The world wanted South Africa’s true, liberated history – and the writing of it – to begin in 1994, but deep contradictions have quickly bubbled to the surface, revealing a society gripped in turmoil. The results of all this have been, of course, paradoxical: a series of elections since 1994 seemed to confirm the ANC’s hold, both popular and legitimate, on power. Yet, simultaneously, South Africa has found itself with one of the world’s highest rates of protest and dissent, expressed both in the work-place and on township streets, in universities and technikons (higher education institutions of technology), clinics and central city squares. This is a paradox that requires explanation – underscored most recently by the South African Police Service’s cold-blooded shooting of 34 striking Lonmin miners at Marikana on 16 August 2012. For Marikana stands not only as a telling sign of the precise character of the post-apartheid state but also as an index of the many deep complexities that the student of South Africa must continue to ponder. At the same time, the fact of dissent so graphically expressed is also a source of hope for those who sense that something better than the semi-liberation that the ANC has presided over in its country must not be long delayed. We will have to examine the roots of such hope – both within the ANC itself and within the broader society of South Africa – before determining the future of South Africa.

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