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Political killings in the contemporary world: *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* through biopolitical lenses

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Abstract: This essay offers a reading of South African Anglophone play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, through biopolitical lenses, with a view to shedding light on dis-embodied political killings prompted by racism in the contemporary world, and to interrogating the means by which these murders are recurrently restructured and justified. Although the play is under the spotlight of scholarly attention, it is scarcely read through biopolitical lenses, especially through Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Ann Laura Stoler and Achille Mbembe's perspectives related to racism and political death, and by alluding to its significance for the contemporary society. This is where this article departs from the existing scholarship.

Subjects: Theatre & Performance Studies; Cultural Studies; Literature

Keywords: drama; Fugard; Post-colonialism; South Africa; biopolitics

1. Introduction

While elucidating and theorising the complex nature of killings, especially of political circumstances, Michel Foucault delineates killing, not as "simple murder", but as "indirect murder": killing is "the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection and so on": his concept is extended by stating that such politically driven indirect murder is often embedded in racism (2003 [1997], p. 256). This essay offers a reading of South African dramatist, Athol Fugard's Anglophone play, *Sizwe Bansi is*

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

There is a form of subtle and violent re-colonisation process through the control and management of populations in the contemporary society. This is often materialised through racism exercised within the nations or beyond the countries, and manipulated by the national or global "rulers". They are hence exposed to killings, or offered living-dead situations by such "rulers". In addition to racially marginalised people, socially and financially vulnerable communities also become subjected to this violence. Unfortunately, this catastrophe is not perceived by many, mainly due to its subtle and powerful mechanism of violence. The experiences of asylum seekers, war targets, the victims of the Marikana Massacre in South Africa, the victims of the Bhopal gas attack in India are a few examples. This article provides a space to consider freshly and critically about such actions operated within the nations and globally. It is helpful to understand a need to acquire agency against such subtle violence.

Dead,¹—co-authored by John Kani and Winston Ntshona, and premiered in 1972 in South Africa—in order to elucidate political killings prompted by racism, and to interrogate the ways and means by which these murders are recurrently re-structured and justified in the contemporary world.²

Although the play explicitly represents the realities of apartheid South Africa in the 1970s, it represents, by transcending time and space, political death as a narrative of biopolitics exercised in contemporary societies. Fugard's works are under the spotlight of scholarly attention. Despite the play's relevance for the praxis of biopolitics of the contemporary world, the scholarship has focused more narrowly on the apartheid-related concerns in the play: it is admitted that what is inherent in the apartheid policies is biopolitics; yet there is a gap in the existing scholarship on the complexity and the nuances of dis-embodied political death as represented in the play. Further, despite the scholarship on the theoretical subject of race and biopolitics, as well as critical readings of the play, readings that combine the two to yield new insights about the play and the theory are on the periphery of literature. Moreover, scholarship has not read the play through Frantz Fanon, Foucault, Ann Laura Stoler and Achille Mbembe's biopolitical lenses related to racism and political death. This is particularly where this reading departs from the existing literature.

To recapitulate, Foucault asserts that it is racism which is the “indispensable pre-condition” for exercising “the right to kill”, while conceptualising biopolitics as “a power that has the right of life and death, wishes to work with the instruments, mechanism, and technology of normalization” (2003 [1997], p. 256). He explicates that racism is not confined to contemptuous judgements on individuals, but is “bound up with the workings of a State that is obliged to use race, to exercise its sovereignty power” (Foucault, 2003 [1997], p. 258). As also perceived by Stoler, this form of racism is the institutionalised political authority based on a group of people who share the same language, skin colour, history, characteristics and the like, which refer to the rules, regulations and policies of imposed by established authorities in power (1995, pp. 87–90). These assertions allude to Fanon's contention that racism is a “system based on the exploitation of a given race by another, on the contempt in which a given branch of humanity is held by a form of civilization that pretends to superiority” (2008 [1967], p. 174). Zygmunt Bauman also adds that “population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay” are “excessive”, “redundant” or “wasted humans” (2004, p. 5). Mbembe's contention is that racism is “the ever present shadow in Western political thought and practice, especially when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of, or rule over, foreign peoples” (2003, p. 17). These concepts highlight that racism is related to political and administrative means in controlling and coercing certain populations. Extending these views, Mbembe also argues that racism recurs in the contemporary society: thus, what is alive is “necropolitics”, the “maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*” [original emphasis] (2003, p. 40).

1.1. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*

Set in the township of New Brighton in Port Elizabeth in South Africa in the 1970s, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* dramatises the story of a photographer named Styles and that of his client named Sizwe. The play opens in a photography studio with the owner Styles delivering a monologue while reading newspaper headlines to the audience, before his client's appearance in the studio. News about a car plant expansion in the paper without any increase of the pay-packet of the employees prompts the narration of a previous incident, Henry Ford the Second's (the owner from America) brief visit to the Ford Factory, where Styles worked before setting up his own photography studio. Styles' monologue is a disclosure of his struggle with indirect political death.

