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**‘A Striking Resemblance?’:
Labor, Mines, and the Historical Politics of
Strikes in South Africa, 1973 - 2013**

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE: "A Striking Resemblance? Labor, Mines, and the Historical Politics of Strikes in South Africa, 1973 – 2013"

This is a long paper, in four parts. The first part is a theoretical introduction that includes a series of intentionally counter-intuitive proposals based on a reading of the media's coverage of the Marikana Massacre. Parts 2 and 3 are more historically and sociologically grounded accounts of the strike against Lonmin, and a comparative reflection on the strikes of Durban and East London in 1973 and 74 respectively. Part 3 begins to pose a new set of theoretical questions by looking at the temporality of strikes over the last 30 years. Part 4 resumes the theoretical work of Part 1, using the ideas of both Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, and contemporary continental philosophy, to help grasp what is at stake at Marikana.

Readers can focus more or less on Parts 1 and 2, depending on their predilections, while Parts 2 and 3 constitute the substantive heart of the discussion.

Photographs and videographic materials will be provided separately.

Thank you for reading.

Rosalind Morris

‘A Striking Resemblance?’:
Labor, Mines, and the Historical Politics of Strikes in South Africa, 1973 - 2013

Rosalind C. Morris*
Lecture delivered at the University of Johannesburg, February 6, 2013

PART ONE

The ‘Marikana Massacre’: The Medium and the Message of Labor’s Depoliticization

It is a remarkable fact that, today, almost everything that happens of political significance seems to occur before the cameras – although this is partly because significance is only granted to that which can be filmed. In any case, we have numerous audiovisual recordings of the events of August 16, 2012, produced by news agencies variously located behind the line of the police side of the confrontation with striking miners. As it turns out, these many recordings have not firmly established, exactly what happened, for even if ‘everything can be filmed’ (and this remains to be demonstrated), it is not. Moreover, what is filmed must still be read. The videography of the event shows police firing at men who appear to be moving toward them. There is panic among the police, and a terrifyingly extravagant volley of gunfire. There are miners, rushing forward, toward the police, with what weapons remains to be determined. There is the sound of tear-gas canisters being fired and also of live ammunition. There are calls for cease-fire. And there are corpses, strewn about the ground.

As we speak, the Farlam Commission into what is widely spoken of as the ‘Marikana Massacre’ is moving toward a conclusion and will soon release a judgment about what may or may not have occurred on August 16, when 34 miners were shot dead and another 78 injured by police at the site of Lonmin’s platinum mine near Rustenburg. Precisely because the imagery does not establish the truth of what happened, the Commission has called numerous witnesses, and the testimony of these witnesses must now be made to stabilize a narrative of what occurred.

If the current understanding of the events that circulates in the left media is indeed validated, it will mean that the miners who were shot had already been split up and been corralled using razor wire. It will mean that they had no means to exit their ‘pen’ save through the front lines, whence they burst into the firing line of the police – set up, as it were, to appear like a vanguard, while functioning as both fodder and decoy. It will mean that most of the deaths occurred away from the cameras, and many, if not most of the dead were shot in the back – in what appears to have been nearly systematic execution. The Commission may nonetheless also

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apportion blame to those miners who bore guns or other weapons, and who threatened violence. And it may also determine the origin of those weapons, some of which are said to have been provided by the NUM. Newly released cell-phone video from a police phone appears to validate the still-to-be stabilized narrative of police vindictiveness and systematic violence.¹ But there remains a counter-narrative in the form of a police claim that the shootings were undertaken in self-defense – in some cases by terrified and unseasoned young officers. This latter narrative receives support in the blogosphere from a remarkably diverse array of people on all sides of the political spectrum.

But even this description of ‘what happened,’ has and must be supplemented by other analytical accounts of the conditions of possibility for this happening. We know, for example, that these audio-visually recorded deaths were preceded by several others over a period of less than 1 week, including those of 6 miners, 2 policemen and 2 security guards. These latter deaths were secreted, and retain a degree of mystery, although they are variously attributed to self-appointed henchmen of the competing unions, the police and perhaps other forces as well. And, of course, it is always possible that personal vengeance hides at the scene of political strife, and uses its violence as a cloak for its own. Nonetheless, these early deaths, and particularly those that occurred on August 11, in the first confrontation between workers and the National Union of Mineworkers, are widely seen to have led to the escalating tension at the Lonmin property, and to the horrors of August 16. But they do not yet constitute a cause.

The effort to explain what happened at Marikana is not, however, reducible to an explanation of the killings. A fuller understanding requires an account of the confrontation itself, the origins of the strike, the demands and strategies for making them by the miners, the conditions whose amelioration the strikers sought, and so forth. Low wages, and a bonus system encouraging risky overtime work, the labor brokerage system, a lack of linkage between cost of living and wage increases, appalling living conditions, resentment of the emerging labor aristocracy of the National Union of Mineworkers and its use of bureaucratic proceduralism to protect privilege and access to power, ethnic tension at the mines, the perception of exorbitant profit rates in the platinum sector, the emergence of alternative and more militant representative structures, including the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) – all these factors must be adduced to grasp the origins and nature of the strike. Even so, the strike does not explain the violence. At each level of analysis, there is a discontinuity that must be grasped. So, we must ask, how and why the communicative relations between the miners and their union representatives, including not only NUM but also AMCU, broke down, leading to a crisis so profound that only the silencing non-message of bullets appeared, to the authorities, as an answer to an otherwise unanswerable call. For, the recognition that the strike received was absolutely mortifying. Having been declared outside and beyond the law, by virtue of its nonconformity to the schedule of contract negotiations, it was met with that which both exceeds and subtends law, albeit in the name of its preservation, namely unsublated force.

We will discuss these complex sociological factors later, but in this respect, what I have to say can add nothing to what the excellent work of journalists, sociologists, labor activists, and the judicial inquiry are already doing and have already said. In this respect, I will speak of only what you know. Nonetheless, the eye of an outsider can be useful insofar as its inevitably literal grasp of phenomena that might otherwise appear as mere commonsense and therefore go without saying, can permit the unsaid to rise to the level of reflective consciousness. And on occasion, it permits a deeper understanding. So, I will ask you to consider not what happened but what it betokens about the nature of political representation in this country at present, and I will ask you to consider what must appear, at first, to be some rather counter-intuitive arguments. These are my theses:

- 1) Although the strike was the manifestation and expression of discontent on the part of striking miners, and thus workers, it was not and is not the expression of proletarian class consciousness.
- 2) Rather, the strikes express the crisis of class discourse and the project of total social transformation, and are ironically associated with a growing revalorization of capital and class difference in the nation at large. This in turn is linked to the demise of the class-party system at the level of political representation.
- 3) The crisis of the class-party system is perhaps the most powerful testimony of all to South Africa's entry into the global economy, but it is also the space in which the ghosts of apartheid are most visible. The persistent and renewed emphasis on cultural values in ANC discourse, and the constant inscription of worker identity as ethnic identity – betray this fact and are its means.
- 4) The crisis of the idea of class as the basis for political representation is linked to a more general problematization of the processes by which political subjectivity – the capacity to have a voice in public affairs – is to be conceived. In this, the mass media is playing a constitutive role.

These arguments appear to fly in the face of a growing consensus in the international and the South African press, namely that the struggles at Lonmin are testimony to a growing class divide.² So let me be clear. I agree, that there is indeed a growing class divide in this country – as everywhere in the world; I agree that workers at Marikana were attempting to see their interests realized. But that does not mean that the strikers of Marikana were acting *as a class*, and more importantly, *against class*. Indeed, they were not. Nor could they in the social space of the public

sphere reconstituted after the end of apartheid. And it is this contradiction that I wish to explore.

To demonstrate the validity of these theses, we must work backwards, and commence with the media. I want to focus on two elements, which are obvious but which nonetheless demand our attention. Both entail a strange fact, namely that, in order to appear in the public sphere, you must do so in the image of someone or something other than yourself, and in a voice that is not your own. Politics in this sense is uncanny. But let us take the elements one by one.

