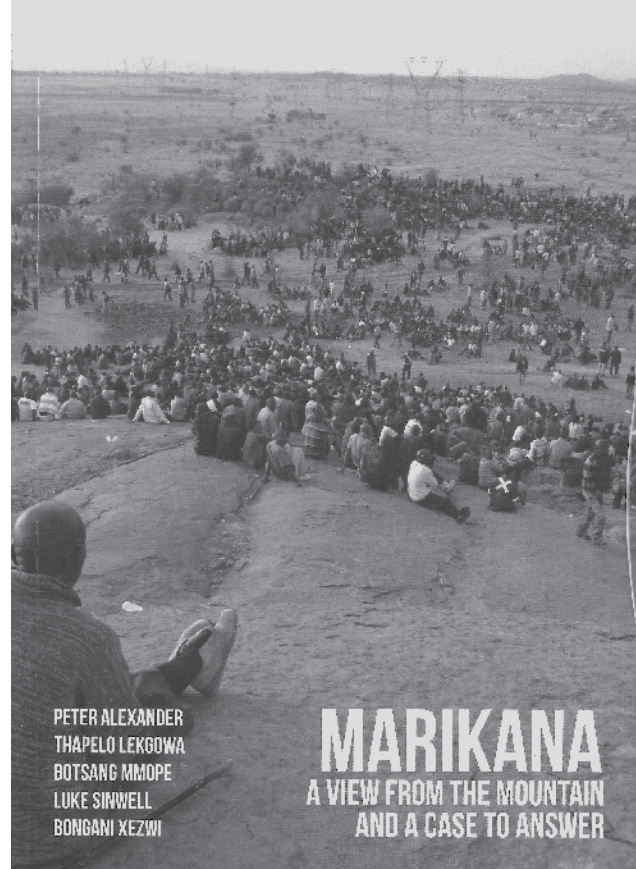


# Review

*P Alexander, T Lekgowa, B Mmope,  
L Sinwell, B Xezwi 2013*

*Marikana: A View from the Mountain  
and a Case to Answer. Jacana Media:  
Johannesburg. Revised edition 2013*

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The 2012 Lonmin strike presents an important case for social scientists to reflect on South Africa's violent and turbulent industrial relations history. The authors of *Marikana, A View From the Mountain and a Case to Answer* attempt to paint a vivid picture of the events that unfolded through the use of detailed maps, pictures, and extracts from interviews with mineworkers, a mineworker's wife and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu) president Joseph Mathunjwa. Furthermore, they draw on speeches by strike leader Tholakele Dlunga and AMCU general secretary Jeff Mphahlele.

*Marikana, A View From the Mountain and a Case to Answer* attempts to provide a history of ordinary people marginalised by their employer and the state. It seeks to fill in the gaps that have been left by the media, unions and Lonmin management. Moreover, the bravery and struggles of the workers is acknowledged. It further provides a glimpse into the continuities of racial despotism

and adversarialism in South Africa's industrial relations in spite of democratic institutions of dispute resolution put in place after 1994. This is evidenced by the escalation of violence during strikes.

Drawing on participant observation, interviews and documentary sources, accounts of the events that unfolded before, during and after the strike are drawn together. Instead of presenting the strike as an isolated phenomenon the authors refer to a successful campaign at a neighbouring mine where Rock Drill Operators (RDO) demanded and received wage increases outside the normal collective bargaining framework. This contributed to workers at Lonmin feeling a sense of betrayal by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) who failed to address their grievances about wages and working conditions. The wildcat strike and responses by mine management and state authorities eventually resulted in the South African Police Services (SAPS) firing at workers resulting in 34 killings and dozens of injuries on the scene as workers fled

the assault by law enforcement officials. The workers contest the claim by SAPS that officers acted in self-defence, arguing that their actions were premeditated. The book is sympathetic towards the mineworkers' version of events, presenting them as innocent, peaceful and defenceless victims of police brutality. The incident conjures up images of massacres like Sharpeville 1960 and Soweto 1976.