It is during Styles' monologue about the importance of dreams and photographs that his client, Sizwe Bansi, now calling himself Robert Zwelinzima, enters to get a photograph of himself, to be sent to his wife along with a letter. Sizwe is introduced to the audience by Styles as a “dream” (Fugard, 1993, p. 164); his metaphor is a prognosis of the impact of ostracism on Sizwe's life to be explored in the essay. While Styles' story is presented through his own monologue with the

audience, Sizwe's story is presented through flash-backs and improvisation techniques when he reads out his letter. Sizwe, a black Xhosa who has left his homeland in King Williams Town in the capital town of Ciskei—150 miles away from Port Elizabeth—to come to New Brighton for job opportunities, is posed at different angles by Styles. Sizwe is instructed to adopt elegant postures which black people are denied in real society. A week after Sizwe's arrival in New Brighton, while residing with a friend named Zola, he has become a victim of a raid by the state representatives: his crime is the inability to produce a valid entry document to the township. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* opens up possibilities for theorising the work of biopolitics, through the reading of Styles and Sizwe Bansi: the main focus of both the play and this chapter rests with Sizwe's story.

2. Styles: an “Armstrong on the moon?”

Styles' narrative—his monologue—offers a spectacle of indirect political murder because it exposes both physical and psychological death that he has experienced while working at the Ford factory. His monologue also suggests the means he used to escape from such tragic circumstances.

Working with unprotected equipment and clothing in a factory is unsafe, perilous and deadly. Styles' service in the factory for a year—in “the dangerous hot test section without an asbestos apron and fire-proof gloves”, as the authorities did not “replace the ones [he] had lost” (Fugard, 1993, pp. 152–153)—is a testimony to incongruities of murder: the authorities' lack of concern and their ignorance towards Style's life intensify the creation of deadly environments for black workers. The fortune of survival is challenged in the factory, characterising the disavowal of Styles' existence; this recalls the notion that there is a relationship between racism and existence, conceptualised by Fanon. Stoler's (1995, p. 88–90) view that racism is not merely a biological science, but is occurred frequently on a daily basis is also supported here.

Styles' narrative also provides testimony to physiological murder, through their Afrikaner boss's insensitive concern towards the workers. A case in point is Bradley's order given to the workers: Bradley says, “impress Mr Henry Ford that they are better than those monkeys in his own country, those niggers in Harlem who know nothing but strike, strike” (Fugard, 1993, p. 154). This is a stark depiction of racial prejudices and pejorative attitudes experienced by black individuals both in America and South Africa. This discriminatory and prejudiced identification implies psychological persecution experienced by black workers. Fanon identifies this circumstance as a “system based on the exploitation of a given race by another, on the contempt in which a given branch of humanity is held by a form of civilization that pretends to superiority” (2008 [1967], p. 174). Fanon's suggestion that the “major artery [of such stereotyping] is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man” (2008 [1967], p. 8) is, thus, reinforced in the play.

In contrast to the workers' dissatisfaction at the factory, Bradley insists Styles and his co-workers to show their contentment at the work place, by hushing up their “true feelings” (Fugard, 1993, pp. 153–154), through singing and dancing. The new safety apron and fire-proof gloves given to Styles are a mere preparation for Ford's visit to the factory. This, alludes to Fanon's observation about “mask[ed]” or camouflaged racism, and functions as “objective evidence that expresses reality” (2008 [1967], p. 8), and confirms invisible murder connected to racism. In his monologue with the audience, Styles recalls this incident with bitter humour, by satirising his pretentious elevation in his new clothing, from a status of a monkey to an astronaut—an “Armstrong on the moon” (Fugard, 1993, p. 153).

In the monologue, Styles also reveals to the audience the means he has used to secure victory over the processes of political killings linked to racism. While being a translator to Bradley, Styles subverts Bradley's humiliation. For instance, Bradley's instructions to Styles—“tell the boys in your language, that this is a very big day in their lives”,—are translated as “gentlemen, this old fool says this is a hell of a big day in our lives” (Fugard, 1993, p. 153). In Styles' translation of “boys” into

“gentlemen” and Bradley into an idiot implies the workers’ intention to be away from the monkey-identity imposed on them, and their hatred towards their boss.

Fanon expounds the black subject’s response to animal allusion. He argues that as the black subject knows the irrelevance of the animal metaphor used for their identity, he “laughs to himself every time he spots an allusion to the animal world in the other’s words” (Fanon, 1963 [1961], p. 43). This is an “important weapon of survival and resistance” in the factory (Brian Crow, 2002, p. 139). Moreover, it releases them from psychological exploitation and social ostracism by safeguarding them from their psychological death.

Moreover, Styles, by securing victory over political killings, leaves the factory and establishes his own photo-shop. Styles’ competence as an independent businessman is evident through the efforts he takes to persuade his customers and promote his business: he is “one of Fugard’s most charismatic characters [...] more enterprising than most and seems to have absorbed some socialist philosophy” (Alan Shelley, 2005, p. 164). Despite Styles’s independence, he acts with fear when revealing his tragedy at the factory. For instance, during the course of Styles’ revelation of the lifestyle he spent at the factory, he acts as “*if someone might be eavesdropping on his intimacy with the audience*” (Fugard, 1993, p. 149). Implicitly, the disclosure of his experiences may be a threat to him, another political death: this speculates the nature of his independence and affirms the continuity of political death.

Instability of black populations’ liberation from invisible political killings, as represented through Styles, is also theatrically presented through parallel events. Styles’ departure from his subservience—being “six years a bloody fool” (Fugard, 1993, p. 155) from white employers—is juxtaposed with Sizwe’s arrival in looking for a job in Port Elizabeth under white employers [emph. mine]. Hence, what is implicit is a circular nature of political murders. It is imperative to cite Styles’ monologue of the significance of photographs as it reflects not only political killings but also Sizwe’s journey to the play.

