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Gibson Alessandro Cima

**RESURRECTING *SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD* (1972–2008):  
JOHN KANI, WINSTON NTSHONA, ATHOL FUGARD,  
AND POSTAPARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

We felt that we need to do this play together . . . one more time, and then from that, we will not do this play again.

—John Kani<sup>1</sup>

There is life in this play.

—Winston Ntshona<sup>2</sup>

On 30 June 2006 at the annual National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa, two giants of South African protest theatre, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, performed as the original cast of the landmark struggle drama *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972). The revival marked the first production of the play in over twenty-five years. After its brief stint at the National Arts Festival (30 June–5 July 2006), the play transferred to the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town (11 July–5 August) and then entertained a monthlong run at the State Theatre in Pretoria (17 August–17 September). After its turn at the State, the production stopped shortly at the Hilton College Theatre in KwaZulu Natal (19–23 September) before settling into an extended engagement at Johannesburg's Market Theatre (28 September to 22 October). In March 2007, the original cast revival of *Sizwe* traveled to the British National Theatre before finally ending its tour at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in April 2008.

The revival of *Sizwe* coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the 1976 Soweto uprisings. When first created and performed in 1972, the piece played an instrumental role in the resistance, since it gave future struggle leaders a political education. Through a collaborative process, South African artists Athol Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona devised *Sizwe* to dramatize the human-rights abuses of their country's institutionalized forms of racist oppression. In this endeavor they succeeded, perhaps beyond their expectations, for the play galvanized opposition

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to apartheid, inside and outside the country. However, the collapse of apartheid South Africa in 1994 and the country's transformation into a burgeoning democracy has changed the meaning of *Sizwe*. What is the significance of a revival in this postapartheid context? Murkier still, what is the meaning of the play for its three creators, Kani, Ntshona, and Fugard?

*Sizwe* has demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate through its premiere and various revivals over the past thirty-five years, an unusual power to captivate audiences nationally and internationally. The play has been anthologized in *The Best Ten Plays on Broadway* (1975). *Sizwe* also appeared on the Royal National Theatre's 1998 list of most significant plays of the twentieth century. In addition, the play was fêted in 2006 during the celebration of the English Stage Company's fiftieth anniversary at the Royal Court Theatre. Given these and other accolades, *Sizwe* stands as one of the most important Anglophone theatrical pieces of the twentieth century.

When initially composed and staged, the play addressed South Africa's pass laws that, along with the Group Areas Act of 1950, were established by the white government as a means of controlling the movement of the majority population in the country. Each African, "Coloured" (a common South African term for someone of mixed blood), or Indian person was required to carry a passbook with his or her name, a picture, and a stamp that gave the individual the right to be in certain areas but not others. In order to dramatize the absurdity and degradation caused by these draconian laws, Kani, Ntshona, and Fugard created the character of Sizwe Banzi (acted by Ntshona), a country bumpkin who has traveled to the big city of Port Elizabeth from his home, the rural outpost King William's Town, in search of work.

As the play unfolds, we learn that Sizwe does not have the correct permit to work in Port Elizabeth and he must return to King William's Town. Sizwe asks his friend Buntu (played by Kani) for help. Yet Buntu can offer no solution, so instead the two men get drunk at a local shebeen, or speakeasy. Afterward, as they make their way back home, Buntu stops to relieve himself on what he believes to be a pile of garbage. However, the refuse turns out to be the body of a murdered man, Robert Zwelinzima. After some debate, Sizwe and Buntu steal the man's passbook with the proper work-seeker's permit and swap the photo with the one from Sizwe's passbook. In effect, Sizwe has died, not Zwelinzima. The entire story of Sizwe and Buntu is framed by a scene in which Sizwe, now Robert Zwelinzima, visits Styles (also Kani), the owner of a downtown photography studio, in order to take a picture to send to his wife back in King William's Town. Part of *Sizwe's* power stemmed from the play's open resistance to the oppressive policies of the South African government during a time when enforced silence was the norm. Yet from the play's perspective, this opposition came at the price of a terrible compromise: the title character must sacrifice his individual identity and live on with the name of a dead man. Sizwe must die in order for his body to carry on.

