

Fiction, Reality and Contested Memory in *God's Bits of Wood* and the "Marikana Commission Report"

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Summary

Reportage of violence against workers is often compromised by age-old tendencies in oppressive states to control narratives on epochal events considered potentially disruptive of existing exploitative economic relations through excision of uncomfortable truths from the official memories of states. Thus memory, in colonial and postcolonial contexts, has been a contested terrain, especially in the relationships between the state-aligned businesses and labour. There are parallels and contrasts in the remembering of violent labour-related events in Sembene Ousmane's *Gods Bits of Wood* and the "Marikana Commission Report" which this article considers to be essential in preventing cyclical violence in the labour market. Hence this article comparatively discusses the treatment of history and memory as narrated in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* and in Judge Farlam's "Marikana Commission Report" on the Marikana massacre and argues that where memory is disputed and contested, the resultant submerging of truth for self-preservation reasons results in open-ended and recurrent violent events.

Opsomming

Verlaggewing oor geweld teen werkers word dikwels, as gevolg van eeue-oue neigings in onderdrukkende state, afgewater deur verhale van epiese gebeure te beheer as dit potensieel ontwrigtend vir bestaande uitbuitende ekonomiese verhoudings is. Die verhoudings is dikwels geskoei op ongemaklike waarhede wat teenstryding is met offisiële herinneringe. Dus, geheue, in koloniale en post-koloniale kontekste is 'n betwiste veld in die verhouding tussen staat-georiënteerde besighede en arbeid. Daar is ooreenkomste en kontraste in die geheue van gewelddadige arbeidsverwante gebeure in Sembene Ousmane se *Gods Bits of Wood* en die "Marikana Commission Report" wat in hierdie artikel as onontbeerlik beskou word om uiteindelik sikliese geweld in die arbeidsmark te voorkom. Die artikel vergelyk terselfdertyd die behandeling van die geskiedenis en geheue soos vertel in Ousmane se *Gods Bits of Wood* en Regter Farlam se "Marikana Commission Report" oor die Marikana slagting. Die artikel beweer dat, waar die geheue onder verdenking is en betwis word, die gevolglike onderdrukking van die waarheid vir selfbehoud lei tot oop en herhaalde gewelddadige gebeure.

The 1948 French West Africa Strike and the Marikana Tragedy in context.

The Dakar railway workers' strike took place in French West Africa in 1947-48 and was in many ways a repeat of the previous 1937 strike that had been brutally crushed by the colonial administration. In the novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1962), Ousmane, a socialist writer with deep roots in the labour movement uses the longest railway strike in French West Africa to create a socialist testimony of the unprecedented. This particular event proved to be a trigger for decolonisation in that particular region and also epochal in the continental Pan-Africanist movement. Jones (2000: 4) argues that the novel has "a number of themes that link the narrative of the strike to the process" of decolonisation. He also links Ousmane himself to the socialist dogma of class struggle and sees the novel as a revelation of "hidden history". It is thus a worker-friendly memorialisation of the strike as a revolutionary event that sowed the seeds for the disintegration of French imperialism in Africa and the transformation of the workers' political consciousness from lumpen urban proletariats to a sophisticated working class. Raja (2011: 423) sees in the novel an "ideologeme" or protonarrative of fantasised class struggle ideology which functions through the agency of a dual focus predicated on narrativisation of a strike event and particularising "certain universal aspects of class struggle". Therefore, the novel is a product of specific material and historical conditions whose net influences have been to position the author in an ideologically contradictory platform to the dominant one of French imperialism and its concomitant economics of material extraction. Its purpose is both didactic and expository, while retaining its Marxist revolutionary ethos.

In its didactic focus, *God's Bits of Wood* targets the oppressed colonial subaltern for conscientisation and mobilisation into a sophisticated and revolutionary urban African proletariat. According to Macherey (1978: 49), the conditions of the production of the text define "the real process of its constitution" and also serve to "show how it is composed from a real diversity of elements which give it substance". It consists of the totality of the critical elements of a typical West African colony under French political, military and economic domination constructed in the interest of the metropole's hunger for raw materials. Hence, Lucaks (1975: 291) asserts that a novel's true artistic totality depends "on the completeness of the picture it presents of the essential social factors that determine the world depicted". Such a picture, in Ousmane's representation of the "hidden history", particularises those aspects of memory that have been deliberately forgotten or expunged from the colonial memory of the strike. In the typical conditions whereby the official colonial narrative has drowned the voices of the subaltern, Ousmane's socialist realism encapsulates the Hegelian maxim of typicality by which his characters, as narrators of the "hidden history" which he essentialises, both embody and reflect the specific complexities of the railway strike as an anti-

imperialist event that actually delivered a proletarian victory and put to rest the aura of French invincibility.