When you look at this, what do you see? Just another photographic studio? [...]

No, friend. It’s more than just that. This is a strong-room of dreams. The dreamers? My people. The simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books, who never get statues erected to them, or monuments commemorating their great deeds. (Fugard, 1993, p. 159)

This shows the elimination of black people, as emphasised through Styles’s reference, “my people”. Black people are expelled from the history of the country; their contribution to the nation is marginalised and trivialised. Styles’s proclamation that such people “own nothing” as the “world and its laws, allows [them] nothing [...] except the memory of [them]selves” (Fugard, 1993, p. 163) refers to implicit exploitation by the authorities. This statement about the exclusion of a people in history is a testimony to expulsion in political killings. The removal of a group of a people from its history represents their political death: a form of genocide.

3. Sizwe: “[w]hat’s wrong with me?”

To recall, Sizwe appears at Styles’ studio and is introduced to the audience as a dream. Posing for a photograph in a happy mood signifies unachievable dreams for most native South Africans, to cite Bauman, “wasted humans”; Sizwe epitomises their dream, stripped away from the black Africans by rulers.

Black communities were confined, by Afrikaner authorities, to homelands in rural areas and townships in the periphery of urban cities in South Africa in the apartheid era. It was an easy and economical way to segregate and regulate them: to use Foucault’s words it is to control the “environment, the milieu in which they live” (2003 [1997], p. 245). Elleke Boehmer defines these types of authorities as the “lower-rung or secondary colonizers in ‘their’ new lands, local

oppressors of the indigenous inhabitants” (2005, p. 178). Boehmer’s ironic emphasis here on the ownership of the lands directly links to the play because both New Brighton in Port Elizabeth and King William’s Town in Ciskei were the traditional homes of the Xhosa natives,³ although they are now owned and administered by Afrikaner rulers. Paradoxically, Sizwe’s life is in danger because of his arrival in a place formerly owned by native South Africans.

Poverty and deprivation in his homeland made him leave King William’s Town. Fifteen miles from town, it has only “dry” land, and is “small”: it has only “one shop” with “too many people”; therefore he does not “want to go back” (Fugard, 1993, p. 174). Neither the parched lands nor the resources in densely populated area in King William’s town offer decent lifestyles for black people, showing the form of political expulsion. Hence, Sizwe’s departure from his home is understandable: he is the bread-winner of a family with a wife and four children. Without addressing these reasons for Sizwe’s entry into the township, he is “repatriate[d] to home district” within three days: he is subjected to a re-expulsion, a “legalised banishment” from the township (Fugard, 1993, p. 171). Sizwe’s enigmatic position, with no perceptible solution or exit, problematises the rationale of the Group Areas Act of 1950, which was imposed by the apartheid government of South Africa and assigned racial groups based on skin colour to different residential and business sections in urban areas. This also resonates with Foucault’s contention that “racism is inscribed as the basic mechanism of power” of government laws (2003 [1997], p. 254).

The struggle between life and existence in Port Elizabeth, as narrativised through the encounter between Sizwe and Zola’s friend, Buntu, further proves the political expulsion experienced by the black populations. Both finding a job without a work permit and obtaining a work permit to find a job are equally tedious: thus black people are exposed to deadly environments. Hence, as S. O. Chukwu-Okoronkwo writes, the black person’s “peace [...] can only be ensured when he is dead and buried” (2011, p. 22). Albert Wertheim suggests that “the reality that emerges all too pellucidly is that whether in rural Ciskei or urban Port Elizabeth [...], the life of blacks in South Africa is a pointless, demeaning, dehumanizing wandering whose only terminus is death” (2000, p. 86). What is proved here is the tragic life bestowed on black people.

Nevertheless, giving up this struggle is impossible for Sizwe because of his obligation to ensure the survival of his family. The two options Buntu suggests for Sizwe—returning to his homeland or finding a job at the mining industry—are also impractical for Sizwe because of his need to live. Mineworkers are easily susceptible to death. Sizwe explains that “there is no money there” and “many black people get killed when the rocks fall” (Fugard, 1993, p. 174), justifying his reluctance to work in mines. It is also disclosed that “the only time they [rulers] don’t worry about Influx Control” is mines (Fugard, 1993, p. 174). Here, the play problematises why the Passbook Law is not implemented in hazardous contexts such as mining: it questions the rationalisation of the Pass Law Act,¹ while providing evidence of the injustice and inequality of passbooks.⁴ We can recall Stoler’s observation that “racial formations are shaped by specific relations of power” (1995, p. 90). This alludes to Bauman’s statement: “*racism is inevitably associated with the strategy of estrangement* [...] Expulsion and destruction are two mutually exchangeable methods of estrangement (original emphasis)” (1989, pp. 66-67). Mbembe’s (2003, p. 40) observation of the destruction of human bodies and populations is also echoed here: his concept that the enactment of sovereignty in cases where “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” is the central phenomenon of power (2003, p.14).

Moreover, Sizwe and Buntu’s encounter of a Member of the Advisory Board of running Bantustans, who collects information about Ciskeian Independence at a *shebeen* at Sky’s place,⁵ offers Sizwe an opportunity to be openly critical of the Independence bestowed to his hometown by the rulers. People in Ciskei have to depend on the Government to be employed elsewhere or in urban areas where they find job opportunities under white supremacy. What is evident is that the independence granted to homelands is just a stratagem of political killings in the pretext of

apartheid rules, an easy way of exterminating the oppressed by concentrating them. This event implies the hypocritical and unsatisfactory nature of Ciskeian Independence.