If this abnegation of self for survival is the controversial message that *Sizwe* proffers, it is important to note that Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona also have had to contend with their identities in the decades following the play's explosion

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onto the international scene at London's Royal Court in 1973. There, Sizwe's self-abnegation paradoxically coincided with the artists' own improvised self-authorship, a process that has informed the personal and professional lives of all three artists and has affected notions of the play's authorship ever since. For more than three decades (1972–2008)—through the origins, development, and revivals of *Sizwe*—critics, scholars, and spectators as well as the three artists themselves have improvised the identities of the play's three creators. Furthermore, black and white audiences within South Africa and abroad reacted differently, complicating the coauthors' identities as well as the play's meaning and provenance. Most recently, Kani and Ntshona's postapartheid revivals of *Sizwe* have renegotiated all three artists' identities in relation to *Sizwe*'s meaning and authorship. In various complex ways, the history of the play itself has become a touchstone of these changing artistic and political identities.

In the wake of the international success of *Sizwe*, the three collaborators, like the *Sizwe Banzi* character of their devising, had to live with new identities. As in *Sizwe*, with these new identities came consequences: Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona became intricately and inextricably tied to *Sizwe* in a manner that did not always reflect their individual or collective investments in the work. Critics often cast Fugard as a "protest playwright," a label about which he felt ambivalent. These same commentators routinely focused more on the personalities of Kani and Ntshona than on their skills as actors and coauthors. Through this critical lens, Kani became Styles, the outgoing resourceful character that he portrayed in *Sizwe*, and Ntshona transformed into Sizwe, the backward dupe from the country.<sup>3</sup> This equation of Kani and Ntshona with their roles occurred even though the two artists transcended these reductive types through their burgeoning international recognition and world traveling.

Fugard combated what he viewed as the limiting label of protest playwright by reminding critics that he had already begun to build an international reputation and corresponding artistic as well as political identity more than ten years earlier than *Sizwe*. Fugard gained an early taste of the renown that awaited him after *Sizwe* during the 1961 production of his play *The Blood Knot* in South Africa and its subsequent restagings at the New Arts Theatre in Hampstead, London, in 1963 and Off-Broadway at the Cricket Theatre in New York in 1964. For these brief excursions to London and New York, Fugard began to develop the nascent tenets of a public persona that helped cloak his private anxieties. Throughout his career, the playwright constantly created, became dissatisfied with, and re-created this public image. Fugard established himself as both a writer of firm political commitment and an artist wary of the harmful potential of propaganda in his work. For example, London theatre critics lambasted Fugard in 1964 for *The Blood Knot*'s perceived ambivalence toward apartheid yet applauded the artistry and complexity of the play's psychology.

The opening of *Sizwe* at the Royal Court in 1973 marked the movement of Fugard's already established public persona away from artistic and toward political concerns, although privately Fugard viewed his *Sizwe*-based reputation as a protest artist with both ambivalence and vexation. In the years following the 1972 premiere of *Sizwe*, Fugard continued to voice his disapproval of apartheid

while attempting to avoid being limited by the protest artist label. He produced a substantial number of plays, both political and personal, including “*Master Harold*”—and the boys (1982), an autobiographical piece with political overtones. Fugard’s critical identity, while affected by *Sizwe* and its various reincarnations over the years, did not depend solely on the play.