According to Baxandall (1983: 285), the Hegelian insistence on typicality enables the possibility of developing literary narratives that mirror the history and social dynamics of social classes in the context of time and space. Thus, in *God's Bits of Wood* actual historical events, and in some cases, personalities, get artistically assimilated in the chronotope which Bakhtin (2002: 8) insists has "intrinsic generic significance". For instance, not only does the novel have historicity as it relies on an actual event in 1948, but it also has in its main character, Ibrahim Bakayoko, a striking resemblance, if not historical parallel of a leading participant in the strike. Jones (2000: 7) states that Bakayoko's character "is based on the real leader of the strike, Ibrahima Sarr", with only the biographical aspects being dissimilar. He adds that this particular individual's contemporaries hailed from a younger generation of French railway workers to the one prior to the 1948 strike and is reflected in characters like Tiemoko, another prominent strike leader in Ousmane's novel. He also notes that the generational tension between the likes of the old watchman and Bakayoko's allies in the novel was actually reflective of the generation gap between Sarr and the first-generation workers' leaders.

Jones (2000) notes the convergences between the colonial record of the strike and Ousmane's narrative in the areas of acts of sabotage, the anti-strike collaboration between the religious leaders and the colonial administration/railway company directors and also the division of the work force into different grades – specifically into the "cadre" and the "auxiliaire". The company management's epidermisation of workers also ensured the continuing exploitation of African workers and French maximisation of profits. Be that as it may, there are numerous instances of Ousmane's narrative fictionalisation trumping historical fact as recorded in colonial records and as contained in eye-witness accounts in the novel, yet this reality does not detract from the novel's historicity and class-conscious essentialism, both of which serve to remember as well as to recover and particularise the heroic achievements of the workers. Thus the testimony of the workers in the fictionalised world of the novel, and in view of its succinct political message and ideological thrust, is disruptive and subversive of the official narrative; at once delegitimising it and replacing it with an explicitly empowering proletarian memory. It might well be argued that the testimony given by the striking workers betrays the author's partisan expropriation of history much in keeping with socialist realism's valorisation of historicity in the construction of the novel. In this activist re-appropriation of history, didacticism is a means to an ideological end. To this end, history and strict adherence to historical fact are subordinated to ideological considerations whose design is to promote the strategic purpose of political conscientisation and the mobilisation of society around socialism and its universal message of workers' solidarity. History is then expropriated as a convenient vehicle for

propagandist purposes, which also informs the direction of the plot and the characterisation in the text. Thus the testimony rendered by the characters becomes both the gospel and emancipatory commissariat truth.

The memorialisation of the West Africa railway strike radically differs at many levels with how the Marikana Strike (2012) in South Africa has been narrated in numerous accounts that include the “Marikana Commission Report”, newspaper and journal articles. The reasons for the differences are historical, contextual and to some extent, ideological. Yet there are also a lot of similarities in both the causes of the strikes, the ideological contestation embedding them and the contested remembrances thereof, from which historical parallels can be drawn and lessons that should lead to a breaking of the cyclical anti-worker violence learnt. This article argues that much as these differences exist, the common denominator of contested memory and the absence of public trust in the official memory, coupled with the maintenance of similar existential conditions of economic exploitation by forces of Capitalism presided over by politically uncomfortable regimes, culminate in violent confrontations, mostly state-sponsored, but in all instances cyclical and predictable.

What became known as the “Marikana Massacre” in South Africa actually began as a workers’ strike for better working conditions which later metamorphosed into a spate of killings of both workers and police officers before exploding into a post-apartheid massacre of immense proportions. It stands out for being antithetical to the post-apartheid dispensation’s nationalist, democratic and pro-worker stance – upon which the expectations of an open society, freed of apartheid era political and economic tyranny, hinge. Marikana is therefore analogous to the pre-independence atrocities of colonial era abuses of African working classes. The 16 August 2012 confrontation witnessed the death of 44 mine workers at the hands of the essentially black-led South African Police Service (SAPS) outfit, operating under the aegis of a new democratic constitution reputed for its liberal democratic credentials the world over. The strike itself was led by the newly formed Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which had been engaged in a war of attrition with its rival National Union of Mine-workers (NUM). NUM felt threatened on its turf by what it considered a radical upstart.

Ironically, NUM, a major affiliate of the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the dominant union in the mining sector found itself conflicted as partner in government through the latter’s membership of the tripartite alliance governing the country. Not only was NUM a conflicted party in the crisis, it was also being ideologically and strategically upstaged by AMCU which positioned itself as a true champion of the working class while derisively dismissing its rival as a lapdog of mining conglomerates, strange bedfellows with capitalists and traitors to the cause of the oppressed workers. The NUM members actually fired deadly shots on the strikers who had gathered outside its offices on the 13th of August 2012 and like the SAPS,

who killed 44 strikers on the 16th of August 2012, claimed before the Farlam Commission that they felt threatened and had acted in self-defence. Thus they attempted to justify their violent actions as being legal (“Marikana Commission Report” 32). Furthermore, both the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and its partner the South African Communist Party (SACP) were themselves compromised as pro-people establishments by the very arrangement in which they were the protectors of Law against the striking workers as creators of alternative Law.