The first element is that the processes by which the narrative of the miners' victimization is being established requires not only verification procedures – this is the task of forensic analysis and witness testimony at the Commission hearings – but also the positing of a resemblance between this moment and other moments in which state violence was deployed against civilians. The moral force of the Marikana claims is buttressed and amplified by its capacity to summon the moral force of other events, in which the state's violence against individuals has been established as unjust, and indeed, as inimical to justice. The force of that moral authority is, if not proportional to the availability of iconographically unary images, then certainly related to it. But the result is a strange spectralization. For it means *making a case for the innocence of the Marikana victims through a comparative gesture that works by making what happened at Marikana appear like something other than itself*. Today, this occurs by saying that Marikana 2012 is “like” Soweto 76. Not for nothing does the headline of Britain's *Daily Mail* newspaper refer to the “ghosts” of Soweto and Sharpeville.³ The *Guardian* newspaper is even more explicit about the linkage: “Marikana mine shootings revive bitter days of Soweto and Sharpeville.” Closer to home, the headline story of *Amandla's* September issue mined the poetic rhyme of the dates, with its title: “Marikana ... from June 16 to August 16: 38 years.”⁴

We are used to the circulation of similar phrasing in the media, which not only tends to circulate press statements as news, but that is engaged in a complex competitive cycle of production, in which mutual citation is the inevitable outcome. But, more than either plagiarism or serendipity bids the editors of these and numerous other newspapers to link June 16, 1976 and August 16, 2012, or course. The Soweto uprisings also saw the police use extreme force against protestors, and are widely perceived to have transformed the anti-apartheid struggle, both because the spectacle of massacred children galvanized internal and international opposition to the state's violent tactics and because it marked the beginning of a new stage of youth politics, metonymically marked elsewhere by the events of May '68.⁵ But if the state's violence in 1976 precipitated a transformation of protest, the Soweto uprisings were not strikes in the colloquial sense of the term, but rather forms of political demonstration. Later, I will suggest that they were precisely of the order of what Rosa Luxemburg theorized as the ‘general strike,’ but let me withhold that argument for now, and conceive of strikes in the terms of everyday language, as the form in which labor exercises its force in the asymmetrical context of wage-negotiations with capital.

As I said, strikes are not the same as demonstrations, although they may partake of the latter tactic as well. I mean to use the word demonstration precisely; they are forms of what Lacan would call ‘giving to be seen’, solicitations of recognition from an Other, an Other that is presumptively the locus and origin of law. Now, law is not justice. Nonetheless, the power of the Other is produced by virtue of an elision of that difference between law and justice, and functions according to a certain and irreducibly calculative understanding of justice as the economy of vengeance, in which wrongs must be paid for. In the case of Soweto, and increasingly, perhaps of Marikana, this Other was the international community. That such an Other was being solicited can be seen, even in those days before the internet or digital image transfer, in the fact that protestors bore placards on which slogans were written. These slogans were messages, to be read in the very moment of being seen, *from afar*. And like all slogans seeking recognition more than reading, they were written in a nearly telegraphic idiom, their aspiration to directness requiring the reduction of signification to its most minimal elements.⁶ Now, those slogans did not concern labor, and did not express laborers’ demands. Indeed, in the protests against the Bantu Education Act of ’76, economic aims and claims were relatively indirect. This did not mean that they had no economic consequences, or that those involved did not also have and articulate economic criticisms of the apartheid state. But, if we may borrow Roland Barthes’ language, the universal signified of the imagery of Soweto was of innocence violated not of labor exploited.

Now, one understands why those championing the miners’ cause might invoke Soweto, and its “already read” imagery of violated innocence. For, despite the nearly overwhelming evidence of excessive police force, there is also an abundance of both videographic and photographic material that can be read as evidence of threatening gestures and violent propensities among the miners – thanks in part to the cinematically mediated aesthetic traditions in which the photographers cannot help but work, and to which the miners cannot help but play – for they too, must appear in a form that will be recognizable in negotiations where they do not and cannot presume that they will be listened to. I do not have time here to address that long history of libidinally invested cinematic mediation, but suffice it to say that the history of racist ‘primitivism’ haunts both the strikers’ performances and the documentation of them at Marikana.[FN] Whatever the origin, the appearance of aggressivity in the miners is the most important source of police arguments for self-defense. Hence the repetitious circulation of those images in which the miners appear to be, as it were, in warlike poses. The more important point for my purposes is the recognition that, despite the aspiration to appropriate the moral authority of Soweto 76, the events of August 2012 and those of June 1976 *are not of the same order, do not entail the same conception of political subjectivity, and are similar only at the most general (and therefore meaningless?) levels in which one can say that the state exercised its monopoly on violence in excess.*

However, and this is my point, the fact that the Marikana strikes are likened to a non-labor-based demonstration, by virtue of the mere fact that both were

suppressed by the state with unspeakable violence, is itself revealing. What does it reveal? It reveals the degree to which politics is being pried away from conventional or classical conceptions of class and labor. Indeed, it reveals the depth of an *aspiration to transcend class*, as I hope to show and, in concluding, explain. In this context, it is not insignificant that the union that appears to have been adopted by many and perhaps most of the platinum miners at Marikana, the AMCU, has declared itself to be apolitical, and explicitly noncommunist. In other words, it makes a claim on the public imagination, including that which comprises its members, by declaring a discontinuity between public life and political life, but we will return to this issue later.

Now, I said there were two elements that reveal the crisis of class discourse. The first is that the case of and for the miners is being made through an imagistic substitution, whereby the miners' innocence is bought at the expense of suspending their particular status as striking laborers. This evacuation of the signifiers of labor is what lets the message – of innocence violated -- travel, and to acquire force even among those who do not avow the right to strike, or who believe the miners were asking for too much. The second instance is that of a transformation in the medial tactics of the Marikana miners and their supporters. Here, we must look at the difference between the roughly-made placards of the miners in the early stages of the protest, and those of the protestors outside of the Commission. The former, often comprised of torn cardboard, written in nearly illegible script, sometimes in fanagalo, have a relatively narrow compass of address. To be sure, they are borne for the cameras, and solicit a reading from afar, but they have very limited capacity to travel beyond the sphere of the mining world. As often as not, their texts are reduced to the wage demand: *Tina fuma lo mali/We want the money: 12,500 Rand.*"

By the time of the Commission inquiries, protestors are wearing identical placards, mechanically reproduced in bold upper-case font, and issuing a command that can circulate widely, across both the national and international media space. In English (the closest thing to a global lingua franca in the mass-mediatized capitalist world), they make their infinitely repeating demand: "Don't let the police get away with murder." The name of the 'Marikana Support Campaign' appears below the message -- in the same typeface as the message. The organizational title summons and evacuates the concept of signature. But still, one wants to ask, is the Campaign the author of these words? If so, in whose names does it speak? In whose voice? These are not trivial questions in a nation where the very right to "have a voice" in the public sphere was only universalized with the new constitution of 1996.

Again, much could be said about these placards, and their implicit use of the double negative, for they do not so much solicit a particular action as call people to resist the passivity that would "let the police get away with murder." The statements worn by the protestors, though, are notable for the degree to which they might be spoken by *anyone*. In other words, the slogans of the placards are no one's speech in particular. Like all slogans, the capacity of these messages to travel requires that they shuck off the particularities of voice, to abandon lyricism. You

don't need to know anything about the person speaking in order to receive this message; it moves in the manner of linguistic bullet towards its targets, where it will be either received or rejected, but generally understood. But note, once again, that this aspiration to universal intelligibility is also and necessarily, the relinquishing of a statement of locatedness. The message has nothing to do with labor, and does not express the particular position or experience of workers. ⁷In any case, we have a strange situation: a strike, which we all know is the expression of laborers' discontent and an aspiration for better wages, as well as their critical understanding of how capital exploits workers, must finally appear in the public sphere not as a question of labor, or the rights and aspirations of a working class, but in the image of a generalized innocence, speaking in a generic voice of issues that cannot be identified with any particular class position.

You might respond by saying, "Of course. How else could the miners make their case, be heard by everyone, and recognized as the bearers of an incontrovertible truth? And, just because they must appear in the public sphere this way does not mean that they are not also motivated by and expressing a class analysis." To be sure, the miners know they are being exploited, know that they are producing surplus value for capital, know that companies like Lonmin are making massive profits, know that the National Union of Mineworkers, and even the ANC are shareholders in companies that depend on their exploitation, know that labor recruiters are profiteering on the basis of apartheid's legacy, and so forth. The question is whether it is ever possible to speak in terms unmarked by one's class position and whether the desire to do so, and the relinquishing of the referent, labor, in the effort to address a public sphere that remains essentially a bourgeois public sphere, can escape the ideological machine on which capital depends. I am skeptical on this point.

