that it demonstrates the changing nature of political violence in many parts of South Africa. While it has become routine for the state to forcefully remove people from their homes in the name of 'delivery', and it is becoming increasingly commonplace for grassroots activists to fear the threat of being assassinated by

agents of local party structures to such a degree that they refrain from sleeping in their own homes, what this example demonstrates is that the 'political violence, which has been a top down phenomenon for years, is now starting to move in the other direction too' (Pithouse, 2013). It is interesting to note the parallels between the imposition of Betterment Schemes in eastern Pondoland in the name of 'development' under the apartheid regime and the contemporary impositions by the ANC lead state in the name of 'development' and 'delivery' in urban shack settlements. Both examples of state imposed 'development' seem to have been a cornerstone of the lived experience that informed the political ideology and mode of resistance of the organised poor in both the rural and urban contexts. The reason that the occupation of land in Durban stands out as most significant within this discussion is because of its direct association with Abahlali baseMjondolo (which translates as 'residents of the shacks') and the astounding commonalities that can be found between this group's 'living politics' and the aforementioned political praxes of the mountain movement during the Mpondo revolts (Gibson, 2013a: 7).

Abahlali baseMjondolo is a grass-roots, participatory and democratic shack-dweller movement that was established in 2005 and since then has grown to become the leading example of organised politics of the poor in post-apartheid South Africa. Since early September this year Abahlali has successfully claimed a number of interdicts in the Durban High Court to put an end to the illegal evictions of people from the Cato Crest settlement in the Durban suburb of Mayville (Gibson, 2013b). However as members and representatives of Abahlali inside the court presented their case – on behalf of those who had since occupied the symbolically named land Marikana and others who had been unlawfully evicted from Cato Crest – they were met with death threats inside the court and outside they were exposed to acts of intimidation and further threats by ANC 'loyalists' who had gathered especially for the event (Gibson, 2013b). According to Nigel Gibson (2013b):

Abahlali members have long argued that the democracy that is enjoyed by the middle classes does not exist for the poor in South Africa. There was a time when many middle-class intellectuals, often fixated on law and policy rather than the reality of the working class and the poor, didn't take this critique seriously. But these illusions melted away in the face of the Marikana Massacre.

With three activists in the Cato Crest area having been assassinated by 'shadowy gunmen' in this year alone the Abahlali members took these threats extremely seriously. However for a great many of the members of middle class South Africa acts of political violence against the working class and poor, particularly those who are organised politically outside of the ANC and its established channels, were predominantly ignored or simply explained away as being 'legitimate violence' against a problem people. As Gibson (2013b) suggests, for many within this sheltered middle class the collective fantasy of a free, fair and democratic South Africa was finally shattered when the police opened fire at Marikana. In a talk given at Rhodes University on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2013 S'bu Zikode, President of Abahlali,

explained that the formation of Abahlali as a political social movement emerged out of what was considered by the founding members to be a moral issue – that being the issue of decent housing. Zikode explained that it was only after they had begun to put pressure on the local ruling party structures to prevent the illegal demolition of shack dwellers' homes that they realised that the issue they were tackling was not necessarily a moral one, but a political one. Zikode said that once the movement realised that they were not considered to be fully-human due to their living in the shacks they realised that their aims had to be about much more than just fighting for decent housing. Their fight became a fight for the recognition of shack dweller's human dignity and respectability just as the fight at Marikana had been about much more than just a living wage of R12 500. The reason that this paper has focused to such an extent on the example of Abahlali is because of the on-going significance the movement is giving to Marikana through their own campaigns and protests which directly associate the massacre with the on-going political repression of activists in Durban by invoking the slogan 'Marikana Continues'. Abahlali's Vice President Lindela 'Mashumi' Figlan (2013), who was born and raised in Flagstaff in eastern Pondoland, articulates the point clearly in his statement:

Some of our fathers were in the mountain committees. Some of our brothers are in the strike committees. Our wives, our sisters and our daughters are in the shack committees with us. We know that more of us will be arrested, tortured and killed in this struggle. But we will stand strong in this struggle. We will oppose all attempts to divide the poor.

### **Some Conclusions**

The goal of this paper has been to bring the Marikana strike and the actions of the organised poor, specifically those of Abahlali baseMjondolo, into conversation with the Mpondo revolts of the 1960s. In so doing this paper has sought to demonstrate how a 'view from below' perspective, such as that advocated by social historian E. P. Thompson, of the history of rural resistance in South Africa can greatly enhance our understandings of the contemporary South African political landscape and the various forms of power and resistance which continue to shape its changing contours. Such a perspective in relation to the Mpondo revolts has revealed the remarkably democratic and participatory aspects of the struggle waged against illegitimate, corrupt and autocratic political authorities as well as the extent to which the political praxis forged at the mountain meetings throughout eastern Pondoland represented an 'emancipatory and inclusive process of collective self-determination' (Hallward, quoted in Pithouse, 2011: 227). These observations pose challenges to the dominant narratives of South African resistance history which elide the importance of the rural imprint in urban struggles as well as neglect the significance of struggles conducted outside of the realm of elite politics. This affirmation is, furthermore, a direct challenge to the kind of modernist thinking which has produced South African resistance history in which ordinary Africans in the rural areas are considered outside of the

realm of 'modern nationalism' and are thus considered to be 'prepolitical' or 'politically naïve' (Landau, 2010: xii). As a result the ordinary people who are the subjects of this rural history of popular politics have not only suffered the collective hardship of land dispossession and the imposition of corrupt and authoritarian leaders but they have also been subjected to the violence of abstraction in the writing of history in the form of the marginalisation of the rural.