The ANC-led government found itself trapped between the extreme polarities of law-enforcement on one hand, and a popular and authentic pro-poor post-apartheid emancipatory actor, on the other. The owners of the mine were a London-based company much reviled by the workers for being capitalist, exploitative and insensitive to the workers’ plight. Further complicating this toxic mix in the ANC’s political cup was the fact that a senior ANC Leader; Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, a shareholder at Lonmin, was accused of playing a key role in the circumstances leading to the massacre. He was later acquitted along with other senior government actors in Judge Farlam’s “Marikana Commission Report” which President Zuma had commissioned in the wake of the tragedy. Consequently, numerous newspaper and other articles have queried the Farlam Commission’s findings and the “Marikana Commission Report” especially as regards clearing senior state players of culpability and failing to provide for proper restitution to the workers and their dependents. Subsequently, these combined factors have significantly lessened the reliability of the “Marikana Commission Report” as a memory of the strike, in some quarters of South African society.

The contestations over the “official truth” in the form of the “Marikana Commission Report” through the articles as reported in the papers reflect both the affirmation and the repudiation of the chronology of the events leading up to the tragedy. Thus the “Marikana Commission Report” as a historical record and memory is contested by the miners and principally, the surviving spouses and families of the deceased miners who have been left in dire destitution by the tragedy. On the other hand, President Zuma accepted the report and celebrated it for clearing his government of any blame, somewhat fortuitously. Nevertheless, the massacre as a historical memory has “impacted upon the South African political landscape” (Buitendag & Coetzee 2015: 96-97) in much the same manner as the railway strike of 1948 in West Africa impacted on French colonial hegemony. History as memory in both instances has been contested by the states and labour, with the exceptional factor being the fact that no post-Marikana “hidden history” in artistic form has emerged in South Africa.

The Narrative Purpose and Memory in *God's Bits of Wood*

In *God's Bits of Wood*, the historical facts of the Great Railway Strike of 1948 which was itself a seminal event of epic proportions in terms of its capacity to demystify the presumed invincibility of the French imperial enterprise and thus dispel any fears of dire retribution, are not mere distortions of truth. The avowed Marxist author (Ousmane) represented the known truths about the strike in what one might term a political utilitarian stratagem that did not significantly twist known memory or depart from established fact, but that still amounted to some form of adulteration or, in today's parlance, spinning. According to Munoz (2009), the established facts about the 1948 strike are that: (1) the French administrators unilaterally and suddenly transferred the railways from the *Direction des Travaux Publics*, a parastatal, to the *Regie des Chemins de Fer de L'Afrique Occidentale Francais* in 1947; (2) workers who had been civil servants prior to this transfer lost that status and with it their job security and the right to make claims that had been possible before the transfer; (3) the company-imposed epidermisation of the working force and its accompanying hierarchical order placed the African workforce at the base; (4) the lumping of the majority of African workers in the temporary classification left them with zero opportunities for progression into permanent stratum and finally, (5) the worsening general economic climate coupled with governmental changes in Paris, were the immediate causes of the 1948 strike. Cooper (2009) states that there were 1729 African cadres and 15726 auxiliaries in 1947.

Ousmane reduces the causes of the strike to worker grievances about salaries, benefits and housing. Furthermore, Ousmane has much fewer than the official 20 000 strong labourers who embarked on the strike. He does this in order to fit the event into his narration which has been privileged by his autonomy as a conscientious African writer "uncompromisingly committed to the cause of the people, drawing from the inexhaustible pool of African/cultural and body of knowledge" (Tsaaior 2013: 4). There is no way in which the strike can ever be divorced from the colonial occupation of West Africa in general, and Senegal in particular, by France. Tsaaior observes that "literary and cultural production in and about Africa has always been mediated by a complex of historical contingencies some of which are outside the cultural orbit of the continent". He further explains the centrality of the cultural hegemony imposed by "the European Self" and the "African Other's" politics of resistance through inscribing its own cultural agency and subjectivity (2013: ix).

In *God's Bits of Wood*, the women's march to Dakar follows the pattern of recovering "hidden history", in other words, disrupting the official narrative by creating new truth. In the official colonial memory of the 1948 strike, there was no women's march from Thies to Bamako. In this case, "known truth" gets conflated with propaganda for the express purpose of pushing a socialist

realist ideology of emancipation of women and a universalised proletarianisation of the urban semi-skilled working class. Moreover, the police violence against women in Ramatoulaye's compound, the subsequent violence at the police station and the death of H'oudia M'Baye under a barrage of water spray by firemen and finally, the confrontation with the marching women on the outskirts of Thies, are all ahistorical creations of Ousmane's which serve narrativisation purposes and the privileging of women. The purpose of this narrative technique is to "give them a viable, virile voice and visible presence thereby tempering the totalitarian regime of imposed silence and forced invisibility" (Tsaior 2013: 56). Clearly, Ousmane's concerns have more to do with ideology than with historical accuracy. For him, the memorialisation of these particular events in the historical annals of Senegal and West Africa have to be viewed from a Marxian ideological prism. For him, the colonised, from both the perspectives of Socialism and Post-colonialism are thus rendered as the subaltern whose enslavement in the extortionist colonial economies needs to be opposed through mass mobilisation of the proletariat as a collective of the victimised.