We must take account now, of both history and sociology. A historical comparison of the strikes of 2012 with those of 1973 will, I hope, prove instructive, far more than an iconographic comparison of 2012 with 1976. Moreover, a reading of the quantitative and qualitative data on union members' attitudes toward questions of wage differentiation, and a consideration of the cultural forms of consumption will require us to recognize that, to a very considerable degree, strikers do not seek an end to inequality so much as access to upward mobility. And a reflection upon the increasing significance of the concept of tradition in the defense of the ANC leadership makes clear that class is no longer the fantasized ground of political representation, but is rather, the displaced project of another (and possibly still to come) era.

PART TWO:
Beyond Soweto: Mining, a Striking History, 1973/2012.

The work of comparison is the work of posing a question about what has and has not changed on the ground in South Africa during the period of globalization. The first thing to note, and that least remarked, is that the world of mining is shrinking, going down, as they used to say in Carletonville, the city of sinkholes where white townfolk were convinced that the end of apartheid meant the end of their own relative wealth. Mining accounts for less and less of the national GDP (a mere 6% in 2011), and employs fewer workers now than it did 30 years ago (about half a million in 2012). It is an industry in decline. This is particularly true in the gold and coal sectors, where the number of employees is moving in inverse proportion to the price of gold and coal respectively. It is nonetheless an industry that is inhabited by the structure of a fetish – of a constant overvaluation and literalization of value.

Beyond the fact that mining is now a small part of the South African economy, mining towns are full of people who do not work in mines. Indeed very few residents of mining towns have any contact with extractive operations. Nonetheless, a powerful part of the consciousness of both miners and non-miners in such communities is the sense that the mines are the primary source of value in the country's history and in its present. Miners (striking or not) often assert their role in the production of the country's wealth, and speak of the profits enjoyed elsewhere (either in the capitalist centers of South Africa or abroad) as a theft of what their own labor produced. Sometimes, the fantasy of value thus abducted is spoken of in mythical terms, in conspiracy theories about caches of gold buried beneath the veld. More often, it is read in terms of a naive labor-theory of value. In other words, they do not include in their calculus of labor-value a sense of the 'average socially necessary labor' of a productive mode or the relationship between living and dead labor that is embodied in an industry like mining where workers are often using technology that is the product of other workers' intellectual and manual labor. This sense of being the absolute and immediate origin of value in South Africa is often associated with a sense of relative entitlement to wages, and to a belief that miners should be paid highly relative to other kinds of employment – not only because of the danger it entails, or the necessity imposed by the migrant system of supporting numerous people in distant places, but quite simply because miners believe themselves to generate more value than others do.

This is the first fissure in the space of class, and one of the reasons why the initial demands of the miners at Marikana, for 12,500 Rand/month, failed to garner much sympathy. As we know, the miners settled for much, much less. But where did that initial number come from? If it was indeed excessive (implying a 300% raise) where did that excess originate? That NUM labor negotiators at Lonmin are reportedly paid 14,000ZAR per month by the company is one source of the scale of miners' demands. It also implies a split accountability on the part of the NUM, and

this fact, referred to by the miners in the idiom of complicity, had enormous consequences for the strike's outcomes. Another factor is that the bonus system already permits miners to earn another 5-8000ZAR/month, but the bonus system requires overtime work, and, as every safety study and every responsible mine manager will acknowledge, overtime work in mines is always associated with higher accident rates, and thus, greater risk for the miners. Moreover, bonus pay is not the basis for the calculation of benefits, and hence the demand that all monies paid be construed as base pay reflects an understanding of wages as inclusive of benefits. Still, the fact that miners settled for less discloses an excess in the original demands, one that is related, I believe, to the fetishized status of mining in South Africa.

The fetish is the concept that Marx turned to in order to escape the dead-end produced by his theory of ideology, which he had earlier defined in terms of inversion and illusion. Unlike ideology, the fetish is not a representation that merely mystifies or distorts the world (as in a reflection). Rather, it is a phenomenon that reveals the truth of a world that is itself distorted. It thus demands a kind of immanent reading. Reading in this way, we can say that, if miners overvalue the product of their labor, their discourse nonetheless reveals the degree to which the value they create must exceed what they could consume, for the lacework of social and economic relations that extends outward from the mines far exceeds its contribution to GDP. Moreover, the wages made by individual miners must sustain vast familial networks and not just the nuclear family once thought of in classical materialist theory as the basis of the worker's reproduction. The fantasy of buried treasure so often narrated to me by miners in Carletonville in the late 1990s, is also a fantasy of the value that cannot be accounted for, but which has been produced nonetheless, and withheld from the miners. It is an image of enormous value, abducted from workers, and made part of the landscape. As I said, the fetish – overvaluation and literalization of value – sometimes reveals the truth of a distorted situation.

I have been speaking of miners, but this is something of a misnomer. Mining labor is a deeply stratified category of employment, skill and social location. In 2004, wages ranged from an average of 300 ZAR/month for outsourced menial labor, to more than 19,400 ZAR/month for mine engineers. So, too are mines differentiated spaces of relative industrialization. The present strikes in the platinum mines have been notable for being led by the rock face drillers (or Rock Drill Operators, RDOs), the lowest rung on the mining hierarchy. These workers – almost all men – inhabit a part of the mines that has changed little over the century, and arguable over the last 3 centuries. Other than the drills themselves, and the oxygenization of the mine, theirs is a raw encounter with rock, relatively unmediated by technology. After descending the 2 or 3 kilometers to the rock face, they insert themselves into small spaces -- some barely larger than a coffin – amid darkness illuminated only by their helmet lights. Compared to the enormous machinery that dominates the landscape at the main shafts, in caverns larger than most houses, the space of the rock face driller is miniscule, claustrophobic, hot and often damp.

As the progressive press endlessly remarks (a fact that we will return to), most rock face drillers are Xhosa-speaking Pondo from the Eastern Cape, or migrant laborers from Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Most are functionally illiterate, and most come from families with generations of miners. This is very nearly an inherited profession, and the psychic investment in mining (in South Africa, as elsewhere) is inseparable from the attachments to other forms and concepts of genealogy, heritability, and tradition. The migrant laborers of Marikana and many other places, but particularly newer mines, typically maintain at least two households, and support 10 or more people.⁸

Rock face drillers are often not referred to as miners, which category encompasses a multiplicity of skilled workers up to and including the level of engineer but below management. In recent strikes, the drillers have often appeared to be critical of other miners' relatively high pay, but this is less because they oppose hierarchy, which they generally do not, than that they are suspicious of the NUM miners' negotiating practices, and their failure to generate sufficient wage increases for the drill operators while nonetheless garnering substantial increases for themselves. And of course, they are horrified by the NUM's apparent turn to force in lieu of 'discipline.' Interviews conducted by Peter Alexander for *Amandla* contain repeated accusations on the part of striking rock drill operators against the NUM and the ANC for complicity with the mines ("the union of NUM is working like a company. This union of NUM, you are having shared with the Lonmin mine. Like Mr Zuma, he has interest in the protection of the other side of the situation in the security of Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa."). As far as I know, NUM doesn't have shares in Lonmin, but it does now have a substantial investment arm that has partnered with both Harmony Gold, and Xstrata – so the sense of the union's contradictory position vis-a-vis mining capital is well-founded. Nonetheless, the criticisms of union and mine management are never more strongly articulated than when addressing the tendency of the mining companies and, according to strikers, NUM, to call in police, who have thus far not hesitated to use lethal force. Essentially, NUM is accused of acting like a state, which is both sustained by and supportive of capital. And yet. After such denunciations, most miners revert to economic analysis, and to a discussion of inadequate wages.

There has been a tendency in the left literature on the strikes to read these accusations against NUM as evidence of a commitment to more radical egalitarianism, a critique of the state-capital nexus, and an incipient revolutionary consciousness among workers whose proletarian credentials are uncontaminated by upward mobility. Yet, worker surveys conducted by COSATU cast some doubt on this reading, insofar as they repeatedly reveal a belief among union members that hierarchy and worker stratification is legitimate and even that the promotion of shop stewards into managerial positions is to be expected and desired, being understood as compensation for sacrifices during the struggle and/or the only route of advancement for black workers with relatively low levels of education.⁹ The demands at Marikana included the elimination of the lowest strata of the wage and status hierarchy, but it did not include the elimination of all differentiation.

In 2004, the “State of the Union of Mineworkers” report, issued by the HSRC, noted, with some prescient concern that “occupational mobility of shaft stewards had a negative impact on solidarity in union branches.”¹⁰ But the lack of solidarity was neither a simple resentment of stratification nor a desire for egalitarianism. Rather, competition for positions, and the demanding of bribes for access to participation in elections of union stewardships, were resented. The professionalization of union management is not in itself seen as a problem, so much as is the lack of communication with the workforce, the lack of representativity in negotiations, and the failure to secure adequate pay raises and better working conditions for the lowest levels of the hierarchy. In other words, there is less opposition and even resentment toward the material success of the upper echelons of the workforce and union, than there is a sense of material lack on the part of the lower strata. This difference between these two kinds of analysis is significant, particularly given the growing expression on the part of discontented COSATU members, including those of NUM who are embracing AMCU, of a desire for political “neutrality,” what we have already begun to understand as a symptom of depoliticization.