Furthermore, black communities are confined into unsuitable lodgings in homelands, built of reeds and tin sheets called *Pondok* which can be seen as places of derogation and insult—indirect political murder through racism. Sizwe and Buntu’s reference to Robert’s residence which is a “big bloody concentration camp with rows of things that look like train carriages (Robert’s character is introduced below) also adds to the mechanism of expulsion. “Six doors to each! Twelve people behind each door!” (Fugard, 1993, p. 181). Similar to concentration camps, what the people experience in their dwellings is a form of incarceration although they have not committed crimes. This echoes Foucault’s examination of racism as bound up with the state’s mechanisms.

Significantly, the arbitrary encounter with a dead body amongst the rubbish in a street, when Sizwe and Buntu return from Sky’s place, becomes a turning point in the play, as well as for Sizwe’s ostracism. Buntu’s inadvertent urination on the corpse and deliberate collection of the dead body’s passbook, as it contains a work permit, is pivotal to explore further how racism functions as a biopolitical weapon for political murder in the apartheid era. In the middle of the lengthy argument between Sizwe and Buntu on the importance of passbooks, Sizwe, strongly manipulating his own body, reiterates his humanity and the right to live:

What’s happening in this world, good people? Who cares for who in this world? Who wants who?

Who wants me friend? What’s wrong with me? I am a man. I’ve got eyes to see. I’ve got ears to listen when people talk. I’ve got a head to think good things. What’s wrong with me?
(Starts to tear off his clothes)

Look at me! I am a man. I’ve got legs. I can run with a wheelbarrow full of cement! I’m strong! I’m a man. Look! I’ve got a wife. I’ve got four children. How many has he made, my lady? (*The man sitting next to her.*) Is he a man? What has he got that I haven’t...? (Fugard, 1993, p. 182)

Sizwe’s nakedness epitomises black people’s dispossession. As Wertheim explains, Sizwe raises “basic questions of human existence” (2000, p. 87) connected to racism. His voice is against the rulers who dehumanise black subjects based on racism. Here, through rhetorical questions, the play politically sensitises the audience to the injustice experienced by black South Africans through the Passbook Law. The irony of the introduction of passbooks to South Africans is explicitly voiced when Sizwe announces, while Buntu is holding the passbook of the dead man, that “[t]hey never told us it would be like that when they introduced it. They said: Book of Life! Your Friend! You’ll never get lost! They told us lies” (Fugard, 1993, p. 181). As Shelley states, the passbook is “a concrete symbol of the all-pervading control exercised over the majority of South Africans in the name of apartheid” (2005, p. 152). “Book of life” is an apt definition because the passbook regulated all aspects of black citizens’ existence, exposing these populations to political death.

The uselessness of passbooks to black individuals is further symbolised through Sizwe’s illiteracy: he is unschooled, not even literate enough to read the identification number in numerals. Sizwe’s monologue—“my passbook talks good English too...[original ellipsis] big words that Sizwe can’t read and doesn’t understand” (Fugard, 1993, p. 180)—satirically emphasises the fact that passbooks are only for the rulers, to be used as a means of regulation. Sizwe’s inquiry, “does that book tell you I’m a man?” (Fugard, 1993, p. 182), is significant as it implies passbooks as biopolitical apparatuses. As Paul Prece sates, the play is “an indictment of the South African Pass Laws” (2008, p. 220). The play problematises the introduction of passbooks as a friend to black people who are illiterate because it is a wicked spirit disguised as a friend.

Despite Buntu’s suggestion for an exchange of passbooks (Sizwe’s with that of the dead man) for Sizwe’s survival, Sizwe’s reluctance and sense of disgust is voiced through his interrogation—“how

do I live as another man's ghost" (Fugard, 1993, p. 185). It is, of course, impossible to live as a ghost. Yet, Buntu's counter-argument suggests that Sizwe is already an apparition, already transformed into non-existence.

When the white man looked at you at the Labour Bureau what did he see? A man with dignity or a bloody passbook with an N.I. number? Isn't that a ghost? When the white man sees you walk down the street and calls out, 'Hey, John! Come here'...to you Sizwe Bansi ... isn't that a ghost? Or when his little child calls you 'Boy'...you a man, circumcised, with a wife and four children...isn't that a ghost? Stop fooling yourself. All I'm saying is be a real ghost, if that is what they want, what they've turned us into. Spook them into hell, man! [original ellipses] (Fugard, 1993, p. 185)

Evidently, an N.I. number is more powerful than black peoples' humanity; recognition can turn them into phantoms. While reminding Sizwe of his phantom-like status, Buntu's aim is to liberate Sizwe from his dilemma and provide succour. Buntu reiterates that Sizwe is already bodiless and incorporeal, through Sizwe's non-existence to the white officer at the Labour Bureau who "takes the book, looks at it—doesn't look at [Sizwe]!" (Fugard, 1993, p. 172). This recalls Fanon's conceptualisation of the black people in the hands of Western colonisation as an object. "This object man, without means of existing, [...] is broken in the very depth of his substance. The desire to live, to continue, becomes more and more indecisive, more and more phantom-like (Fanon, 1967 [1964], p. 35). Buntu adds that "pride isn't a way" for black subjects; his advice is to "shit on [their] pride" (Fugard, 1993, p. 190). His judgment also recalls Fanon's suggestion that pride is not a way to gain salvation from the oppression and segregation of the Negro nation (Fanon, 2008 [1967], p. 93). As Wertheim suggests, Buntu's argument is "tragic pragmatic wisdom" (2000, p. 87).