Kani and Ntshona, who were virtually unknown prior to the international success of *Sizwe*, also had to contend with critical perceptions of their identities. Often cast as blacks who shared their life stories of South Africa rather than the legitimate coauthors and skilled actors of *Sizwe*, both men have moved to recast themselves as playwrights by writing single-author plays.<sup>4</sup> Kani’s *Nothing but the Truth* (2002) won critical acclaim in South Africa, England, and America, ensuring him a place within the canon.<sup>5</sup> He also found a new identity as a director and an arts administrator. Ntshona, in addition to his roles in the international revivals of *Sizwe* and its sister play, *The Island*, has become a fixture in the community of his birth, New Brighton. Like Fugard, Kani and Ntshona have rewritten their identities as artists, not only reclaiming the mantle of playwright but also contesting the sometimes limiting role of struggle actors. The two artists spent much of the 1970s and early 1980s touring the world with *Sizwe* and *The Island*. After the final performance of *Sizwe* at Johannesburg’s Market Theatre in 1982, Kani addressed the problem of becoming trapped in his protest role as Styles by appearing in some of the major plays of the Western canon: Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (with Ntshona in 1981), Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* (1985), and Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1987). Apart from *Godot*, Ntshona reshaped his political identity by moving back to New Brighton and dropping out of the national and international theatre scene for three years.

#### THE BIRTH OF *SIZWE BANZI* (1963–72)

In order to understand how this landmark drama built the international reputations of Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona in relation to one another, one must step back ten years before *Sizwe*’s salutary 1973 opening at the Royal Court in London—and subsequent worldwide tour—to examine briefly the abortive run of Fugard’s *The Blood Knot* (1961) at the New Arts Theatre in Hampstead from 20 February to 17 March 1963. The play dealt with two brothers who shared the same black mother but had different fathers, one white and one black. The “Coloured” brother, Morris, has returned to their little shack in Korsten, a poor area of Port Elizabeth, after a failed attempt to pass as white. Morris, lacking a job back in Korsten, must serve as a housemaid for his black brother, Zachariah, who works as a gardener to support both men.

In addition to dramatizing South African apartheid as a blood struggle between brothers, *The Blood Knot* broke the color barrier in the country; for the first time in its history, a white man (Fugard as Morris) and a black man (Zakes Mokae as Zachariah) shared the same South African stage. Somehow, the play managed to elude the strict state-sponsored censors. In fact, because of the veiled nature of the political message of Fugard’s play, at least one Johannesburg reviewer mistook the drama as a defense of apartheid because of its depiction of infighting between the Coloured, erudite, and essentially asexual Morris and the

black, illiterate, and lustful Zachariah. Despite this racist misinterpretation of *The Blood Knot*, the South African production established the then-unknown Fugard as a writer of firm political commitment on the national stage. There was every reason to suppose that a production of the play in England would place the South African playwright on an international stage along with his contemporaries Harold Pinter, Alan Ayckbourn, John Arden, Shelagh Delaney, and Arnold Wesker.

However, Fugard's play was not as well received in Hampstead. There are many reasons for its apparent failure.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most significant reason for the British theatre community's nearly wholesale rejection of this production, however, was the perception there that the play lacked political commitment. Kenneth Tynan for the *Observer* called the play "unconsciously illiberal."<sup>7</sup> Roger Gellert from the *New Statesman* agreed that *The Blood Knot* exhibited an "almost reprehensible lack of bitterness about apartheid."<sup>8</sup> Tynan and Gellert both reasoned that any play that could succeed on the repressive stages of South Africa could not display a serious political intention.

The Hampstead failure affected not only Fugard's professional identity but also his personal sense of well-being. He did not begin to emerge from the bout of depression that ensued until more than two months later, when he received a visit from township intellectual Norman Ntshinga. Fugard recounted the meeting in his notebook on 13 March 1963:

[Ntshinga's] was the old, old request. Would I do a play for them? I say request, actually, it is hunger. A desperate hunger for meaningful activity—to do something that would make the hell of their daily existence meaningful.<sup>9</sup>

As it turns out, both men were hungry for "meaningful activity." Fugard acknowledged his own need later in the same entry:

I realised I was making contact again with S.A. [South Africa] for the 1st time since my return from London. I found his presence 'strange'—his well-known "blackness" strange—it was like meeting a well-loved and hated friend after a long separation.<sup>10</sup>

Despite Fugard's ambivalence about Ntshinga's "strangeness," he recognized the need, perhaps amplified by his recent failure abroad, to reconnect with South Africa through Ntshinga. He agreed to direct a play for Ntshinga's group of New Brighton amateur black actors.