My own research suggests that this complex and rather reformist sentiment among workers is more common than a more revolutionary radicalism, and this is perhaps not surprising given that the labor of culture (rather than the culture of labor) and the policy of government for the past two decades – and especially since the implementation of GEAR (the neoliberal policy of ‘Growth, Employment and Redistribution, unveiled in 1996) has been largely devoted to the valorization of black embourgeoisification, the promise of access to consumer satisfaction as a corollary of emancipation, and a commitment to employment as the most salient problem of the economy. It is also abetted by resurgent and neo-traditional forms of masculinity, which are often avowed in discourses that posit an analogy between the ideal chiefly practice of a putatively vanished world, and the patronage that is enabled by the rising differentials in wealth that, thus far, mar the democratic transition. South Africa now has the highest Gini-coefficient in the world, which is to say the highest levels of economic disparity, the lowest levels of educational attainment among the industrialized nations, and an average unemployment rate of about 25% that soars to 50 or 60% among youth in townships. Labor casualization is the rule in the unskilled sectors and thus even the employment statistics are inadequate registers of the predicament facing South Africa’s masses. This casualization is, of course, an enormous source of tension within the working population, and a real threat to the power of the unions, whether NUM or AMCU. Several studies by union sociologists have remarked the failure of NUM and COSATU to find a way to represent informal workers, rather than to merely demand their formalization, but this demand may be construed as another symptom of union depoliticization.

One could expect, in this context, a sustained revolt in the form of a ‘mass’ or ‘general strike.’ Julius Malema, the disgraced but popular one-time ‘leader’ of the

ANC Youth League (himself a beneficiary of the new inequality) called for solidarity strikes in other mines. But, despite simultaneous and persisting but sporadic strikes in the transport and agricultural sector, this has not yet happened, the dominant discourse of all the unions being wages, rather than structural transformation. And, as we shall discuss later, the general strike can never be limited to the question of wages. To better grasp what *is* happening, including the vacillation, in workers' discourse, between a demand for better wages and a critique of the labor aristocracy's alienation from its rank and file on one hand, and a recognition or indeed valorization of hierarchy's legitimacy, we need to rethink somewhat the history of labor protest in South Africa. To this end, let us consider and reconsider not Soweto '76 but the Durban Strikes of 1973.

In 1973, Indian and black workers, mostly in the manufacturing sector, undertook what was, by the definition of the times, illegal strike activity (black workers were denied trade union representation, and were prohibited from withholding labor in the form of strikes). Their primary demand was for increased wages to compensate for high rates of inflation and increased costs of living, especially transportation.

The Durban strikes followed on a work stoppage by drivers of the Public Utility Transport Corporation (PUTCO), and commenced with simultaneous actions by the workers in the textiles and steel industries. These were followed by strikes by chemical, electrical, rubber and, to a lesser extent, service industry employees. In other words, it was an industrial manufacturing sector-wide, if not yet general strike. The result of the work stoppages, which affected more than 50,000 workers in Natal alone, was a wage increase that averaged about 25 percent, although this amounted to only about 2 rand per worker per week. At that time, the average wage was 8 rand per week for black unskilled workers, with an estimated poverty datum line of between 77 and 83 rand per month. In other words, black workers were striking because almost all were receiving wages that induced poverty, and not only poverty but severe poverty.¹¹

In a remarkably insightful essay published in the *New Left Review* in 1974, Sam Mhlongo¹² noted both the simultaneity and the difference between strikes in South Africa and those in the neighboring South West Africa (now, Namibia). The strikes in South West Africa had preceded those in Durban by a few months. What differentiated them was that, in the former, grievances were not limited to wages, but were addressed to political and economic policy issues as well. Most centrally, they included a demand for the abolition of migrant labor itself. No such demands were made by strikers in Durban, where wages remained central.

But the strikers in each context were also different. The workers in South West Africa were not what classical Marxian economists would call "free." That is to say, they were not entirely dependent on selling their labor for wages. As migrant laborers, many maintained family homesteads where small-scale farming and

pastoralism provided the supplementary basis for survival – albeit on inadequate and often infertile land. In South Africa, by contrast, the strikes of 1973 mainly affected the manufacturing sector, which employed people who were largely settled in urban areas, who did not regularly return to agricultural or pastoral activities, and who were indeed free in that ironic sense given the term by Marx; they were free to sell their labor, by virtue of having been coercively ‘freed’ of other attachments. In other words of the Marxian idiom, they had been subject to ‘originary accumulation,’¹³ that process by which peasants, pastoralists and agriculturalists are forced into wage labor by processes that deprive them of continued practice and self-sustaining access to pre-existing modes of being and forms of subsistence production.

It is perhaps surprising to realize that manufacturing had already displaced mining by the 1960s and become South Africa’s largest contributor to the GDP, growing at rates comparable to that of Japan – nearly 6% per annum. This began to collapse in the early 1970s, both in South Africa and globally. Inflation, which had been about 3% during the decade also grew in the 1970s, and reached 10% by 1974 (it would reach a startling 18.7% in 1986 – another year significant in the history of strikes in South Africa). The strikes in Durban occurred just after a period of increasing inflation, soaring costs of living, and the relative demise of the manufacturing sector after a period of relative growth (but before the final designation of a recession in 1976, and the catastrophic events of the Soweto student protests). The material determinants of their emergence seem to correspond rather straight-forwardly to the diagrammatic imagination of proletarian strikes put forward in orthodox left accounts of working class protest.

Nonetheless, the Durban strikes of 1973 did not remain confined to the urban manufacturing and heavy industry sector of South Africa. And when they moved, as they did, to Carletonville, the center of the gold mining industry at that time (and still seat of a major regional office for the National Union of Mineworkers), demands expanded to include not merely absolute wage increases, but a reduction or abolition of race-based pay differentials, better living circumstances, and changes in the migrant labor system itself. Anglo American’s response on September 11, 1973 was a police raid, which led to the deaths of 11 miners. The strike ended a day later, with demands unmet, fear of being fired trumping capacities for sustained work stoppage.

There is, on the face of it, a striking resemblance between the state’s response to the miners’ strike of 1973, where the use of extreme violence was aimed at the destruction of worker protest entailing the with-holding of labor, and that of August 2012, when police shot and killed 34 striking miners at Marikana and wounded another 78. The most obvious point of similarity is the intimate collusion between state and capital, the division of labor between private ‘security’ and state police forces, and the attribution on the part of both of a propensity to violence among the striking miners. But appearances can be deceiving – or revealing –

depending on the fuller context in which they are both symptoms and signs. Let us then consider the differences.

The strikes that commenced in August 2012 at Marikana are, I believe, signs of a profound change in the balance of power between elements of the state, the unions, and labor in South Africa. They are also, perhaps, the symptom of previously misrecognized dimension of the anti-apartheid struggle, one whose careful recounting may lead us to a different understanding of the relationship between Africanist and socialist forces within the South African narrative of anticolonial nationalism. Before considering those questions, however, we should briefly acknowledge the elements of the Marikana strikes that seem new, bearing in mind that this 'newness' is not without precedent – the strikes in August 2012 are inseparable from those at the Rustenberg Implats mine in 2011.