Eventually, as Wumi Raji states, Sizwe "discards his true identity" (2005, p. 139); Shelley writes, "the only way Sizwe Bansi can survive is to surrender his identity" (2005, p. 134). As Robert Gordon interprets it, "the questioning of identity emblemizes the existential interrogation of what it means to be human" (2012, p. 385). Sizwe's failure to find a work permit, coupled with Buntu's argument, forces him to accept reluctantly the identity of the dead. That is how Sizwe Bansi appears as Robert Zwelinzima—the dead man's name—in Styles' studio.

Sizwe's surrender to Buntu's suggestion transforms Sizwe from his early phantom-like status in the hands of Afrikaner rulers to a dis-embodied ghost. Losing one's own name makes a man invisible: it deprives him of dignity. Moreover, the knowledge that one's own identity can be destroyed and left to rot is painful. It symbolises Sizwe's non-corporeality—his political death and non-existence. In addition, Sizwe's dis-embodiment signifies the elimination and the incorporeal death of the whole black society because as Wertheim notes, Sizwe means nation and Bansi means broad or wide in Xhosa (2000, p. 86). This provides theatrical testimony to Foucault's argument that biopolitical operations target populations as masses, represented through the noun Sizwe. It must also be noted here that the stratagem used to kill Sizwe is also invisible: that is, he is not subject to political murder through corporal weaponry or physical torture like in war environments, but through dis-embodied means—self-transformation into an apparition. What Sizwe obtains is dis-embodied existence because his corporeality is already subject to political murder. Killing his own identity—the suicide—is the climax of the effects of the regulation of Sizwe's life, political killings.

Sizwe's suicide is a metaphorical indirect murder exercised by the sovereignty in postcolonial South Africa, recalling Foucault's statement: "killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat and the improvement of the species or race" (2003 [1997], p. 256). Murdering Sizwe is neither a victory over political opposition (as Sizwe is not a direct political opponent), nor a biological threat. Rather, Sizwe's death characterises a victory over black majorities. It shows how racism

functions in regulating biological processes in political contexts, echoing Stoler's words that "a new mode of racism [is] inscribed" within the political milieu (1995, p. 33).

Wertheim states that the play asks the audience whether naked Sizwe can be "redressed and re-dressed" (2000, p. 87). In this vein, Buntu is a "comically magical micturition" (Wertheim, 2000, p. 87), as he gives life to the dead by finding clothing for Sizwe. Prece compares Buntu's operation of the exchange of photographs, to "an organ transplant"—on completion, "new life, new possibilities will exist" (2008, p. 223). Sizwe is re-dressed as he begins to live in Port Elizabeth as a ghost. However, rectifying the consequences of racist influx control policies is hard. As Wertheim explains "the sad reality however, is that Sizwe's exchange of identity can only be a stopgap measure because he will be caught out by the authorities if he gets into trouble and his finger prints are checked" (2000, p. 87). Similarly, Shelley's prediction is that "the authorities would deal severely with the forgery that enabled him to assume another man's identity" (2005, p. 167). The unreal existence may further expose Sizwe to deadly conditions such as incarceration. With his new identity he has to remain vigilant about authorities and may frequently experiences near-death situations. This alludes to Mbembe's (2003, p. 40) explanation of "necropolitics", as Sizwe renounces his identity, he has to live with the knowledge that he is Robert's dead soul, which is also recurrent psychological death.

Additionally, Sizwe's transformation may doubly victimise him if is caught to the authorities. This is highlighted in the performance context as well because both Styles' and Buntu's roles are performed by one actor. Prece claims that "this doubling subliminally serves to re-iterate and echo Sizwe's dilemma in dual identity in the context of performance" (2008, p. 223). The actors' double-performance underscores Sizwe's secret act and adds dramatic impact to the play: yet whether Sizwe has symmetrical dual identity is speculative as Sizwe's identity is dis-embodied and non-existent.

Theatrical gestures also demonstrate Sizwe's incorporeal death. At the outset of the play, he "walks nervously" into the studio, and his behaviour is "hesitant and shy" (Fugard, 1993, p. 164). When introducing himself to Styles, Sizwe "hesitates as if not sure of himself" by "swallowing" (Fugard, 1993, p. 164). Later, when reading out the letter, he is seen "frozen" (Fugard, 1993, p. 169). Moreover, when Sizwe and Buntu improvise a scene where Sizwe's new passbook is under the police's scrutiny, Sizwe becomes "impassive" and "frightened" (Fugard, 1993, p. 189), and is "carried away by what he is feeling" (Fugard, 1993, p. 188). Sizwe is also seen as "desperate" (Fugard, 1993, p. 184), "confused" (Fugard, 1993, p. 187) and in "maudlin tears" (Fugard, 1993, p. 185). Sizwe's physical and psychological expressions show his dis-embodiment and how his human existence is destroyed and rendered invisible (emph. mine). This supports Mbembe's contention that human existence is rendered instrumental and destructed by means of political sovereignty (2003, p. 38–40).

