After the shooting: Policemen examine the bodies of dead miners.
There seemed to be a terrible inevitability as events unfolded on August 16, 2012, at Marikana Platinum Mine, near Rustenburg in the north-west of South Africa: Strikers against police. Knives against guns. Witchcraft against bullets. Scenes reminiscent of the darkest days of apartheid, reminding everyone that their Rainbow Nation has not progressed as far as they had hoped.

Marikana, owned by the British-based Lonmin company, was the scene of one of a series of wildcat strikes over demands for massive pay increases that had raged across the South African mining sector. The violence began on 11 August when two strikers were shot during clashes between police, Lonmin security, strikers, and the leadership of two warring trade unions. Over the next few days, eight more strikers, police and security personnel were...
The unrest reached its bloody climax on August 16, when 34 strikers were shot and killed, many of them shot in the back as they tried to flee a hail of bullets from heavily-armed police, while 78 more were injured.

The massacre, which took place on the 25th anniversary of a previous national miners’ strike, was the most deadly use of violence by the South African security forces against its own civilians since the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, when 69 protesting inhabitants of a segregated township in Transvaal (now Gauteng) were killed by police gunfire. (It is worth pointing out, however, that the police at Sharpeville were faced by unarmed protesters wielding nothing more dangerous than cardboard passes, not a knife- and spear-brandishing mob, who’d earlier carved up a couple of cops.)

Al Jazeera reported that the strikers had

Over the next few days, eight strikers, police and security personnel died . . .
Miners were ‘shot at close range or crushed by police vehicles . . . ‘

charge” took place. He said some of the vic-
tims “appear to have been shot at close range
or crushed by police vehicles.”

270 strikers were arrested and charged with
murder, the charges later dropped by the Na-
tional Prosecuting Authority and the miners
released.

our days after the tragedy, National Police
Commissioner Riah Phiyega came under fire
after she saluted the policemen who gunned
been forced by police in armoured vehicles
with water cannons into an area surrounded by
razor wire at which point the shooting began,
although other witnesses, including a Reuters
photographer, said a miner had opened the fir-
ing.

South African Pulitzer Prize-winning journal-
ist Greg Marinovich later examined the scene
and found the majority of victims were shot
300 meters from police lines where the main

Against all
odds:
A striking
miner gestures
with a knife

Securing
the scene:
Police check
the bodies
of dead and
injured
miners
A ‘warrior’ group of miners had taken part in a black magic ritual...

The response of some police officers may have been disproportionate to the danger they faced from the group of more than 200 armed protesters, while evidence was also heard that a ‘warrior’ group of miners, armed with knives and machetes, had taken part in a black magic ritual as part of their plans to attack the police lines.

According to South Africa’s Times newspaper, “The ritual involved the burning of a sheep alive...
‘The last shot caught my testicles and caused me some severe injury . . .’

and mixing the remains with muti, and making small incisions in the men’s bodies to give them the courage to confront the police, and make them immune to gunfire.”

Other reports said that human body parts had been used in the ritual.

A striker, Mzoxolo Majidiwana, told the inquiry that, after being hit with police fire, “I could hear voices of policemen approaching the place where we had fallen. When they got to me, I was again shot several times from close range whilst I was on the ground.

“I sustained further shots in my abdomen. The last shot caught my testicles and caused me some severe injury. I pleaded with the police to rather kill me and told them my relatives’ name[s], so they could help identify my body.”

In response to his plea to be finished off, the police officers told him he was going to die anyway. He said the policemen used their cellphones...
to take photographs of the bodies lying around, while laughing. Others kicked the bodies.

Ronnie Kasrils, ANC Minister of Intelligence in Nelson Mandela’s post-apartheid government, commenting about this and other cases of police brutality, said, “In 1994, we established a police service – not a police force. That was reversed in 2009 with a repugnant military ranking system. The constant attacks on protesters, the “shoot to kill” exhortations of police officials, the numerous reports of police corruption, the use of conspiracy theories to deal with opponents of government and the move to strengthen the powers of the government security cluster by dubious means – all this worried me.

“How can this happen in a country where the constitution and Bill of Rights is dedicated to protecting the safety of our people?”

The inquiry is expected to end in June.

– Tony Sutton

“How can this happen in a country . . . dedicated to protecting our people . . .’”
ALON SKUY (32) began his career as a photographer after completing a course at the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg. After working as a freelance photographer for the Star, Saturday Star and Sunday Independent newspapers, he became a full time photographer for the Star in December 2006, and later moved to the Times, of Johannesburg, where he is Chief Photographer.

These photographs are part of a portfolio that earned Skuy first prize in the newspaper picture story category at the recent Pictures of the Year International’s awards. The contest attracted 48,000 entries.