The first thing to note is that *the contemporary moment is marked by a split in the mining sector whose form of appearances is a competition between unions on grounds other than racialized membership*. The question is: what is the cause and nature of this fissure? At Marikana (and at many other operations) miners are represented by two unions, the historically prior National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). The latter was formed in 1998 and registered in 2001. It is often said that the rationale for AMCU's break from NUM only a few years into democracy, is a desire for political neutrality and, more specifically, a noncommunist position. This would differentiate it significantly from NUM, which has a long history as a vanguard of radical labor politics, and is a strong advocate of the Tripartite Alliance, which includes both the ANC and the SACP. Critics offer a different explanation, however, citing the extreme bureaucratization of NUM and its increasing lack of capacity to mobilize at the grass roots level.¹⁴ For its part, AMCU's origin at a coal strike in Witbank, after the NUM 'disciplined' and expelled miners who had undertaken underground occupations following their rejection of a wage deal brokered and accepted by NUM without member ratification, suggests a more immediate causality than ideological strife. At the same time, there is evidence that NUM's own claim on radicalism may need to be rethought. As already stated, the union has several significant investment entities, at least two of which are involved in partnerships with the mining corporations Xstrata and Harmony Gold, and it now has a vast real estate program, as well as a not-for-profit development program. Its membership has not only generated the wealthiest members of the black bourgeoisie, whose creation was the goal of the ANC's BEE policy, but includes a substantial professional managerial class. Sakhele Buhlungu remarks that: "Today union leadership has become a full-time occupation with highly specialized positions arranged in a hierarchical order from the lowest to the highest. Those who occupy these positions receive regular salaries and a range of benefits such as medical aid, provident fund, car and housing allowances and study leave...In short, unions are emerging as bureaucracies and union leaders as bureaucrats. In the majority of cases, only full-time officials operate within this bureaucratic framework, while workers tend to perform ceremonial functions at union meetings such as congresses. However, unions such as the National Union of

Mineworkers (NUM) and the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) have put workers in full-time leadership positions (full time shot stewards, many of whom serve as branch and regional leaders), serving as an extension of this bureaucratic machinery at lower levels."¹⁵ As I have suggested, the fact that so many miners avow the rights of workers to access wealth in a stratified socio-economic system suggests that class contradiction within the National Union of Mineworkers is insufficient explanation for the current conflict. And a careful historiography of the conflict at Marikana shows that the unilateral granting of pay increases to some NUM workers outside of scheduled contract negotiation, opened the way for the supposedly precipitous and impatient 'wildcat' strikes of the winter months, and stoked perceptions of favoritism and indeed corruption. Nonetheless, the breach of the sectoral unity once represented by NUM has had a number of external abettors—from fraudulent organizations seeking access to union dues, and incendiary members of the ANC Youth League.

In the end, the designation of the strikes as illegal by NUM, the state and the mining corporations (an agreement that should give us pause) legitimated the dismissal of striking miners at very high levels. More than 37,000 workers have lost their employment since the strikes began, and many of those who are being offered an opportunity to return to employment, will have to do so at the original levels of compensation. But the designation of the strikes as illegal testifies to two things. First, strikes and thus labor opposition is contained in and by a juridical system which works by granting unions recognition only insofar as they accede to the relative authority of the state to determine the grounds, forms and timing of their opposition. Second, the essence of the illegality of the strikes of Marikana was not, initially, their violence, but rather, their timing.

PART THREE: The time and timing of strikes

As Mhlongo himself noted, the gains made in Natal in 1973 were quickly overwhelmed by inflation. They were, in his estimation, but signs of a future capacity for the politicization of labor. However, for him, the strikes also exhibited the limits of 'proletarian spontaneity.' Their failure, marked in the case of the industrial workers by the reduction of demands to a question of wages, and by the miners in the rapid return to work when confronted by the violence enabled by the alliance of state and capital, was thus also evidence of the need for organizational and pedagogical coordination in the form of "separate and independent black trade unions."¹⁶

If it was black solidarity that constituted for Mhlongo the form of appearance of still to be achieved black autonomy, it was duration that constituted the register and the medium of political force. Reduced to the temporality of the now, and

captivated by need generated by low wages, the black workers of Durban would remain in his estimation an expressive power but one incapable of real political effectivity. This lack of transformative effectivity was also an incapacity to assume the representational function for which the urban proletariat was otherwise destined. In the absence of that representational function, *the* strike would be merely *a* strike, in the sense of being a hitting (out) against something. Although he did not say as much, we can infer here that it is in this slippage that the majority of spontaneist movements collapse into expressive rituals of protest and vengeance, allowing assaults on individual capitalists, rogue soldiers, or bad apples of another some other sort, to stand in for a critique of systemic violence, structural inequality, and social injustice.

This debate about the possible hijacking of the mass strike by theft and violence, which is to say the politics of immediacy (whereby wealth is not so much redistributed as captured), is an old one in radical history, of course. Rosa Luxemburg introduced her monumental treatise on the 'Mass Strike,' by quoting Engels's *Lage der Arbeiter Klasse,* in which he ridiculed the Bakuninist fantasy of a "fine morning" on which the working classes would simply rise up and, after "at most four weeks" bring the propertied classes to their knees. Without organizational structure and a substantial strike fund, he noted, such a "holy month" would be impossible, and if resources existed, a general strike would not have been necessary. For her part, Luxemburg would take leave of the simplistic oppositionality that characterizes Engels' reading, and disavow the idealism which sought a single model of the general strike for all times and places.¹⁷ On the one hand, she recognized the virtue of this argument in opposing anarchism, with which she would have no truck. The Russian Revolution of 1905, whose inauguration appeared to emerge from anarchist rage, and which was transformed like the proverbial scythe into the spear of Biblical and Virgilian poetry, was, for Luxemburg, the moment of anarchism's 'liquidation.'¹⁸ Where it persisted, as in Bialystok, it did so because of the extremity of oppression to which the workers were subject, and because of the multiplicity of factors mitigating against the formation of sustained solidarity. These included multi-nationality (and, one presumes, linguistic mutual incomprehension) among workers, severity of poverty and oppression, and so forth. Otherwise, she remarked, anarchism was merely the banner under which petty thieves pursued a policy of plunder, and sought the satisfaction of the most immediate desires. The proper goal of the mass strike, she said, was to enable the working class to access the 'rights and conditions' necessary for emancipation.¹⁹ As Gayatri Spivak has reminded us, it was the interruption or blockage of that access to the state and its instruments for redistribution that Antonio Gramsci described as the condition of subalternity. The point to be made here, is that, at least insofar as the period of the early twentieth century goes, the mass strike appeared to Luxemburg primarily as an instrument for accessing the state, and even parliamentarianism (a necessary stage), not for destroying it, though that goal would constitute for her an ultimate horizon.²⁰

I emphasize the historical specificity of her argument, and we will return to the question of historical location below. But let us remain closer to home, for now.

A year after the Durban Strikes, and about the same time as Mhlongo's essay in *NLR* appeared, Rick Turner would write under the pseudonym of Gerry Maré, about the strikes of East London (in Natal) in a manner that showed the rapid transformation of that initially spontaneous movement in Durban. Turner himself would not only adopt the ideology of Black Consciousness intimated in Mhlongo's call for separate unions (despite being white), but he would participate in one of the most sustained efforts at union education in the history of South Africa's labor movement. What Turner identified as the peculiarity of both the Durban and the East London strikes was their tendency for rapid movement between factories in unrelated sectors of the economy.²¹ He saw this as evidence of a general state of malaise and "impotence" in a deeply disenfranchised population, from which workers could nonetheless be mobilized through the example of other militant action. It is a vision of inspiration rather like that provided in Marx's account of the Taiping rebellion, where the "tables began to dance while the rest of the world appeared to be standing still -- *pour encourager les autres*."²² Mimesis is here the medium of a political mobilization that remains vulnerable to dissipation in the absence of relatively immediate successes.

Turner's analysis is significant for a number of reasons. First, he notes that the demands by workers were never for relative increases, nor for an equalization of pay among workers. In East London, workers demanded percentage-based increases, which meant that the wealthier workers were demanding wages that would have increased both their relative and absolute wealth vis-a-vis other workers, even as it indicated a generalized sense that no black workers were making adequate wages. Second, he notes the significance of the 'border' areas, which straddled the homelands or 'bantustans' and metropolitan centers for overall wage policy on the part of capital. Manufacturing laborers from these areas were still presumptively participating in subsistence economies, and their wages were much lower than those of workers from the urban areas. In fact, their average wages (at 6.57 rand/day) were about ½ of the wages paid to workers in Port Elizabeth (12.31 rand/day).

In his reading of the labour statistics of his time, Rick Turner noted that the first and perhaps most profound difference between Durban and East London, was that the strikes of 1974 were significantly longer than those in 1973, indicating both the emergence of an incipient organizational structure, albeit one in which negotiating and liaison committees were often confused, and a sense of growing militant self-consciousness on the part of black workers. He linked this lengthening duration, to the fact the strikes were accompanied by more comprehensive ideological statements than those of the previous year, statements linking wage issues to structural patterns of race-based capital. The result of this metamorphosis was, according to Turner, the discovery of the "legitimacy of the strike weapon."²³ It is important to note here that strikes were not unprecedented in South Africa, and

indeed that the mining sector in particular had seen a number of large scale and profoundly violent strikes, those of 1922 and 1948 being most notable. But since the beginning of apartheid, protests by black South African (such as the pass protests that culminated in the Sharpsville massacre of 1960) had become more common than strikes – the withholding of labor being brutally suppressed by the state, and by mining companies that operated as pseudo sovereignties, with their own police forces. But even in 1974, the emergence of the strike weapon was threatened by the development of a strategy that Turner called “negotiating by sacking,” which had become the “main way in which South African employers convey their ‘final offer’ to black workers.” Dismissed workers could re-apply at the new wage rates being offered, or go elsewhere and likely remain unemployed. We have seen this again and again in the Marikana dispute, where the designation of the strike as illegal on grounds of its non-conformity to the contract’s calendar legitimated firing.