The connivance of the twin religious powers of Christianity and Islam as junior partners with the colonial administration and big business in the suppression of the strike is another classical example of Marxist Analysis' dialectical materialism concept and its emphasis on the protonarrative of the exploitative economic system of capitalism and the nature of society. Religion is seen as the hatchet weapon of ultimate social control as it militates against organised labour and potential emancipatory revolution. In this scenario, the superstructure is a mere representation of the values of the bourgeoisie that get reproduced for the purpose of sustaining continuing tyrannical stranglehold on the key pillars of capitalist/colonial society. In the same analysis, the law enforcement agencies that include the police as state apparatus and the entire penal system that relies on terror, are integral aspects of the bourgeoisie class's instruments of control that have been primed to ensure the continued hegemony of the colonial state. Eagleton (1977: 8) aptly sums up this relationship between ideology, society and the literary text when he states that this complex relationship requires us to understand ideology in society as consisting of a "definite, historically relative structure of perception which underpins the power of a particular class".

Through the Imam of Dakar and the wicked El Hadj Mabique who connive with the French authorities and the railway company in attempting to defeat the workers' strike, Ousmane exposes one critical paradigm of religions complicity in the pattern of French extractionist capitalism in its African territories. Nevertheless, he desists from generalising about the religious leaders in the strike-breaking efforts of the colonial authorities by presenting a positive face of religion through the sage Fa Keita whose maturity and steadfastness to Islam and worker solidarity are refreshing. Jones (2000: 5) describes him as a character who exudes a workers' unity "that transcends

oceans and eliminates hierarchies especially in his statement that workers will never be again forced to bow down before anyone and no one will be forced to bow down before them”.

The official record confirms Ousmane’s implication of Islamic clergy in the strike-breaking efforts of the authorities but excludes the prison violence. Of course, the essential backdrop to the violence is racial essentialism, with the French coloniser in his supposed civilising mission pitted against the oriental Other, whose presumed inferiority legitimises both his enslavement and where necessary, his physical elimination. In other words, French imperialism in Africa was driven by capitalism. Capitalism’s economic relations with Africans in Senegal and the hinterland were dictated to by two basic tenets – the necessity of a readily availability cheap labour and the assurance of socio-political stability predicated on unfettered control of the colony’s superstructure and coercive instruments. These imperatives would guarantee maximum and unhindered extraction of raw materials for the benefit of both the colonial bourgeois and the French bourgeoisie. Predictably, these twin imperatives contradicted the basic aspirations of the African working class and thus, could only be realised through the violent suppression of strikes in the name of preserving western civilisation and social order in West Africa. The number of workers that lost their lives as a result of the French colonial state’s quasi-military activities in the official memory is not exactly known, but in Ousmane’s chronotope, nine people lose their lives to state-orchestrated violence, a figure which is substantial in the context of the novel. Raja states that “the colonial machinery unleashes its repressive power through direct and indirect expressions of absolute power” (2011: 434). The strike itself was a critical watershed moment in the cause of West African anti-colonial struggles in that it gave birth to anti-French sentiment that finally broke France’s hold on Francophone Africa leading to the attainment of independence of many countries in the region. The legacy of the strike, in terms of the extent to which the fires of independence were ignited, is of course implied in Ousmane’s novel.

Memory, (In)justice and the Preservation of the Status Quo in the “Marikana Commission Report”

Judge Farlam’s “Marikana Commission Report” is effectively the official memory of the tragedy of Lonmin Mine. It is thus a narrative of a tragic event as well as a historical document whose representation of the event impacts on how it is to be memorialised. Most importantly for the state, it shapes how citizens should remember the strike, form impressions about the state’s role in it and perhaps, wholly absolve it from the deadly debacle. Upon its positive reception as a “neutral” and open-ended product of a judicial inquiry, hinges the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the citizens. This is made more urgent

by the growing perceptions of a state whose revolutionary credentials are increasingly questioned by ever bellicose political rivals like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party, the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the militant students' movements like the Fees Must Fall, and indeed a suspicious and increasingly disaffected (urban) lumpen proletariat and electorate. The perception of abandonment of the Freedom Charter and with that, the working class through kowtowing to powerful economic forces in the so-called "white liberal agenda" and Western capitalist forces with whom the ruling elites are said to be in bed is one narrative political opponents of the ANC feed on. In the combustible post-Marikana South African politics marked by disappointed expectations of economic emancipation, the poor economic growth and the increasingly violent strikes and service delivery protests, the legitimacy of the state which is at stake continues to be eroded. It is from this perspective that the former president Zuma's enthusiastic welcoming of the "Marikana Commission Report" has to be understood.