Juxtaposing two types of death and situating two dead bodies (Sizwe's non-corporeal death and Robert's corporeal death) the play further complicates the phenomenon of death in the apartheid era. The first death is an indirect oblique murder, supported and commended by law of the apartheid regime as a mode of regularising peoples. The latter is an offshoot of direct violent behaviour, an act punishable by law in the apartheid era. Buntu says, "I thought I was just pissing on a pile of rubbish, but when I looked carefully I saw it was a man. Dead. Covered in blood. Tsotsis must have got him" (Fugard, 1993, p. 180). This term, tsotsis (hoodlums), as the Oxford English Dictionary defines, is used to refer to township gangs in South Africa: "young black gangsters belonging to a group prominent in the 1940s and 1950s". Why Robert is killed and why his body is left on the street amidst rubbish is not explained in the play, yet as shown in Fugard's novel, tsotsis are the outcome of poverty and the huge socio-economic gap between wealthy and socioeconomically downtrodden communities, which compel them to engage in criminal activities for their survival.

To refer to the significance of Robert's corpse, the bitter irony the play focuses in the context of killing is the similarity between the dead body and rubbish in a passageway in New Brighton. Urination on a dead body symbolically enhances the non-value given to humanity. Despite this worthlessness and Robert's dis-embodiment, the corpse paradoxically embodies power as it possesses a work permit. The audience notices how this dead person can be re-born to life; a ghost can be taken as a powerful symbolic force against the white's authority; Robert's ghost can survive in this apartheid society counteracting the apartheid laws. The difficulty in differentiating a dead body from garbage—and the acceptance of the identity of a dead man for survival in Port Elizabeth—underscores the tragic effects not specifically of apartheid policies but also of the biopolitical operations. It sensitises the audience to the stark realities of the mechanism of the oppression. This recalls Foucault's notion of political power which has, as noted earlier, "the right of life and death" (2003 [1997], p. 256). Both Sizwe's life and political death are indirectly coerced by the political sovereignty exercised through racism.

According to the representative strategies of the play, biopolitical operations aim at keeping its subjects alive through two modes: first, through labour exploitation creating death, risky worlds, exportation, expulsion and vilification of the black communities as depicted through Styles' anecdote of the factory; secondly, through personality suicide, as represented through Sizwe' tragic experiences. Both these situations highlight how the state keeps people alive but kills them without slaughtering them corporeally, regulating them through racism. This is explicitly articulated through Sizwe's words. Sizwe raises the question in the end whether "a black man stay out of trouble? Impossible [...] our skin is trouble" (Fugard, 1993, p. 191). Foucault's argument that, through political circumstances, people are exposed to death and deadly environments is supported here, because Styles and Sizwe are subject to political laws. In Foucault's terms, they are "pre-condition[ed]" to become subjects due to their skin colour (2003 [1997], p. 256). Moreover, Mbembe's explanation is that "the human being truly *becomes a subject*—that is, separated from the animal—in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death [...] Becoming subject therefore supposes upholding the work of death" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 14). To reiterate, Mbembe contends that contemporary society creates the "maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*" in which many populations have to suffer lifelong processes of death—a continuum of death—a "status of *living-dead*" [original emphasis] (2003, p. 40). Some people are exposed to catastrophic circumstances through socio-political settings; consequently they live with the possibility of death. Thus, they live in a liminal space between life and death, as living dead people, as particularly demonstrated through Sizwe's dilemma.

4. A reflection on the theatre's reception: a case of biopolitical regulation

Sizwe Bansi is Dead also provides de facto materials to biopolitics exercised in the form of racism during the apartheid period in South Africa, as reflected through its performance contexts amidst the reception of the play. Such a reflection offers a space to better understand the praxis of biopolitical mechanism exercised not only during the apartheid era, but also globally, by the rulers even in the 21st century. It is thus imperative to examine concisely the state suppression of oppositional theatre during the apartheid period, and the reception of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, as a practice of biopolitical control.

Theatre practitioners started to depict resistance against injustice and violence by criticising the biopolitical trajectories, although the political and student protesters were submerged and counter-attacked by the National Party in the apartheid era in South Africa.⁶ In the early 1970s, especially under the influence of the Black Conscious Movement (BCM), much oppositional theatre was produced. It was performed in urban areas allotted to non-whites; this theatre was "markedly more political", was inspired by black people's lives and played often by a black cast (Graver & Kruger, 1989, p. 273). In the meantime, theatre groups which did not have direct links with the BCM were also established: "[t]he two main theatres in this group were the Space in Cape Town (opened 1972, closed in the early 1980s) and the Market in Johannesburg (opened 1976)" (Graver

& Kruger, 1989, p. 273). As Kruger notes, the Space and the Market theatre used “their national and later international visibility to evade censorship in the turbulent 1970s at a time when the violence of the apartheid state became well known worldwide” (1999, p. 147).