The capacity of the East London strikers to resist offers of the sort just mentioned, seemed to Turner not to exceed one week. So, seven days was the horizon and limit of collective savings and socializable resources. If Engels was right to be suspicious of the fetishization of calendrical time as the measure of the strike’s political force, it is nonetheless clear that, to be able to endure was the very condition of possibility of the ability to become political - in South Africa, and perhaps everywhere. As this ability developed, waiting assumed its ambiguous power, just as the necessity for hastening the process of change assumed its allure. But this is not the end of the story.

As with Mhlongo’s insistence on the capacity for duration as the sine qua non of real politics, so Turner’s concern with the longevity of the ‘74 strikes bespeaks the centrality of time in his understanding of political radicalism. We are reminded here of that ‘holy month,’ which Engels invoked and derided as the sign of the anarchists’ fetishization of the mass strike. Against the anarchists’ fantasy of a verily calendrical ritual, and their obsession with spontaneity, Turner’s (and Mhlongo’s) recognition of duration as the sign of a capacity for the assumption of political subjectivity has its truth. By 1987, only 5 years after its formation, the National Union of Mineworkers could organize and sustain a strike for three weeks by about 200,000 mineworkers, then the longest in South Africa’s history. Today, the vast majority of strikes last less than 6 days, but it would be wrong to presume that the longer strikes are inherently more political, or that their duration is testimony only to organizational strength and financial capacity on the part of labor. We need consider what it means, in 2005, for workers to remain on strike for 177 days. In this light, we may also reconsider the threat by striking Marikana miners, cast once more in the idiom of a temporal strategy. “We will strike for 5 days every week.” Formally speaking, the Marikana strike lasted 41 days -- long enough to achieve and exceed the status of Engels’s holy month, and far longer than the limiting week so lamented by Turner.

A statistical overview of the strikes of the last few decades shows an uneven but discernible tendency. Strikes are fewer today than they were in the past, particularly during periods of political protest, as in 1973 and in the late 1980s. But they are larger, entail larger numbers of person-days lost, and they are in an increasingly ambiguous relation to inflation rates and other material indicators of changed consumer capacity. From my perspective, these developments suggest both the integration of capital and the organizational strength of the unions, and specially COSATU, within the Tripartite Alliance. The largest unions, those of the public sector, inevitably account for the longest and most protracted strikes, and there is a strong correlation between union size and strike duration. It is precisely this strength and unity that is now in question. But even more fundamentally in question is the nature of the strike per se, its role in the mediation and/or opposition to class difference, and its capacity to function as a force for social justice. Although the strikes of the late 1990s appear linked to COSATU's criticism of the ANC's hard drive to the right, and thus appear of a simultaneously political and economic sort, those since then have either been political but local (as in protests over redemarcation in places like Marafong and Bushback, or over service delivery in Soweto) or they have been sectoral and economic, limited to wages, and questions of remuneration for labor time. That is to say, we have seen a splitting between strike and protest, the very duality that the imagistic substitution of Soweto for Marikana and Marikana for Soweto tried to efface.

Rosa Luxemburg was deeply suspicious of this conflation. She thought that political theatre associated with both anarchic and 'demonstrative strikes,' was at one with their ephemerality. But as they say, times and perhaps time itself has changed. In the transnationally mediated space of the global economy, of course, there is virtually no strike that does not specularize itself. However, the issue is not whether and how strikers give themselves to be seen, but rather whether their 'protest' is limited to the question of wages or not. For, it is this self-circumscription that permits the strike to assume its finitude, to become that which can be an event, something whose temporariness and temporality (what Derrida would call temporization) permits it to be 'resolved,' 'concluded' and even 'economized.'

PART FOUR:

Back to the Future: Or, the History of Depoliticization, Again

Even those left labor historians who have not read (or who have forgotten) Turner have largely accepted his reading of the transformations in the strikes between Durban and East London in terms of their politicization, with the earlier strikes appearing to be merely wage-directed and limited in the scope of their demands, and the later strikes, particularly on the mines, encompassing demands for political change, and thus becoming eligible for the term, 'general strike.' A certain kind of orthodoxy sees this movement, from the narrowly economic to the more formally political quality of the strikes, as the sign of unionism's maturation. It then inscribes this early development into a teleological narrative, whose future

history moves rather smoothly toward the formation of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in 1982, its embrace by the new structures of COSATU in 1985, and thence to the radicalization of the mass strike during the late 80s, when 'ungovernability' became the medium of black opposition to apartheid, and finally to the entry of COSATU into alliance with the South African Community Party and the ANC. Such a narrative – enormously alluring by virtue of its elegant linearity– is then be confronted with the present situation, in which there are fewer strikes of longer duration, increasing strikes not sanctioned by unions, and increasing levels of violence both by the state against workers, and by workers directed not only at particular capitalist entities (mining companies, in particular), but against the state and members of the union administration itself.

It is not that strikes have been reduced to the mere expression of sectoral interests, and confined to purely economic questions. It is rather, that the necessary vacillation between the two types of strikes/protest and indeed the dialectic between them has been interrupted. For all her impatience with 'demonstrative strikes, Rosa Luxemburg's judicious refusal of Manichean analysis should be recalled:

“...the movement on the whole does not proceed merely from the economic to the political struggle, but also vice-versa...

Each new rising and new victory of the political struggle simultaneously changes itself into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle by expanding the external possibilities of the latter, increasing the inner drive of the workers to better their situation, and increasing their desire to struggle...

In a word: The economic struggle is that which leads the political struggle from nodal point to another; the political struggle is that which periodically fertilizes the soil for the economic struggle. Cause and effect here continually change places....the economic and political moments in the mass strike period form only two interlacing sides of proletarian class struggle in Russia. And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike.” (241)

Nor is the revolution a function or outcome of the mass strike. To the contrary it is their origin: “the revolution first creates the social conditions which make possible this immediate transformation of the economic struggle into the political and of the political struggle into the economic which finds its expression in the mass strike” (243).

In Germany, Luxemburg greeted the development of trade-unions between 1895 and 1900 with a certain ambivalence. On the one hand their acquisition of independence, vis-a-vis both capital and the Social Democratic party, which was the organ of socialism at that time, was to be lauded because it entailed the development of new tactics and self-consciousness. On, the other hand, the emergence of its own officialdom, a necessary corollary of that independence, threatened the bureaucratization of a professional class within the trade unions (262).

Especially important here is the overestimation of the organization, which is changed from a means to an end, gradually to an end in itself, to an almost precious thing to which the interests of the struggle should be subordinated.... Continually absorbed by the economic guerilla war, having the task of making plausible to the working masses the great value of every small economic conquest, every increase in wages or decrease in the working day, the trade union leaders gradually lose the power of seeing the larger connections and taking survey of the whole situation.” (262)

One can be forgiven for being reminded here of Buhlungu’s careful accounting of bureaucratization in NUM and COSATU more generally.

Indeed, Luxemburg continues with a powerful caution against the creation of a ‘lumpen’ stupidity from within the very heart of unions:

“...in place of the collegial, unpaid, purely idealistically motivated trade-union agitation by local commissions of the comrades themselves comes the business like, bureaucratically, regulated direction of trade-union officials who, for the most part, are sent from outside. Through the concentration of the strings of the movement in its hands, the capacity of judging in trade-union affairs become its professional specialty. The mass of comrades are degraded to a mass incapable of judging, whose essential virtue becomes “discipline,” that is, passive obedience to duty” (264).