Buitendag and Coetzee (2015: 98) argue that South Africa's violent mining sector strikes have been a recurrent feature since apartheid, and aptly add that these recurring themes of repetition "will reappear". They further point out that it is the forgetting or overlooking of previous violent events that ensure that violence becomes cyclical. Most relevant, perhaps, is their assertion that memory itself is "not neutral" and consequently, dwells "in the domain of imagination" wherein our recollection of events "is a conjuring of the past". They argue that it is from this remembrance that we are enabled to be just to the violated Other, thereby breaking the cycle of traumatic events.

When legitimising state ideologies memorialise events, it is inevitable that survivalist political imperatives will selectively handpick what goes into official historical memory and what does not. Thus state-sanctioned "truths" as tropes of narrating the past risk getting choreographed as official histories that legitimise unpopular regimes both in their colonial and postcolonial contexts. The "Marikana Commission Report's" "acquittal" of the political elites in the South African state was naturally a welcome "official memory" for the government which, if accepted in the public domain, would lead to a forgetting of the bloody affair. The critical question on the state-sanctioned memorialisation of the Marikana strike and the massacre that followed is whether or not the "Marikana Commission Report" was fair, reliable and honest in its representation of the events that transpired before and during the massacre? This moot question impacts on the reception of the report by the public, and directly implicates the legitimacy of the state and its authority as upholder and enforcer of the constitution.

The "Marikana Commission Report" documents the incidents, conditions and events that culminated in the massacre as reported to the Commission during the public hearings. The public nature of the hearings, it was anticipated, would provide legitimacy to the process and quell all doubts

concerning the findings thereof. This was essential in the charged atmosphere in which opposition political formations sought to milk maximum political mileage from the immense public outrage, more so as municipal elections loomed on the horizon. The judicial inquiry for many, became, in a sense, a trial of the state, and the official report, a verdict on its legitimacy. The “Marikana Commission Report” highlights several incidents of lawlessness prior to the massacre which included numerous killings attributed to the striking workers. Some of the notable killings were those of a Lonmin Officer, Mr Julius Langa, on the 13th of August 2012, two police officers, Warrant Officers Monene and Lepaaku, and three strikers, Mati, Jokanisi and Sokanyile (129). The “Marikana Commission Report” notes reports of violence and intimidation in Lonmin’s Occurrence Book, all of these directed at non-striking workers. It also mentions that ten deaths on 16 August 2012 “were caused by Lonmin’s refusal to talk to the strikers” (132). It prominently mentions the railway line and the hill area known as the “Koppie” as the major sites of confrontations between the police and the workers, since the strikers’ activities were concentrated in these areas. The “Marikana Commission Report” details the activities of the police as they attempted to maintain law and order, facilitate negotiations with the workers aimed at disarming them of the “pangas, assegais, spears and sharpened objects” and thereafter, remove them from the Koppie. It documents the failed efforts of the police, led by a Major General Mpemba, to get compliance from the workers and, more importantly, their confidence. It describes how on one of these failed efforts on the 13th of August 2012, singing and crouching workers, clashing their weapons together, charged at the police after teargas was fired at them, and how two police officers, Captain Thupe and Major General Mpembe, later disputed each other’s accounts of the incident in submissions on the origin of the order for the police to fire a teargas canister which led to the escalation of the violence.

The details on the pre-massacre skirmishes between the rival workers aligned to NUM and AMCU are recorded in detail in the “Marikana Commission Report”, as are the killings that occurred before the fateful incident. If the media, which also reported on the strike, is prone to sensationalism, the reasonable expectation would be that a report of a judicial inquiry led by a respected retired judge would have credibility. It is prudent that its representation of the event should be factual and beyond dispute. Indeed, the “Marikana Commission Report” sought to achieve this through recording the facts as given during the submissions in transcript form, with the details, the names of the witnesses and the dates of each submission recorded. For instance, the transcript of the meeting between Lieutenant General Mbombo and the Lonmin Mine management reveals that the former wanted the management to explain how the crisis with the strikers would be resolved, and that the response from Lonmin’s Mr Mokwena was that “Lonmin’s priority is getting people arrested” (161). Lieutenant General

Mbombo in turn announced the South African Police Service's priority of giving the workers the opportunity "to put down their weapons and leave the Koppie one by one," further intimating rather ominously that, if the strikers refused to surrender the next day, "it is blood" (162). The Report highlights that police numbers on the ground rose from 209 members on the 13th of August 2012, to 532 on the 14th, 689 on the 15th and by the 16th, 718 officers. On the 14th of August, the Report mentions that the Lonmin management promised Lieutenant General Mbombo that the company would give its workers an ultimatum to return to work, and if they did not, the police promised to disperse them on the 15th of August. It states that at no time did Lieutenant General Mbombo urge the Lonmin management to negotiate with its workers. Instead, there seems to have been the concern on the SAPS's part to establish whether or not the mining sector was about to replace the NUM with another union, and to register their concern that giving the workers "any leeway" could be seen as supporting them (164).