Without attempting to deny its significance as the first post-apartheid state-sponsored violence of its kind this paper has argued that the persistent tendency within recent scholarship to view the Marikana strike and massacre as 'exceptional', in isolation from its broader historical and political context, has only provided limited understandings of the event's meaning and significance for the contemporary political landscape in South Africa. This paper sought to engage in a re-examination of rurally based protest and repression in order to locate some of the suggestive links, particularly in regard to the transmission of repertoires of struggle, between the Marikana strike and the Mpondo revolts, and more specifically the Marikana massacre and the Ngquza Hill massacre. Perhaps the two most striking of parallels observed between the events at Marikana and the Mpondo revolts is the featuring of mountains as sites of resistance and spaces for subaltern forms of politics to be conducted as well as the featuring of state-sponsored massacre in response to such political praxes in both instances. It has been argued that within the space of the mountain poor and working class rural people who are usually considered and treated as lesser-beings (both materially and intellectually) by dominant social groups in society demand that their full humanity and political agency be recognized and that they are treated with equality, dignity and respect.

By drawing on the examples of the farmworker's strike in the Western Cape as well as the two occupations of land by shack dwellers in Cape Town and Durban, respectively, this paper has sought to demonstrate the consequences and influences of Marikana, as an event reflecting an emancipatory politics of struggle, as groups of politically actional poor and working class people continue to invoke the meaning and significance of Marikana in their own struggles around the country. As Gibson (2013a: 10) has explained aptly, the struggle which lead to the Marikana massacre 'continues everyday in South Africa in the necessary revolts, which are not simply about service delivery, the lack of jobs, of houses, of electricity, and other human needs, about corruption and harassment, but also about the demand for recognition as equals. It is the hard work of second liberation, it is about life, not simply physical existence but *what it is to be human*'.

By taking seriously the insights to be garnered from histories of rural resistance, such as the Mpondo revolts, there are new ways for South African researchers to understand and engage with contemporary instances of resistance. Thus, instead of following the trend of simplistically reducing peoples' struggles down to 'illegal' and 'illegitimate' acts of public violence, we are forced to do the much more complicated thing and actually take these

people, their histories and their politics seriously. This is precisely one of the main messages delivered by both the books *Rural Resistance in South Africa* and *Marikana: A View from the Mountain*. When placed in conversation together, the two books are able to provide the platform for us to see how Marikana was a moment of resistance rooted in local specificities which had ramifications on a national scale; however, and perhaps most importantly, it was not organised around party-politics, nationalist or trade unionist agendas. Just as was the case with the Mpondo revolts, the Marikana strike must be given its rightful place in South African history: as an example of ordinary peoples' ability to collectively organise themselves in the fight for social justice in the face of extreme state repression and escalating socio-economic hardship. However, to do this effectively, the connections between rural and urban experiences and resistance needs to be taken seriously, including the way in which an egalitarian praxis of resistance rooted in the rural areas is transmitted to and changed within more urban-based settings.

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#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> E. P. Thompson, who's works are foundational texts within the school of social history, stresses the need for historians to oppose the 'spasmodic view of popular history' according to which the majority of people (the masses) are seen as being void of historical agency only appearing 'upon the historical canvas' sporadically and spasmodically during periods of social turmoil and disruption (1971: 76-77). According to Thompson adherents of, what he calls, the 'spasmodic school' of growth historians are 'guilty of a crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour, and function' seeking to explain crowd action as elementary and instinctual responses to economic stimuli (1971: 78).

<sup>ii</sup> For practical reasons this paper uses the spelling 'Pondoland' for this region of the Eastern Cape Province. However, it is important to note that due to attempts to 'decolonise' the term there are many variations to its spelling, such as 'Mpondoland' and 'Phondoland'. In the book *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years* the editors chose to adopt the spelling 'Pondoland', however, some of the other authors in the book choose to use the alternative versions of the region's name. Furthermore, it is also important to note that the resistance seen during the Mpondo revolts took place in Eastern Pondoland and not Western Pondoland. For an in-depth exploration of the reasons for this difference see (Hendricks and Peires, 2012).

<sup>iii</sup> Although it must be acknowledged that the work of Keith Breckenridge and Gavin Hartford were both extremely instrumental in guiding the initial research for this paper by identifying the persisting demographic patterns relating to the Mpondo RDOs at Marikana, which are an industry-wide feature, that has ensured that the district of Pondoland continues to serve 'as a laboratory for the social science of migrancy': see (Breckenridge, 2012: 1-4 and Hartford, 2012: 1-11).

<sup>iv</sup> The use of the somewhat troubling term 'Mineworker' and a number is according to what is provided in the book *Marikana: A View from the Mountain* and is not the designation of this author.

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