

**THE REPRESENTATION OF APARTHEID SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN
ATHOL FUGARD'S *SIZWE BANSI IS DEATH***

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Abstract

The research assessed “The Representation Apartheid System of Government in Athol Fugard’s Sizwe Bansi is Death”. The research employed Post-Colonial Theory for the study’s framework analysis and utilized qualitative method of data collections through Content-Analysis that make use of the play Sizwe Bansi is Dead couple with the adoption of textual technique process to dissect the play. Other sources of knowledge such as published books, journals and online materials were utilized as secondary data. The study adopted Purposive Sampling method to focus on the play while a thematic method was used to analyze information studied. The study found that the author Athol Fugard make use of multiple dramatic methods that include flashback technique, separation effect method, method of story-within-a-story, minor sets and props technique that were all compressed by utilizing small cast hence cost effective. The research therefore conclude that the play Sizwe Bansi is Death as authored by Athol Fugard is a political protest best applied through theatre and art ignoring violence as means to achieve political change in African environment. The play is considered a success as it has spread the message all over the world. To this effect, the study recommend that contemporary African writers should endeavor to adopt and utilize theatre art effectively as an avenue of exposing government policies that encourages racial segregation, ethno-religious discrimination that engender disharmony and disaccord among multi-ethnic and racial settings in Africa and Nigeria alike.

Keywords: *Apartheid, Segregation, Racial Discrimination.*

DOI: [10.58934/jgss.v4i16.216](https://doi.org/10.58934/jgss.v4i16.216)

1. INTRODUCTION

The ideology of segregation among the blacks and whites in South Africa emerges as result of the fear of the white minority towards the non-whites majority. They introduce a system of government named ‘Apartheid’ which led to racial segregation and supremacy that instituted

state sponsored oppressions and killings against the Blacks majority that were not represented in the government (Engler, 2013). To fight back, the blacks used literary arts in form of writings and plays which depicted their struggle in the hand of the ruling minority whites.

Among the literary art that drew the attention of most Africans to the plight of blacks in South Africa during the apartheid era is the work of Athol Fugard's 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead'. The play demonstrates the social, political and economic inequalities that the system of apartheid imposed on the blacks where those that questioned the segregation policy were either arrested, tortured and at times killed. The focus of the play was on how easily the blacks were subjugated to the point of death with no alternative to fight back, only to mourn in silence attracted attention, apparently because of the searchlight beamed on desire for equal rights in Africa after colonialism.

It will be recalled that prior to our contemporary time, most of the African literature were simply geared toward folklore, entrenchment of cultural identity as in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) and many others. And as such, concerns were equally shifted towards concentrating on fighting racial segregation to achieve political independence.

Writers such as Fugard therefore took up the gauntlet to address issues that are of great importance to the socio-political development of Africa and Africans, which hitherto had been neglected. One could categorically agree that that writers and critics that focused on political issues have come of age, as there is a more balanced views and perspectives dominating African literature today. Lending credence to this, Fugard (1993) emphasized that in the play 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead':

The indigenous black South African were violently oppressed through torture, poverty, deprivation, and murder as result of apartheid segregation policy with menial jobs left in the hand of the blacks that was portrayed in the play where mechanics of Ford were left to work harsh conditions unprotected conditions (153-153).

Furthermore, in the African literary art, persons who have read novels, stories, poems, songs, proverbs, folktales, authored by Africans will be familiar with the negativism associated with colonialists' mistreatment of Africans and their traditional cultural values. But for a non-black such as Athol Fugard to write a play as 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead' deserve further scholarly assessment as it defies worldviews and practices of literary art that is marred with narrow-

minded bigotry, that grossly misrepresented the plights of African in the hands of the whites during the apartheid era in South Africa.

This study will basically examine the representation of the Apartheid System of Government in South Africa as Represented in Athol Fugard's 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead'. It also looks at how the author creatively brought to surface the sufferings of black's majority in the hand of the ruling minority whites in South Africa during the apartheid era which was abolished in 1994.

Statement of Problem

This study concentrates on the identification and examination theme of racial segregation and its effect of oppression to Blacks in South Africa during the apartheid government. African literature in relation to racial discrimination in Africa exposed the contributions of both blacks and non-blacks in elaborating the conditions the people of Africa experienced in simple yet understandable prose. The work of Athol Fugard's 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead' intended to showcase that racial segregation, exploitation and oppression is a major theme in the play especially because the work was written during the apartheid era at a point where racism was institutionalized in the South African society.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present research uses a qualitative approach because it mainly focuses on people, especially social groups, or individuals, it relies on information that originates from discussion, explanations, stories, attitudes, and moods (William, 2011). Therefore, Kumar (2011) believes that the aim of research that is qualitative in nature is to elucidate, dissect, discover, and find out the views, attitudes, values, behaviors and knowledge of a single person and communities. According to Creswell (2014), design of qualitative research checks issues and understands the main thrust of the research in detail. Huberman and Mills (1994) believes that the main characteristic of qualitative method is to focus on simple events that occur naturally in the environment, so that the inquirer have a vivid control over the appearance of these events in genuine world. This is like the way and manner Fugard utilized genuine events that occurred in his country South Africa during the colonial period.