Nonetheless, as a way to suppress this political awakening, theatre was censored and performers were harassed. For instance, protest theatre since the 1970s was “curtailed by Afrikaner suppression of political mobilization” (Kruger, 1999, p. 73). Because of the intensity of rebelliousness in theatre during this era, “[a]ll the leading groups had folded or were banned by 1975” except those assigned as “multi-racial” and performed in cities “where the government need not worry about their rhetoric sparking a revolution” (Graver & Kruger, 1989, p. 273). For instance, Gibson Kente’s plays were banned in the 1970s because he was believed to be influenced by the BCM,⁷ even though his plays were not overtly political. The most dishonourable and tragic example was the death of Mthuli Shezi⁸—author of the play *Shanti*—who “was pushed in front of an oncoming train at the Germiston railway station during a scuffle with Germiston railway policemen”; the play’s producers were arrested and the play was banned under the Terrorism Act (Orkin, 1991, p. 1). In 1961, Fugard’s *The Blood Knot* (revised and retitled as *Blood Knot* in 1987) was also banned for two reasons: it symbolically protested against the issue of classification of South Africans according to skin colour and explicitly criticised the law prohibiting inter-racial relationships. The “performative power” of theatre is explicit, according to Graver (1999, pp. 1–2); he notes how its power increased, parallel to the direct political protests against apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s. What is also rendered visible is the overt violence used in suppressing theatre which helped people to understand black subjugation. This was also materialised through the closure of the Space in the 1980s. It is amidst such socio-political unrest and performance culture that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was produced, as a response to segregation rules both in political sphere and theatre, and as a theatrical reaction to overt biopolitical violence in South Africa.

On the 8 October 1972, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* was first staged for “a single Sunday night performance for a members-only audience” at the Space Theatre in Cape Town (Kruger, 1999, p. 147). The premiere was subsequently banned by the police even “before a multiracial audience” (Walder, 1993, p. xxix), providing evidence to subtle biopolitical operations on theatre practitioners. However, it had been “secretly” staged in its’ two actors’ (John Kani and Winston Ntshona) home towns in Johannesburg and New Brighton before being banned in Cape Town (Kruger, 1999, p. 147). The way the play was received by black and white populations is dissimilar. Although the play moved its “predominantly white audience [...] to laughter and tears” at the Space Theatre, it “provoked” the black people in the performers’ home towns (Kruger, 1999, p. 13). When staged in South Africa four years after the premiere, actors were “imprisoned briefly before an international outcry secured their release” (Walder, 1993, p. xxix); as Kruger argues, “[t]he virtual publicity of anti-apartheid theatre took concrete shape in real time and space in the performance and reception” (1999, p. 13), by providing evidence to biopolitical regulation.

Fugard’s statement about a performance event of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is worth noting here in this respect. He states that:

[a]fter watching the first few seconds of the operation [...] in stunned silence [...] a voice shouted out from the audience: “Don’t do it brother [...]” Another voice responded ...“Go ahead and try. They haven’t caught me yet.” [...] I realized I was watching a very special example of one of theatre’s major responsibilities in an oppressive society: to break...the conspiracy of silence.... The action of our play was being matched...by the action of the audience. ... A performance on stage had provoked a political event in the auditorium. (Fugard, 1993; pp. 31-32 as quoted in Kruger, 1999; p. 153)⁹

The scene here refers to the event where a Sizwe’s photograph is exchanged with the dead person, Roberto. Fugard’s observation provides testimony to the play’s significant role in provoking

the audience to respond to the injustice explored in the play “break[ing] the conspiracy of silence” towards brutal biopolitical operations. Black people’s aversion to injustice is implicit through the voice that came from the audience: “[d]on’t do it brother”, whereas the calamitous need to break the laws of injustice is voiced from the other. This depicts a political struggle in the audience, as represented on-stage. Fugard also includes a material example of political theatre in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*:

I have never yet known an audience that did not respond to the first half-hour of the play as if it wasn’t getting its money’s-worth of laughter. New Brighton was more than just ‘no exception’ [...] I couldn’t also help feeling that something more than just a response to a brilliant comedy performance was involved. (Fugard 1984, p. 30 as quoted in Shelley, 2005, p. 162)

These performance contexts show how the play sensitised its audience, especially black communities, to apartheid brutal biopolitical mechanism. By referring to an intimate example of the relationship between the audience and players at New Brighton, Shelley also writes that a player invited a person from the audience to come to the stage to observe closely an act—how a photograph is taken: this helped to “abolish the distance between the actor and audiences, by eliminating the stage, removing all frontiers” (Grotowski 1991, p. 41 as quoted in Shelley, 2005, p. 163). Fugard also describes in Ronald Harwood’s *A Night at the Theatre* how the play was conceived in 1974 in a black Township in St Stephen’s Hall in New Brighton, “a plain brick building and one of only two usable halls in an area with a population of 250,000” (Shelley, 2005, p. 162). Hence, as Robert Gordon asserts, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* achieved “an intensity of performance that may be unequaled in the history of South African theatre” (2012, p. 384). What is clear in these performance histories is how the play was received amidst the state’s censorship, amidst the means taken to destroy and regulate theatre and theatre practitioners.

5. Conclusion: contemporary biopolitical workings

Apartheid policies are extinct in South Africa, yet, what remain are the legacies and debris of them, and diverse forms of political killings. This alludes to Mbembe’s concepts on the creation of *death-worlds* (2003, p. 40). This phenomenon can be witnessed in the post-apartheid South Africa, and beyond South Africa.

First, to examine a couple of instances from South Africa, the state’s political response to the crisis of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, before anti-retroviral therapy was made available in the public health sector, could be understood as an instance of political murder in the post-apartheid context: the treatment process has been notoriously slow, and the public care system is at a low ebb during the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. Tim Woods, 2013). The Marikana massacre of 2012 in Johannesburg, South Africa also bears thinking about in this light: the South African Police Service opened fire on a group of mineworkers, by killing 34 workers, creating 78 casualties and incarcerating 250 protestors at Marikana, who were involved in a protest demanding a wage increase (e.g. Peter Alexander, 2014).

