

Marikana & end of honeymoon

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, professor and deputy registrar at the University of South Africa, says the Marikana massacre signals the end of a honeymoon phase in South African politics. He talks to **Musawenkosi Malabela**.

MM: What are your general views on the Marikana massacre?

TSM: Well, firstly, I am glad that you are calling it a massacre because that is what it is. I know that part of the 'war of words', that has broken out since the massacre, and you can almost tell where a person is coming from by how they refer to the event. Some call it the Marikana tragedy while others talk of an unfortunate event. In the 2012 E'skiel Mphahlele lecture – delivered in Polokwane by Professor Muxe Nkondo – he referred to the event as the Marikana disaster.

So the question of what you call it becomes very important, because it already indicates your stance, your basic reaction to it, and the potential basis of your future actions. I think it is fair to call it a massacre because more than 30 persons were massacred in a relatively short space of time. It is a massacre because this was – primarily – the state against citizens. It was a situation where one side, by virtue of its training and weapons, was far more superior to the other.

There is one newspaper picture which was very similar to a Sharpeville massacre picture which I recall – with people lying down and one person trying to get up

because they were just injured. Some people have reacted very angrily when comparisons have been made between Marikana and Sharpeville saying: 'It is not the same: that this is not an apartheid state and so on'.

What is the same is that it is state violence against citizens and civilians. That the state is not an apartheid state is significant but to the dead citizen, does it matter whether one was killed by an apartheid state or a democratic state? In some ways Marikana is worse than Sharpeville in that these dead striking workers – at least the 34 – in all probability are some of the people who voted this government in.

So they have every reason to regard this as 'their' government, and therefore did not expect to be killed by members of a police force under the command of a democratic government. You can't say the same for the people who died in Sharpeville. They died in the hands of a police force under the command of a government they did not vote for.

The Marikana massacre is certainly the Sharpeville of post-apartheid South Africa. Nothing close to it has happened since independence in 1994. It is a watershed event.

Marikana means several things to us. It shatters our child-like innocence about what it means to be a democracy. It smashes our pretence that we are a country that is at peace with its citizens and with itself. All our assumptions about a caring state that is pro-poor and worker-friendly have been thrown into confusion. This then is the end of our honeymoon – between citizens and the ideas of liberation and democracy. In this sense we must 'read' the Marikana massacre not in an isolated manner – because it's easy to do so.

This insistence of the contextualisation of the Marikana massacre within the post-apartheid story of South Africa was the hallmark of Professor Nkondo's lecture. Relations of trust seem to have broken down between workers and their union leaders – perhaps a long time ago. This is shown especially by the relationship between certain sections of the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the workers.

This is not to generalise NUM-worker relations as bad and poor. But clearly there seems to be a growing distrust between the workers and some leaders. This too is the end of an incredible

honeymoon during which mine-workers made gain after gain under the leadership of the NUM. Has the NUM reached its plateau? Have post-apartheid labour relations – at least in the mines – reached a turning point? Do the vast majority of mine-workers still assume that the NUM has only their interest at heart?

There is another dimension to the ending of the honeymoon. This pertains to the fact that everyone who died is black – all the 56 workers who died in the strife in the platinum mines in 2012. It is not insignificant that in the 18th year of democracy overseen by a government of the *African National Congress*, and *Africans die*. A question that is being asked, albeit in hushed tones is [being] black cheaper or has it gone down in value since 1994? One would have expected the opposite.

I think it's also the end of the honeymoon between bosses and workers. We have gone through a time when the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu)'s interventions and those from government, were seen as coming from 'our' trade union and 'our' government. Workers had a sense that even the bosses had the same understanding.

Its problems notwithstanding, the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) bargaining forum is a product of a shared vision, between labour, government and management – a vision born out of a shared struggle. This shared sense of past and future has been shattered.

Workers are beginning to question: 'Maybe we don't have a shared vision, or have been duped into thinking that there is such a thing when it actually doesn't exist'.

Another level at which the honeymoon has come to an end, is at the level of the ANC and the people who vote for it. The ruling party sometimes spends too much time talking about its

members as if they are its most important constituency when in fact the voters of the ANC are more numerous and in some ways more important. But it is the vast majority of South Africans who place their hope and future in the ANC. I have a sense that the honeymoon between the ANC and the people is also fracturing in very significant ways. Marikana is an illustration of this, but is not the *only* illustration and therefore must be situated within a long period of so-called service delivery protests.

Violence, for example, has come to characterise the protests. We saw that in Marikana people were carrying weapons, and we have also seen the return of the 'necklace' in the killing of so-called sell-outs. There were reports and indications that many Marikana workers were rejecting the NUM, and in some ways the Association of Mining and Construction Union (Amcu). Although others think that Amcu was behind the strike, I am not sure that even Amcu was always in control of what was happening there.

It is as if workers went to the backyard of the homestead instead of the pretty and shining front and caught their leaders with their pants down, and saw the unforeseen. They discovered the link between union leaders, political leaders, mine bosses and the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) elite and connected the dots. The moment of awakening had come.

MM: What caused the massacre?

TSM: What can ever make it necessary to kill 34 people in seconds or 11 people in a week? So the question is annoying because nothing should cause a massacre in a democracy.

There is a cocktail of socio-economic issues that caused the massacre: the poor living conditions of the mineworkers and the shameful salary gaps. There were

debates on whether R5,000 was better than R4,000.

'No, no they don't really get R4,000, its R5,600' – as if those saying this could live on that amount. The bottom line is that the gap between the salaries of workers and mine bosses, workers and trade union leaders is too big.

Then you have the police being let loose on the people to 'take charge of the situation'. Were all options exhausted? Where were the ANC leaders from Luthuli House? Where were the relevant cabinet ministers? Where was Cosatu? Where were NUM and Amcu? I mean for a week or two the workers of Marikana were on their own. By the time the political and union leaders tried to intervene publicly, it was too late.

That week I missed Winnie Mandela more, in a way I never thought I would. In her younger and healthier days – when she had the energy – she would have been the first to arrive after the first death, and the first to arrive after the massacre. As a non-military person I still do not understand why the police could not camp round that koppie and talk to the workers. What was the rush? Were the police thinking they could just go and frog-march workers back to work at the barrel of the gun?

The police commissioner, Mangwashi Victoria Phiyega, has told the nation that the police had to do what they had to do. I am no military or security expert but the video clips I have seen so far, portray a panicking and disorderly police force. ^{LB}

Musawenkosi Malabela is a researcher in organisational renewal with the National Labour and Economic Development Institute in Johannesburg. This is the first part of the interview with Professor Tinyiko Sam Maluleke on the Marikana massacre. The interview was done in October 2012.