She does not add that that passivity also has an aggressive form of appearance, namely the violence directed against those who threaten the false unity of discipline, a violence born of the confusion of the disciplined union with the coherent proletarian subject of revolution. If the revolution, for Luxemburg, constitutes a kind of conditioning horizon, giving rise to strikes which, in turn, extend the revolution and summon its actual practice; and if, for her, the proletariat was the undisputed bearer of liberation into universality, we can no longer console (or delude) ourselves with that illusion. This is not because we must relinquish ambitions for real social justice, an end to inequality, or the transformation of the economy. But we must yet understand what it means to say that the proletarian subject is no longer, and not yet possible in South Africa. To do so we must return, once again, to that strange mediatic scene, in which the striking miners enter the public only in the image of something other than themselves, as the ghosts of a future past. And here the key issue is less the desire to appear in the image of assailed innocence, a la Soweto '76, than the aspiration to a position political neutrality. For this is the claim of AMCU, and of the Marikana miners. On the one hand, of course, this is the mere expression of contempt for the corruption of officials in the reigning political party, and in the dominant unions. For many, both in South Africa and elsewhere, politics means corruption.

And who could disagree? But, let us linger for a moment over what this means. For the expression itself reveals much about the nature of our conception of the political today. What people mean, when they say that politicians are corrupt, is

that they are using public office for personal gain, that what ought to have been disinterested service, and representational transparency is, in fact, its opposite: self-interest, pursued in secret, using surreptitious but direct forms of communication (ie., using the network of people you know). Again, one cannot dispute that this is the case. But the more important issue is the degree to which the complain rests on the presentation of a simple opposition, namely that between a universal public interest and an absolutely individuated one. And herein lies the rub. The very formulation of the opposition, contained in the ubiquitous and righteous complaints about corruption, demands the suppression of class – as a concept but more importantly, as the basis for representation. It is in this no-man’s land – with all the implications of violently enforced suspension that that term implies – that the Marikana workers and AMCU seek their dubious alternatives, even as they enact the depoliticization that capital demands. To understand why this is the case, we need to recall, very briefly (too briefly), how it is that ideology functions.

I began by remarking the strange fact that the Marikana miners are represented in the public sphere, in an image of something other than themselves, and other than labor, and the supporters of the miners could only speak in a voice that was not particularly their own. In this sense, claiming moral authority meant claiming universality, and, in the case of AMCU, rejecting the politics as the space of an improper self-interestedness. This is not surprising, in the after of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which essentially defined *politics as a matter of being subject to forces that make you do what you would not otherwise do*. The TRC, the most significant institution in the production of a new public sphere after the fall of apartheid, made this predicament – of acting other than oneself -- the ground of amnesty, and then theatricalized and televised it in myriad hearings where individuals could admit what they did in a manner that allowed them to say both, “I did it,” and “something else (the apartheid state, or the exigencies of revolution) made me do it.” In this extraordinary reassertion of humanist ethics, the subject of politics in South Africa was enshrined as a split subject, and politics became the source of that split.²⁴ But, and this is important, it established an untraversable gap between the two. To be political in the terms of the TRC is to act on personal bases, in the wrong context and in the wrong way. This formulation of the political was not the invention of the TRC, but it was theatricalized by the TRC, whose many important achievements nonetheless could not overcome the fundamental paradox to which it gave form, namely: how can you build an ethical state, and re-establish the legitimacy of law by minimizing the gap between justice and legality, when the question of politics and the task of responsibility are irrevocably sundered. Unfortunately, this has become the commonsense of South Africa – as indeed, in much of the rest of the world. And it has led unions to claim political neutrality, while mitigating the possibilities for alliances that are based on *collective self-interest*.

It is useful to recall that, in Marx’s analysis, acting in your own interest means acting in your collective interest as a member of a class. However, he argues, doing so becomes blocked under capitalism, which operates a massive machinery of

alienation. As waged laborers, individuals are made to believe that they should act only in terms of individual self-interest, which is nonetheless said by bourgeois philosophers to be 'natural.' Because the entire system of capital is one of socialized value, encompassing not only living labor, but dead labor (those whose intellectual, technical and other productive labor is invested in the means of production), and all those whose 'non-productive' labor allows for the reproduction of the worker, the fantasy of self-interest can be nothing but a delusion, with painfully real effects.

The political task for Marxians has been to conceive of a way in which individuals might come to not only understand but feel themselves to be situated as members of a class, which is to say, as the kinds of subjects who are limited or partial, *because of the operations of capital*. And it assumes that the affective and intellectual realization (and they must be conjoined) of partiality will then impel individuals-cum-workers in the capitalist system toward a real universality (not the false generality of the bourgeoisie), which is to say a classless society. When this apotheosis occurs, in what must ultimately be an act of self-destruction, the proletarian class will become universal. Which is to say that the alienation and fragmentation of life under capitalism will be overcome.

To understand this process, it is helpful to reread the chapter on 'The Working Day' in *Das Kapital*. There, one sees a movement between the idiomatically particular speech of workers, cited in the footnotes, and the impossibly articulate discourse of "the Worker," ("arises the voice of the Worker," writes Marx) who inhabits a space of absolute reciprocity and mutual recognition with the capitalist. It is only this figural and indeed fictive Worker who achieves universality, in *Das Kapital*. The actual workers, in all their heterogeneity, remain caged in the lower regions of the page, like the prisoners of the Doge's palace in the face of a deluge, always at risk of the oblivion produced by an inattentive reader. The aporia between workers – situated, partial and not yet universal – and 'the Worker,' is the aporia of politics, one might say. But it is also the space of pedagogy and of strikes. For the task is not neutrality, but the representation of the very singular and *universalizable* interests of a class that is, at present, specifically not granted the capacity to "signify the universal."

In South Africa, as in other postcolonial states which live in the shadow of a system that worked through ethnonational differentiation (one can think here of places as diverse as Cameroon and Malaysia), this problem -- the possibility for conceiving "the Worker" in general -- is specifically structured by the principles of ethnicity and race. There is not a single account that I know of in the progressive press that does not refer to the Marikana miners in terms of their ethnicity and their largely foreign national status. And one notes here that Pondoland is construed in these accounts as a veritable foreign land within the Eastern Cape – as though extreme rural poverty was an illegal immigrant. Of course, this is a gesture of specification that merely expresses the force of the apartheid system's capacity to organize the social field on the basis of ethnicity. At the same time, however, we must acknowledge that every such gesture, in which the miners are understood to

be speaking *as Pondo* or *Sotho from Lesotho*, are gestures that withhold from them the capacity to “signify the universal.” It is in response to this constantly repeating ethnicization, perhaps, that the reactive drive to be like anyone else emerges. In any case, there is something between ethnicity and the universal human, even in the bounded national sense that grants citizens something called “human rights.” The point is that the SeSotho speaking Rock Drill Operator from Lesotho can only access the rights of the “human” by becoming, first, a worker acting on the basis of collective (class) self-interest. What the conflict between AMCU and NUM, and the ethnicizing descriptions of the miners reveals is that such a pursuit remains either a phantasm of the past or a project for the future, depending on your perspective. It is too soon to tell, either way, but we might recall Rosa Luxemburg’s dialectic of the economic and the general strike before assuming the end of history.

¹ Britain’s Channel 4 news released the footage on Sunday, January 27, 2013.

<http://www.channel4.com/news/marikana-massacre-police-shooting-video-footage>, accessed January 27, 2013.

² See for example, Mandy de Waal “Marikana massacre: Global media’s focus on tripartite failures and

² See for example, Mandy de Waal “Marikana massacre: Global media’s focus on tripartite failures and the growing class divide,” *The Daily Maverick*, August 20 2012,

<http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-08-20-marikana-massacre-global-medias-focus-on-tripartite-failures-and-the-growing-class-divide>, accessed January 25, 2012.

³ Lindsay Jones, “The South African miners’ massacre raises the ghosts of apartheid - and fears for South Africa’s future,” *Mail online*, August 20, 2012,

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2190989/The-South-African-miners-massacre-raises-ghosts-apartheid--fears-South-Africas-future.html#ixzz2JVG6gM00>, accessed January 28, 2012.

⁴ “Marikana ... from June 16 to August 16: 38 years,” *Amandla*, No.26/27, September 2012, pp.11-12.

⁵ The ANC Youth League had, of course, always functioned as the space of youthful militancy, both in relation to the party and the society at large. It nonetheless remained structured by an elaborate regulatory apparatus of rules for appointment to leadership, which principle it did not eschew. What is remarkable about Soweto 76 was the degree to which it mobilized those outside of the party, and thus how it marked the generalization of the category of youth as one of possible political subjectivity. The anxieties that this development precipitated, in South Africa, as elsewhere, can be seen in the efforts to assert the principles of traditional authority, and here African patriarchal and gerontocratic forces inevitably coincided, when then they did not collude with apartheid forces. An excellent introduction to the history of the Youth League may be found in Clive Glaser’s *The ANC Youth League: A Jacana Pocket History* (Jacana, 2012).