The descriptive nature of the book does illuminate a sense of the pressures mineworkers and their families encounter on a daily basis at work and at home. At home, the mineworkers and their families are confronted with poor living conditions in shacks in informal settlements around the mines without proper amenities. The picture created mirrors poverty, unemployment and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa worsened by the migrant labour system in which mineworkers have to support two families at 'home' and near the workplace.

What is also shown is the failure by local authorities to provide

proper housing and sanitation regardless of the presence of different mining companies. Furthermore, the book highlights the dangers workers face in mining on a daily basis whilst receiving meagre wages. These factors combined with allegations that NUM lost touch with its rank and file due to upward mobility, corruption and perks given to union representatives documented by Sakhela Buhlungu and Andries Bezuidenhout and Masondo provide an explanation for the wildcat strike.

In addition to the above factors, the authors show the complexity and messiness of conflict resolution in the workplace 17 years after democratic institutionalisation of industrial relations in South Africa. The fact that RDOs demanded a wage increase outside normal collective bargaining channels without union participation can be seen as rejection of the current system. Rock drilling is a physically demanding job. Importantly, RDOs are a vital component to the mining process because without drilling ore and hauling it there is no production. A proliferation of informal networks (worker committees) such as the 'five madoda' depicts ambivalence by workers towards the industrial relations institutions. The authors describe the escalation of violence during strikes and in particular by mine security and the SAPS. However, beating and forcing non-striking workers to join strike action suggests continuity of the past practices into the present. It underlines the troubled nature of the industrial relations system in South Africa, as argued by Karl von Holdt.

In spite of the strengths mentioned above, the book would have benefitted from a historical grounding. A case in point is the status of RDOs historically in South African mines. Rock drilling

was mainly done by Shangaan, Pondo and Swati men who were regarded as strong. When the strike occurred, RDOs were no longer drawn from certain ethnic groups, but were still poorly paid.

Another gap is the changing gendered nature of mining. There is an absence of voices of female mineworkers. This perpetuates an impression that women are simply widows. It raises questions about participation by female miners and why their voices are absent. Is this a reflection of prevailing patriarchy or an omission by the researchers? Historically, clergymen have played a significant role during conflicts on South African mines. However, in many instances their perspectives were shaped by a moral position and thus they often failed to understand the complexities of mine conflict, as argued by Donham. This is another matter that is glossed over in the book.

Whilst we acknowledge the right of authors to side with workers, we do feel that untested allegations and assertions by mineworkers are reported as fact, hence, detracting from exploring the nuances of complex social relations. Use of traditional weapons and *muti* were reported in media as playing a significant role in the escalation of the conflict resulting in assaults, beatings and shootings. The authors naively regurgitate miners' denial that traditional weapons and *muti* played a role. This is questionable given their historical use in conflicts during colonial and apartheid periods, as observed in research by Dunbar Moodie and others.

Whilst striking miners may have a stake in contesting the charge of violence on their parts i.e. to coerce others to participate or used *muti* for protection from bullets; the authors should have considered this more carefully. Singing *makuliwe* [isiXhosa for

'let there be a fight'] reported in the first edition points at least to symbolic aggression. By excluding the perspectives of other parties on the violence and how they interpreted the actions of the workers, the book deprives readers of an insight into the complex dynamics that were at play during the conflict. This furthermore simplifies the complexity of the event and could be read as a biased analysis.

In spite of claiming to be an ethnographic study, the short time spent in the field does a disservice to sound ethnographic principles. Hence it is not surprising that key questions are left unanswered. The book raises many lessons for a novice researcher, ranging from the complexity of the field, as well as the difficulty of negotiating access in a hostile environment with a chain of gatekeepers and choices researchers have to take and defend. Whilst the book is a useful descriptive resource, it is apparent that there is scope for researchers working on an in-depth study to consider broader analytic issues.

In the final instance, it seems that the rush to get the book to press resulted in unnecessary errors in the 2012 edition as well as the 2013 revised edition. Such errors include misspelt names, for instance Ramphosa instead of Ramaphosa, Amco instead of Amcu amongst others.

As a source providing descriptions of the incident, the book is a useful, albeit incomplete source for researchers. It contains primary material, which together with additional materials could be used to understand the conflict at Marikana as an analytical case study analytically. <sup>18</sup>

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