Lieutenant General Mbombo is also reported as having disclosed that in her discussion of the Marikana strike with the National Commissioner, the latter had asked her if she knew who the directors at Lonmin were, to which she had replied that she had heard the name of Mr Cyril Ramaphosa (current President of South Africa) being mentioned, leading to the National Commissioner saying – "got it". Again, Lieutenant General Mbombo's conversation with the then Minister of Police, Mr Mthethwa, revealed that Mr Cyril Ramaphosa was calling him and "pressurizing him" on the strike. This particular narrative of implicit collusion between the police, the management of Lonmin Mine, the NUM and powerful political leaders in the ANC was gaining traction with the striking workers and the Marikana community as evidenced in the "Marikana Commission Report's" mention of the fact that the EFF's Mr Malema was readily accepted by the strikers and given the platform to address them while the police struggled to gain such confidence and trust. It is instructive, in evaluating the representation of the actual facts about the tragedy that newspaper reports concur with the official narrative and go on to describe the political dynamics in the area, which tended to delegitimise both the NUM and the ANC through rejection, with the strikers preferring the EFF leader, church leaders and AMCU.

In accounting for the spectre of violence in South Africa's mining strikes, Buitendag and Coetzee (2015: 101) distinguish between natural law and "positivist approaches to violence in law". They explain that in natural law, violence is seen as a "raw material" of nature which is not at odds with the law if used for "just ends". The positivist approach holds that violence is a "mere product of history and that just (legal) means necessarily lead to just ends". They point out that natural law espouses a justice that is achieved outside of the legal means, whilst positivist violence "espouses legality through procedural guarantees". They add, however, that this representation of violence has false dichotomy on the means and ends of the two tenets as

the means and ends of violence thus espoused lack compatibility. They insist that justice cannot always be judged on the grounds of pure legality as there exist other norms in certain contexts by which the meaning of violence and its relationship to justice can be judged. For instance, no exhaustive list of acceptable circumstances wherein violence can be legitimately used is provided for in Law. Law is itself threatened where unsanctioned violence orchestrated by a section of the populace breaks out, under natural law. Hence, violence by striking workers in pursuit of their ends is unsanctioned and is an act of law-breaking, while it is simultaneously law-creating in terms of replacing existing socio-economic relations with what is regarded as being just.

Buitendag and Coetzee (102) see the Marikana strikers' violence as being unsanctioned and therefore, a threat to the legal system as it declares "a new law". It is "extra-legal" and, often, such violence is met "with violence from the state". State violence is positivist and from a legal perspective, law-preserving. In other words, the unsanctioned workers' violence is potentially anarchic, revolutionary, and as it were, upsetting to the constitutional apple cart. From the strikers' perspective, the killings of the non-striking Lonmin workers in Marikana would be justified under natural law as necessary riddance of strike-breakers. On the other hand, the attacks on the police officers sent to maintain the peace in the area qualify to be classified as anarchic and threatening to law; hence the police's intention of disarming the strikers, arresting the perpetrators of the violence and subjecting them to the legal system while protecting the mine management and non-strikers is justifiable in positivism. However, as a counterpoint to this narrative, AMCU "exposed" the injustice of the state as enforcer of law in its alleged kowtowing to the commercial interests of big business through colluding with mining conglomerates in frustrating the strikers' efforts at improving their lot, while promoting the survival of the NUM and by implication, its ANC tripartite alliance partner. Hence, if the "Marikana Commission Report" were to confirm the veracity of AMCU's allegations on the causal factors of the massacre, and unreservedly apportion the blame on the state actors and Marikana Mine, then the state's standing as guarantor of law and by extension, its employment of violence in pursuit of justice as defined by law, would be impeachable. In other words, its legitimacy would be overthrown as a first step toward a workers' political revolution. The memory of the Marikana massacre and broadly speaking, the strike, just like the 1948 Dakar strike would be immortalised in the public imagination as a revolutionary event. The conclusions reached by the "Marikana Commission Report" make it impossible to commemorate the strike as a glorious memory and a revolutionary event in the same mould as the memory of the Dakar strike, largely because of the different socio-historical and political circumstances of the two events.