This traumatic event can be considered as a replica of the biopolitical mechanism of the past, except for its operators. Put differently, the Marikana disaster re-energised the political massacres of the past. During the apartheid era, black populations were subjected to biopolitical killings, especially through the Population Act and the Group Areas Act, as symbolised in the play. In the 21st century, the country is under the authority of black rulers. Nevertheless, economically and socially ostracised black people are exposed to biopolitical killings, by the black policemen of the black government. As represented in the play, mineworkers were doubly brutalised in the apartheid era. To allude to Sizwe’s words, mineworkers were not paid, but exposed to precarious milieus: the passbook law was not enforced in mines, by indirectly exposing the black people to the *death worlds*, to recall Mbembe’s diction (2003, p. 40). Implicit through the Marikana brutality both is a continuation of political killings, but

a transformation of the mode of them. The biopolitical operations of the past which were operated indirectly through certain Acts are now explicitly, overtly and directly practised by the state.

To move beyond South Africa, political killings are not confined to post-apartheid South Africa, but also are mushrooming in other countries today, especially in once-colonised countries, or on racially, socio-politically and economically marginalised communities. For instance, as K.S. Subramanian writes, “[t]he 20th century was the most violent period in history. Nearly three times as many people were killed in violent conflict in the 20th century as in the previous four centuries combined” (2007, p. 34). Moreover, as Itty Abraham et al. argue, globalisation “fosters war economies and socio-economic dislocation” (2010, p. 10); consequently, postcolonial populations appear to be, as they demonstrate, “especially vulnerable to crisis and fragmentation, often related to vagaries of the colonial legacy: arbitrary territorial borders; insecure ethnic, religious or national minorities; and post-independence nationalist movements that deepen, rather than transcend, divisions” (2010, p. 10). They add that myriad roles of political violence include state and non-state behaviours, which are created and sponsored either locally or externally, and take diverse forms such as “terrorism, guerrilla warfare, sectarian violence, police actions, riots and assassinations” (Abraham et al., 2010, p. 2). To elucidate, both the quantity and quality of violence in Indian society at all levels today bears “an irreducibly political context” (Subramanian, 2007, p. 35).

Moreover, by particularly referring to asylum seekers’ resistance in Australia by means of lip sewing, David Farrier and Patricia Tuitt question “what is *right* and what are *rights*” (2013, p. 253).

Lip sewing occurs as the embodiment of an imposed abjection; in postcolonial terms, it represents the appropriation of the body of the language of asymmetrical power relations, offering in the most compelling fashion the configuration of the asylum seeker as the new subaltern. (Farrier and Tuitt, 2013, p. 254)

Lip sewing shows a form of resistance by the racially marginalised to the regulation of peoples, exercised not within the counties but beyond their territories—powerful nations oppressing people arriving from other (usually former colonies) territories.¹⁰ This is a specific phenomenon which involves the legal aspects of two territories—asylum seekers’ *home country* and the *dream country*, the zone to which they try to access.

In brief, racially, politically, socially or economically “powerful” people tend to intervene to regulate the biological lives of subaltern individuals, either to fulfil these authoritative peoples’ socio-political and economic purposes or to suppress subalterns’ resistance. For instance, at the hands of national security, anything which threatens the state is removed: citizens are stripped of their rights. Moreover, individuals who are racially and economically under-privileged are considered as biological spare parts for “industries” dealing with human bodies. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* provides material to shed much light on such concerns on political killings.

Evident through the analysis, political killings encompass both corporeal and psychological execution exercised through diverse means such as social ostracism, exposure to deadly environments, expulsion, murder, manslaughter and genocide. While representing how the dehumanising treatment of South Africa’s black communities causes an individual to give up his identity to survive in a society governed by the internal colonisers, the play thus, functions as a synecdoche of many killings, biopolitical stratagems, experienced by populations in the contemporary world. The play alludes to diverse types of political death, ranging from the plight of illegal migrants and the passive sufferers of air attacks to the targets of politically driven mobs of jingoism and to the direct war victims, practised to a great extent since the twentieth century, in the entire world.

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Notes

1. The original spelling of the play is Sizwe Banzi is Dead (Walder, 1993, p. 148).
2. The play-text which appears in Dennis Walder's (Ed.) *Township Plays* (1993) is used for the essay: original formatting is also taken from the play-text throughout the essay. For instance, stage directions are quoted in italics as in the original printing.
3. It is the second largest ethnic group in South Africa after the Zulus.
4. Passbook refers to a form of internal passport system to segregate the populations, regulate urbanisation and allocate migrant labour.
5. *Shebeen* is an unlicensed pub.
6. The National Party (NP), established in 1912 and committed to the defence of Afrikaner concerns, was the ruling party in South Africa from 1948 until 1994, until the African National Congress came to power.
7. Kente is a Black South African dramatist based in Soweto, and considered as a major contributor to black theatre (e.g. Orkin, 1991).
8. Shezi was also the elected Vice President of the Black Peoples Convention in 1972 (Orkin, 1991).
9. The original ellipses are used here.
10. This mainly refers to the lip sewing actions taken by irregular immigrants as a protest against authorities.

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