The study is interpretative and explorative in nature. The study had sought an insight of how the Apartheid System of government in South African literature is portrayed in Athol Fugard's 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead'. The comprehension would be done by analyzing the complex

relationships between the ruling White Minorities and the Black majorities in different contexts of their relations characterized in the play which was outlined and interpreted.

Consequently, research design that is qualitative in principle is therefore applicable in the sense that it utilized reasoning in investigating the focus and the direction of the play 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead'. This as expected, would assist the researcher to fully interpret, describe the people behavior in order to achieve an acceptable outcome with regards to the thorough analysis of apartheid and its obnoxious impact on the native black Africans in Fugard's 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead'(Flora, 2018). It is not about whether the findings can be generalized to the other works, however, it is about the ability to use the appropriate methods to achieve the aim of the study. Even though in the play, there are concerns on the small number of the main characters. However, concern should be focus on how those characters depicted, described, and portrayed since research of qualitative technique has nothing to do with numerical figures.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review attempts to review contributions by many writers, scholars and professionals on events that marked the African continent which affect the lives of the Blacks negatively as results of system of colonization which conditioned systematic injustice, deprivation, and servitude against the blacks particularly in South Africa under apartheid regime that entrenches racial segregation against the Blacks majority. The review is performed in a thematic form.

The seminar adopted Post-colonial Theory for the study's framework to explain how literary works contributed to creating more consciousness and awareness for the Africans to raise up against injustice meted by colonial and apartheid rule.

Post-Colonial Theory was postulated by Edward Said in his work titled "*Orientalism*" (1978). It came into limelight through the efforts of many scholars who responded to the new consciousness that came up during the Indian independence in 1947, and also as the reaction to the general negative re-orientation to the 'Third-World' struggles from the 1950s onwards.

Post-colonial theory challenges the legacy of colonialism and deconstructs the imperial ideology of superior culture and world super class position. The theory focuses on the cultural psychology of those who are marginalized by dominant Western culture: the new immigrant;

the working class; women; and other post-colonial subjects and interrogates the legacy of the imperial attitudes of the West on their former subjects.

Post-colonialism could be taken as a practical reflection of history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse particular to the former colonial subjects of England, Spain, France, and other European powers. Its focus is on third world countries in Africa, Asia, Caribbean and South America as well as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is best examined within the paradigm of Post-Colonial Theory. This is because his works examine the relationship between the linkages of apartheid and colonial rule during the apartheid South Africa. This implies the relationship between the "colonized" and the "colonizer", 'self' and 'the other', the oppressed and the oppressor, the master-servant relationship.

a. Apartheid through the Lens of African Writers

The notion of 'Apartheid' as the name implies left the oppressed with psychological effects and it also damaged their identity. These effects resulted in the oppressed changing their behavior to be or to look like the oppressor (Fanon, 1967).

In the same vein, Fanon (1967) asserts that an African will try to speak French more than a European does for him/her to sound European and also to enable him (African) to fit into the European society. In this understanding an African assimilates himself into the European culture which Fugard presents through Styles who repudiates this by owning a photo studio. In other words, he becomes a bourgeoisie.

Pettigrew (1971) interprets such behavior as an outward expression of the inner state of a person and links it to a psychology of oppression as is revealed in 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead' where Styles transforms Sizwe Bansi to a town man to fit the standard of an urban resident.

b. African Writers' Consciousness Toward Self-Determination

It is pertinent to note that the African novel is a response to and a record of the traumatic consequences of the impact of Western Capitalist colonialism on the traditional values and institutions of the people. This situation as well as circumstance is pronounced most in South Africa which has just emerged from the shackles of apartheid separatist enclave.

Accordingly, Mda is conscious of the South African situation and portrays this in his novel, *Ways of Dying*, using Noria's son, Vutha as a symbol of the South African situation, suffering double death and violence in the hands of apartheid and Black majority rule in the new South African state.