Didactic Elements in *God's Bits of Wood* and the "Marikana Report"

The Dakar strike of 1948 and the Marikana strike of 2012 have several differences and also some striking similarities which when contrasted provide useful lessons on predicting and remembering epochal events like these. Fanon, in his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth* notes the violence of French imperialism in the colonies and how in Algeria, the oppressed were forced to employ violence in order to liberate themselves. Thus colonial violence is a mind-set that is analogous to France's engagement with the colonised Other, and that gets perpetuated in all its imperial realm under many guises which include maintenance of civilisation and law and order, while concealing the hideous nature of capitalism. To Fanon, the colonist and the colonised have a relationship of "one physical mass", in which the former, aware of his safety needs, is forced to cry out loud: "Here I am the master" (1963: 17). The state-sponsored violence in *God's Bits of Wood* is calibrated to stretch the limits of the African proletariat's resistance to capitalist exploitation. Ostensibly, it is state law enforcement directed at an anarchic and ignorant underclass whose major characteristic is its moral and intellectual inferiority, demonstrably embodied in both racial and class differences. Monsieur Dejean, the regional director of the railway company is the face of this inhuman system. His twenty years of service in the colony are testimony of his allegiance to the imperial project. His numerous honours include the crushing of the previous strike of 1938 in which he "had crushed the disturbances almost immediately" and had been rewarded with a promotion to the post of chief clerk (Ousmane 29). Like the Lonmin manager in the "Marikana Commission Report", he has no intention to negotiate with the workers, he is very angry and vengeful:

That very morning he had refused to see the representative of the workers. He knew that among them were the sons of the same men whose movement he had crushed nine years before, and he had no intentions of yielding now. It was not a question of agreement or disagreement. First they must go back to work; that was all there was to it (29).

The common attribute of the company management and the Marikana leaders is that of disdainful arrogance; the same which dismisses the workers and their representatives as unsophisticated creatures, and dehumanises them as beasts of burden or as criminals. Hence, Mr Mokwena's declaration to the police that "Lonmin's priority is to get people arrested" is an echo from the colonial past, emphasising that attitudes have not changed. While the epidermisation of the worker/management factor underlines the principal common ingredient – class conflict in *God's Bits of Wood* in the novel's colonial context, this factor is less visible in the post-apartheid South African political order. However, merely window-dressing company management through the presence of a

black mine manager in Marikana only conceals the reality of majority ownership of mines by a postcolonial Western entrepreneurial class. Dejean was a white company manager in a French colony representing absentee shareholders in metropolitan Paris as the imperial centre, while an African manager at Lonmin in 2012 represents absentee shareholders, the majority of whom are in the former imperial centres and the present financial capitals of the world. The essence of racial difference in the colony, in the case with the post-colony, is from a purely materialist perspective peripheral to the broader class conflict between the workers and their employers. Hence, the white colonial manager is no less a puppet of the colonial bourgeois than a black manager in his relationship to the shareholders in a post-colonial context. The binary subjectivity of occident and orient in this context is essential in the analysis of capitalism as an ideology of the colony and the post-colony, be it Anglophone or Francophone. The underlying structures are the same.

The second issue of law enforcement in relation to the penal system and state power manifests itself in the deployment of the police as state instruments of coercion in support of big business. In the colony, rarely is state-sanctioned violence in defence of law directed at errant companies and their executives. Rather, the security companies employed by private business collaborate with state instruments in executing the dictates of shareholders at the work place and indeed, in general society. The workers as an oppressed underclass are regarded as ignoramuses when it comes to law and potential anarchists whose ignorance of law makes them legitimate targets of state violence. Thus knowledge is appropriated and monopolised by the state and big business as an empowerment tool by which hegemonic control of the workers/society is maintained. In the context of the deployment of state power at Marikana, the “Marikana Commission Report” questions Lieutenant General Mbombo’s qualification for her job, plainly stating that her decision to move to the operational stage of the law enforcement action at the “Koppie” was a clear testimony of her poor training, lack of skills and the experience “to enable her to make decisions as to what should be done in the complex and difficult situation like Marikana” (367). A similar irrational decision concerning the deployment of the state’s coercive power in *God’s Bits of Wood* occurs in two incidents in which a panicked police contingent overreacts to torch-bearing women led by Mame Sofi by firing at the civilians and burning down their dwellings, and later at the police station when frightened police officers bring in the water cannons that lead to Houdia M’Baye’s death. In Marikana, the “Marikana Commission Report” declares that the decision to tackle the workers on the “Koppie” was “inexplicable” and unjustified. It traces the poor management to the police headquarters where even the National Police Commissioner is described as being in a worse situation than Lieutenant General Mbombo in that she had been appointed to her post as SAPS head with “no policing expertise and experience whatsoever” (368). In a sense, the government as the authority vested with seeing to the equipping

and skilling of the police force, and administering the Law in a constitutionally sound and knowledgeable manner, simply handed a loaded gun in the form of state power to novices who should then lead the charge to quell the passions of a volatile and restive society.