⁶ One may make an argument that the Soweto protests were strikes, but only if one believes that the labor being withheld was the labor of subjectivation. In this case, one would have to make the claim that students and others were refusing the (often underestimated) work that is required to assume

the place of an ideologically interpellated subject, as Althusser would term it. There is, in my opinion, good reason for making such a claim, but it does not appear to have been contemplated by those organizing the protests, nor those participating in them.

⁷ The status of the police in this situation is a complex one, given that it both functions to preserve power, and the state's representation of capital's interest, and is populated by largely working class men and women. The pathos of the words uttered by some of the young policemen in the aftermath of the shooting – one can hear them saying, “dammit, dammit” on some of the audiotape -- may perhaps reveal the complexity of identification even across the lines of combat, and of the rending of class itself.

⁸ One should not underestimate, however, the degree to which this mode of social existence for the migrant laborer, is juxtaposed against a more sedentary, fixed form of life among miners in older mining towns, where, often enough, residence in townships is now two or three generations deep. Indeed, such a difference is itself a source of tension in some mining townships, where established communities are surrounded by, or encrusted with informal settlements, and where residents of hostels patronize the bars, brothels and shops of the older community.

⁹ Themba Masondo, “The sociology of upward social mobility among COSATU Shop stewards,” in *COSATU: contested legacy*, ed. Sakhela Buhlungu and Malehoko Tshoaedi. Johannesburg: HSRC Press, 2120, pp.110 – 31, p.119; Sakhela Buhlungu and Malehoko Tshoaedi, “A contested legacy: organizational and political challenges facing COSATU,” in *COSATU: contested legacy*, pp.1-31, p.15. See also, Sakhela Buhlungu, *A Paradox of Victory: COSATU and the Democratic Transformation in South Africa*. Durban: Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2010.

¹⁰ Andries Bezeidenhout and Sakhela Buhlungu, “Old Victories, New Struggles: the state of the National Union of Mineworkers,” *State of the Union*, Johannesburg: HSRC, 2004, pp.245-65, p.253.

¹¹ The Poverty Datum Line was used mainly to determine minimum wages for white workers, but, as strikers would remark a year later in East London, black people had to buy the same commodities as did white people, and bread, sugar, and other foodstuffs were subject to significant inflation during the early 1970s.

¹² Sam Mhlongo, “Black Workers’ Strikes in Southern Africa,” *New Left Review*, 1/83, pp.41-49, Jan-February 1974.

¹³ I prefer the term ‘originary accumulation’ to the more commonly used ‘primitive accumulation,’ because it implies both a position of structural priority within an overall process of capital formation, and recursivity. Primitive accumulation, in its narrowest sense, refers to a process, accomplished through force of arms and law, by which people are expropriated for labor and exiled from their previous mode of existence-in-production. In this sense, it is an historically specifiable moment within the long *durée* of capital's and capitalism's expansion. But originary accumulation exceeds this eventful beginning, and must be produced and reproduced constantly within the lives of both societies and individuals. I therefore believe it is necessary to assume and supplement Rosa Luxemburg's claim that capitalism can only expand through colonialism and militarism, and her argument that the classically conceived ‘reserve army’ of the proletariat is insufficient to explain the rate and nature of historical expansion (conceived by her, we must recall, during the early decades of the twentieth century). The supplement comes in the recognition of those processes of subjectivification by which all individuals, including those born in advanced capitalist societies, must be taught to assume a personal future determined by the necessity of waged or salaried labor. In other words, they must be socialized in a manner that disavows the possibility of things being otherwise. This social-psychic structuration of the subject of capital (not to be confused with the capitalist subject) is enormously complex, and more will be said elsewhere about its processes, but for now, it must suffice to say that social norms must be repetitively inculcated in individuals. The structural principles governing a particular society are neither mechanically nor magically reproduced in its members. The vexing ambivalence that afflicts the relationship between education and capitalism arises here, and must be addressed directly and in all its complexity -- not with easy disavowals of vanguardism (which can only pretend that the differential of experience has no role to

play in the classroom, and in the production of the teacher's 'authority'), or claims that ideology is irrelevant in the age of biopolitics, where a short-circuiting of desire through recourse to 'the body' smuggles in base materialism disguised as a critique of recognition theory.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that NUM officials explained their lack of organizational capacity at the grass-roots level on communications technology, saying that they had been unable to generate consensus and thus ratification of agreements or even decisions about entering into negotiations because their primary mode of communicating was cell phone text messaging. This vectoral mode of communication certainly lacked the capacity for producing the face to face dialogue, as happened at the soccer stadium at Marikana on August 10, when workers came together and decided to bypass NUM and approach Lonmin directly. AMCU appears to be better able to produce such immediate exchanges. By contrast, NUM's incapacity to utilize the crowdsourcing-potential of SMS-messaging which has been well used by others around the world (whether to generate political rallies or spontaneous musical events) is revealing, not only of its own technological outdatedness, but also of its conception of the communicational relay as a mirror of bureaucratic hierarchy.

¹⁵ Sakhela Buhlungu, *Paradox*, p.119.

¹⁶ Mhlongo, p.49.

¹⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, "Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions," in *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Dick Howard. London and New York: Monthly Review, 1971, pp.223-70, 224.

¹⁸ Luxemburg, 225.

¹⁹ Luxemburg, 227.

²⁰ Luxemburg's statements on the Jena resolution make this clear. Although the resolution introduced by Bebel at the Jena Party Congress of 1905 recognized the mass strike as a possible tactic of proletarian struggle, it was sometimes thought by party members to be legitimate only if called by an executive committee, and limited to a defensive function when the state tried to limit suffrage or trade union rights. Luxemburg, however, thought it a more complex phenomenon, whose essence lay not in its instrumental function but in the fact that it was a site and medium at which the 'masses' would learn and develop a changed consciousness of their own capacities to act politically. Heterogeneous in its form and in its relation to both political and economic ends, she insisted that it is not a 'mere appendage' of parliamentarianism. Luxemburg also emphasized the degree to which repressive measures taken by the state could transform oppositional politics, suggesting that the German state's assault on suffrage was itself a conditioning element that summoned new modes of political practice, including the mass strike – although it had not yet been attempted by the German workers (Ibid., 232-3).

I note, with a certain sense of distress, that in the recent introductory volume to the 5 book series, *Readings in the ANC Tradition*, this early moment in the struggle to define the philosophical and practical agenda of socialism is entirely ignored. In it, the Russian Revolution is limited to the events of 1917, which entirely eclipse the uprising of 1905, and with it, the debate about anarchism, vanguardism and the differences between the Russian and German traditions of socialist practice – crucial topics for any student of international workers' movements and especially those concerned with the relationship between trade unions and other forms of political organization. Because that set of publications is intended as a primary tool for educating a generation of South Africans with no direct experience of either the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles or the moment before the consolidation of neoliberalism, and because it claims a representative function in the expression of the ANC's current self-understanding, such an omission appears to me as a grave error and lost opportunity. For, the question of the mass strike, which lies at the origin of the first Russian Revolution, retains its capacity to illuminate today's circumstances.

²¹ Rick Turner (Gerry Maré), "The East London Strikes," *South African Labour Bulletin* 15 (August) 1974:26-32, p.28.

²² Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1. Chapter 1, Trans. Ben Fowkes. In Marx's estimation, the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-64 became the locus for mobile revolutionary force, which had been exercised and then lost in the European revolutions of 1848. When Jacques Derrida invokes this passage in *Spectres of Marx*, he does so to draw out a quality of automaticity which he believes Marx is attributing to commodity production under capitalism, and which constitutes the animating principle of the ideological

substitution, whereby the products of labor become commodities, even as the social character of social labor is. When the table dances, it reveals through an act of “hiding by showing,” that commodities are indeed the product of living labor, albeit a living labor applied to dead labor – hence an uncanny thing. See Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York and London: Routledge 1994. Derrida’s reading unfurls a complex concept-metaphor crucial to Marx’s formulation of the commodity logic, but the element I wish to remark here concerns the temporal lag between the exemplary moment, transformed in retrospect by radical pedagogy, and the movement inspired by it. If that movement is to avoid the kind of spontaneism, it must both refer itself back to the first instance, as encouraging exemplar, and recognize the necessity for some calculus of changed circumstance.

²³ Turner, 1974, p.30.

²⁴ Of course, this split is not originary, and should not be confused with that primary splitting constitutive of the subject of language, so well described by Lacan in his account of the mirror stage. Rather, the split of the political subject is written over and onto a self that is only unified through the delirium of misrecognition that is the basis of all ‘identity.’