Mda in his novel used his sensitivity as a writer to portray the South African nation and situation as going through a double death and violence just like Achebe notes in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that: the African writer must primarily concern himself with the past in an effort to help his fellow African regain that lost dignity by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost (p. 42-45).

The double death and violence suffered by Vutha is epitomic of the South African situation then, from apartheid to post-apartheid era – white racial rule to Black majority rule amidst violence, corruption, poverty, unemployment, and racial discrimination even amongst racial likes.

Ngugi in his work *Homecoming* (1982) arguing for a deeper political commitment says that:

Literature cannot escape from the class structures that shape our everyday life. Hence a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it or not, his works reflect one or more of the intense economic, political, cultural, and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side of the battlefield: the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is whose politics (p. 58).

These assertions highlight the notion that literature is a tool used to educate the masses about events in their society. This echoes the political situation in South Africa. The political situation in South Africa dominates all aspects of life in that country. Thus, commitment among black writers has been seen as a necessity.

This view is echoed by Nazareth in his work *Literature and Society in Modern Africa* (1972), as he notes that:

Apartheid affects every aspect of a person's life like a virulent form of cancer. Hence many South African writers and, 'colored' South African writers are concerned with fighting Apartheid, with demonstrating how monstrous Apartheid is and showing how it dehumanizes everybody (p. 22).

Broadly speaking, the African novel is a response to and a record of the consequences of Western capitalist colonialism on the traditional values and institutions of the African people. This explains African writers' pre-occupation with the past and contemporary social issues.

While recognizing the need for a redefinition and reordering of values in modern Africa in the wake of the disruptive effects of colonial era, writers like Chinua Achebe; Ngugi Wa Thiong'O; Ayi Kwei Armah; Mongo Beti; Bessie Head; Ezekiel Mphahlele; Nadine Gordimer; and John Maxwell Coetzee, realize that before this reordering can take place there must be a confrontation with the past.

Achebe in his work *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1981) states that:

There is a saying in Igbo that a man who cannot tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer's duty is to explore in depth, the human condition. In Africa, he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history (p. 22).

The novel and literature have never ceased to be a vital tool in showcasing and dissecting the anatomy of society showing the incongruities prevalent therein. Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1975) uses the novel to expose the ills in his society at the demise of colonialism. He also uses it to show a state of disillusionment and despair amongst the Africans at the time when his country had gained political independence. He explores the social and political corruption in Ghana, soon after political independence, by the supposed messiahs of his people.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF LITERARY WORKS TO AFRICAN POLITICS

Literature in Africa is influenced on the greater part by politics. This gains support by the declaration of Leopold Sedar Senghor at the "First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne" in 1956 when he said, "contemporary African poetry and novels are conditioned by the colonial presence" (1956).

African Literary scholars have indeed regarded their works as a weapon against colonial presence and oppression. Lawrence in *Morality and the Novel* (1925), states that "The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circum-ambient universe, at the living moment" (p. 127). He goes further to affirm that: "as mankind is always struggling in the toils of old relationships, art is always ahead of the times, which themselves are always far in the rear of the living moment" (p. 127).

In addition, there is a relationship between man and his social environment which the art or literature reveals. This relationship Lawrence calls 'life' for mankind. According to him "it has the fourth dimensional quality of eternity and perfection and is momentaneous" (p. 128).

The novel or literature is a good example of the subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and not as much true outside of its own place, time, and circumstance. The novel borders on the balance of society and man, good and bad; morality and immorality, love and hate, violence, and consciousness; reconciliation and peace.

5. TEXT ANALYSIS

a. Using of Drama to Showcase Racial Discrimination

The book which came in form of political satire as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* tried to portray the crisis of identity in Apartheid era South Africa where the system of White supremacy conditioned a racial policy that eat deep into fibre of South African society. The play as analysed provide a vivid problem of racial discrimination which did not augured well for both the supreme white minorities and majority inferior blacks. The play also attempted to enumerate solutions against the apartheid.

The experience of the authors in the tumultuous environment was put into use in the play by adopting a unique dramatic method that gave the advantage to achieve a favorable result in the play. In fact, various writers attempted in critiquing the play in their techniques yet only less have succeeded in delving on the political tune conveyed by the book especially by channeling their focus on the numerous advantages regarding dramatic patterns and method choices selected by the playwrights in making sure that the aim of the message was achieved through main themes of the play.

b. Changing of Identity to survive

The play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* can be adjudged to be about a human live endeavour characterized by struggle to live in racial segregated policy in South Africa. One of the main characters *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* possessed a passbook that expired thereby disallowing him from earning a job in his local environment. After a series of attempts to earn a job in a close by King William's town yet failed. He subsequently met a man named Buntu and along the

way found a valid passbook with the owner Robert Zwelinzima been dead. Desperation pushed him to make use of the dead's man passbook thereby forfeiting his name for survival. In dramatic plot, the author employed many dramatic strategies to reach to the crescendo of the story.

c. Horrors in Flashbacks

In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Styles, a prominent character in the play which is seen firstly on stage studying a newspaper and headlines written in the newspaper triggered his memory back to an event in the past while he was a worker at the Ford Motors Plant along with the visit of Mr. Henry Ford Jnr. to the plant in South Africa. Styles remembered the level of racial discrimination exhibited in the factory by the White against Black Africans as the South African environment has already been characterized by unhealthy racial segregation against the Blacks.