Michel Foucault (1977: 28) views power and knowledge as twin axioms exercised in the context of state penal codes and systems which serve in the context of the body-politic as “material elements and techniques” that are “weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them into objects of knowledge”. Monsieur Dejean uses these weapons to delegitimise the workers’ demands for wage hikes, pensions and allowances by claiming that when they get these, they “go out and buy themselves another wife, and the children multiply like flies ...” (Ousmane 1962: 29). The explicit racial profiling only disguises the profit motive behind the claim, and justifies the refusal to negotiate. This is followed immediately by the justification to employ state violence against the workers – “The soldiers have been ordered just to frighten them ...” (Ousmane, pp. 29-30). The historical parallel in the Marikana massacre is to be found in the Lonmin management’s “priority” to have “people arrested”, and the accession to this expectation by Lieutenant General Mbombo in the promise “it is blood”. In Ousmane’s memorialisation of the Dakar strike, state violence is a recurrent feature of the workers’/ employers’ conflict with several deaths of the workers reported and wanton destruction of their homes being the *modus operandi*. The cyclical violence culminates in the final showdown with the women in Dakar where a black commissioned army officer orders the defiant marching women to “Go back to Thies, women!” The defiant women press on as the panicky soldiers, unnerved by the moving mass of humanity, “not knowing what to do” open fire and cause the death of Penda and Samba N’doulogou.

The difference between this fictionalised memory of the final confrontation between the worker-aligned women and the state apparatus in Ousmane’s novel and the “Marikana Commission Report” on the confrontation on the “Koppie” is that the death of the Marikana workers did not lead to a workers’ victory, and consequently the triggering of a political revolution in the state. Instead, the status quo of business abuse and exploitation of workers, with the tacit support of the state, was retained. Hamilton (2015) dismissed the report as a whitewash, protesting that it “completely exonerated the government, specifically the Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and the former police ministers Nathi Mthethwa and Susan Shabangu respectively” (sic). Bruce (2015: 23-25) bemoans the fact that although the report was generally “even handed and fair in many ways”, it still had a one-sided element in “presenting the strikers’ intentions and disposition to violence as consistent throughout the conflict”. Furthermore, the other contributory factors like for example, the strikers’ refusing to hand over their weapons to the police, are seen as confirming their inclination to violence when previous confrontations with their

armed NUM rivals and with the police, in which lives were lost, are completely ignored in the report (Bruce 2015: 30-31). In fact, the report accepts the NUM's invocation of the principle of self-defence through proportionate application of deadly force against the strikers based on legitimate suspicion of an impending attack on people or property, claiming that this is provided for in the South African Constitution (Bruce 2015: 42). According to Bruce, the failure by the "Marikana Commission Report" to recommend compensation for the families of the victims of police violence is a notable weakness.

Maluleke (2015) notes the same failure to recommend compensation in much stronger language when he lambasts the report for reducing the lives of 44 men to worthlessness, stating that the Marikana Commission, whose terms of reference were "wide enough to cover the question as to whether a compensation scheme" should be provided by the state, opted instead to leave the bereaved families in a lurch whereby they had to try to "convince a court that they were entitled to compensation" on their own, and without the financial resources to do so. On the failure to establish liability for the massacre, Wilson (2015) submits that the "Marikana Commission Report" failed to establish individual culpability for the killings, let alone the details of the circumstances in which the individuals were killed. Thus in Marikana, unlike in Dakar, the strikers were not only massacred by the police, but also, their efforts came to nought. The state and the Lonmin Mine executives remained firmly ensconced in their ivory towers, with the workers a crashed and dispirited lot. The "Marikana Commission Report" largely blames the strikers for precipitating the shootings at the NUM Offices and for the subsequent police shootings that followed, intimating that by arming themselves with dangerous weapons, they were intent on violence and must carry the blame for the consequences thereof. This finding exonerates law enforcement, mine management and the NUM from the deaths that resulted, and memorialises the massacre on the presumed intention by the strikers to commit violence. Needless to say, this conclusion has been discredited for its biased analysis of a complex conflict.

Conclusion

The critical lessons we get from remembering the tragic moments in industrial relations from *Gods Bits of Wood* and the "Marikana Commission Report" are that: (1) when violence is the key ingredient of the state's engagement with its citizens, it is entrenched in the psyches of the state players as well as the citizens. The possibility of negotiated settlements of disputes is diminished as the citizens' regard for the law is eroded, and they react to state violence with violence of their own. We see this paradox narrated in Ousmane's novel and repeated in Marikana. (2) When a state gets into bed with big business, its

capacity to enforce the law even-handedly is handicapped, and its moral authority is undermined by what is publicly regarded as a corrupt association. The public's loss of confidence in the state manifests itself in open defiance of its authority, which leads to violent confrontation with the enforcers of the law. (3) The loss of confidence in the state's law-enforcement agents erodes its political legitimacy thereby creating a dangerous power vacuum which often mutates into deadly energy that is unaccountable to any political structure and may consequently unleash anarchy. (4) In Thies, negotiations that followed the violence resolved the long-standing grievances of the workers which the arrogant leaders of big business had initially ignored with contempt. The capitulation of the railway company to the workers led to the retreat of the French from their African territories and the eventual independence of sovereign African republics and a positive memory of the 1948 railway strike. In South Africa, the political/colonial question had been resolved through a negotiated settlement and democratic elections in 1994, which yielded a new law (the constitution). However, lessons from the country's violent past have not been learnt; instead, forgetfulness has set in and violence remains a "legitimate" method of settling disputes.

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