The predicament of the Black South African worker, as Styles elaborated in the flashback recollection is very terrible especially where his recollection lead to him to mention that: "safety-precautions after six years?" This statement was credited to the visit of Mr. Henry Ford highlighting despite many years of service to plant, attention was never paid to the safety of the workers of Black race. The author portrayed this in a mocking tune, to the extent that the audience of the play will be left with the vivid feelings that despite working for six years in the Ford Motors plant, Styles and other Black workers have been subjected to occupational risks and hazards.

Flashback strategy in dramatic play is a relevant process in reinforcing the theme by thoroughly structuring the plot which is why Trussler (2000) said flashback as a process through which an event or series of events that happened prior to the present time is recalled into the current account in a special sequential arrangement or whatever manner the author desire to plot to be. It led conclusions in an intermission in the consecutive sequence by a mixture of events drawn from earlier period.

In the flashback, the audience experienced the apprehensions of the white people in charge as their focus was only to generate profit ignoring the safety of the black workers in the plants. In addition, Sizwe Bansi visited Styles studio to snap picture for his wife and children back home at King Williams town where he narrated his story to Styles in a flashback mode. He commenced and read the letter he planned to send along with the snapped picture to his wife.

It is while he is reading the letter that the audience were taken back to the past. In recollection, he lamented his worse experiences through his engagement with Buntu and when he finishes reading the letter, the audience found themselves back to Style's photo shop.

The recounting of his experiences demonstrates vividly the predicament of bondage the Blacks were suffering in South Africa during the apartheid era. The flashback method, hence, assisted in bringing out Fugard's themes on racial segregations and demise in the play. It is worth mentioning that the flashback adopted by Fugard is highly efficient because it assists the dramatist to artistically dramatize his message and question the negative trends of apartheid policy that created a worse condition of inequality to Black South Africans. This aptly captured the opinion of Catron (2002) who contributed that the flashback method could assist to set the tone by revealing a serious defining event in a play.

The author in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* also makes use of Flashforward technique which entails the audience to be driven into the future through a passionate imagination of the protagonist on the manner he feels to view the environment he originates that is free from all obnoxious features of racial discrimination. Thus, this process is achieved through his imagination.

The author in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* brought this to light when Sizwe, Buntu and Styles recollect attentively on their hope to witness events around them: being acknowledged members of the society with equal respect and status, favourable working condition, equal working permits for all, freedom of movement to any part of the native land without any segregated policy and many more.

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study was able to find out that the author Athol Fugard expressed the veracity of apartheid as a government policy in South Africa during its colonial period which negatively oppressed the native Blacks ways of life through racial segregation and discrimination that caused hardship, pains and suffering denying the Blacks population to pursue their live endeavours in all aspect whether socio-economic, political, or cultural.

For the author to successfully convey this message in the *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* play, the study found that the author utilized multiple dramatic methods that include flashback technique, separation effect method, method of story-within-a-story, minor sets and props technique that were all compressed by utilizing small cast hence cost effective.

7. CONCLUSION

The study therefore concludes that apartheid policy in South Africa during colonial era no doubt induced racial discrimination and oppression on native Blacks which was displayed in *Sizwe Bansi is Death* as a prominent theme in the play.

The study also concludes that the main theme of Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Death* is majorly on showcasing the obnoxious effect of apartheid as policy that encourages racial segregation and discrimination which often resulted to psychological and physical injuries and deaths to native Blacks as depicted by the three main characters in the play Styles, Sizwe and Buntu who at the end fantasized on a land free of all shackles of apartheid.

The study further conclude that the play *Sizwe Bansi is Death* authored by Athol Fugard exposes how racial discrimination and oppression affect the socio-economic and political aspects of native Black people in South Africa during the colonial era.

In a nutshell, the play *Sizwe Bansi is Death* authored by Athol Fugard is political protest best applied through theatre and art ignoring violence as means to achieve political change in African environment. The play is considered a success as it has spread the message all over the world.

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