With Fugard's direction, the New Brighton group mounted a commedia dell'arte adaptation of Machiavelli's *La mandragola*, retitled *The Cure*. The play opened in an abandoned performing-snake pit at the Port Elizabeth campus of Rhodes University on 15 August 1963 to an audience of New Brighton blacks and white university students. The Serpent Players—the name taken from their snake-pit performance space—were born. The group became a challenge for Fugard, not only in terms of his own physical safety from the oppressive

apartheid government but also because of the dangerous racial politics of South Africa and a crisis of identity precipitated in part by his collaboration with black actors. Despite the near-constant intervention of the Special Branch, the secret police of South Africa's Nationalist government,<sup>11</sup> Fugard continued to create theatre with the Serpent Players from 1963 to 1973, when a decade of collaboration culminated in the London opening of *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*.

In 1963, the two actors who would bring *Sizwe* to international acclaim, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, were nineteen and twenty-one years old, respectively. The pair met at Newell High School in New Brighton. Two years later, both were employed as janitors: Kani at the Ford Motors Factory and Ntshona at a chemical plant. Unbeknownst to either Kani or Ntshona, the Serpent Players and Fugard had already begun to experiment with improvised theatre based on the pressing issues of apartheid South African life. By 1965, Kani had learned of the fledgling theatre group and joined the cast of the Serpent Players' production of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Kani was initially cast as a guard, yet he assumed the part of Haemon when the original actor was arrested for membership in a banned political organization and sent to Robben Island.<sup>12</sup> Two years later, spurred on by his former schoolmate Kani, Ntshona joined the group. The two young men soon became the principal members of the company.

However, a play on the order of *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* did not spring fully formed from the collective improvisations of the three men. The play was the result of six years of experimenting with what in 2006 Ntshona termed "playmaking."<sup>13</sup> In fact, *Sizwe* was the fifth such project developed by the Serpent Players with Fugard.<sup>14</sup> The first of these, *The Coat* (1966), used Brechtian distancing techniques to examine the uses a New Brighton woman found for the coat her husband had given her before he was sentenced to three years on Robben Island. Three other devised performances addressing New Brighton life, *The Last Bus* (1969), *Friday's Bread on Monday* (1970), and *Sell-Out* (1970), developed along similar lines.

Outside his duties as director of the Serpent Players, Fugard continued to develop the skills he would later use to help create *Sizwe*. The playwright devised two performances with friend and actress Yvonne Bryceland: *Orestes* (1971) and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1972). Both of these plays were sparked by headline-making events. In the case of *Orestes*, Fugard and Bryceland, along with actors Wilson Dunster and Val Donald, used a 1964 incident in which a young man left a bomb in a crowded Johannesburg train station, killing a young child and gravely burning an old woman. They set the tragic story against the backdrop of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The devised work was performed once, on 21 March 1971 at the Castlemarine Auditorium in Cape Town, as the first project of the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB)'s Theatre Laboratory.

Fugard's 1974 introduction to *Statements*, the Oxford University Press volume that collected his composed script for the collaboratively improvised *Sizwe*, termed *Orestes* "one of the most important experiences I have had in Theatre and I will be living with it, and using it, for as long as I continue to work."<sup>15</sup> The piece had a major impact on his career-making work with John

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Kani and Winston Ntshona in *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* and *The Island*. In the same introduction, Fugard acknowledged a debt to Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski, writing that his book *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) “made me realize that there were other ways of creating a totally valid theatre experience . . . that it needn’t be the orthodox experience I had been retailing for so many years since *The Blood Knot*.”<sup>16</sup>

Out of the rehearsals for *Orestes* and his collaboration with Bryceland emerged another other devised work: *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1972). *Statements* responded to the two pillars of apartheid legislation, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), which prevented marriages across the color lines, and the Immorality Act (1950), which criminalized sexual contact between races. The play took as its central image six police photographs of a “Coloured” man and a white woman making love. Fugard and Bryceland, playing the “Coloured” man and the white woman, respectively, improvised dialogue during rehearsal that the playwright would transcribe, structure, reimagine, and bring to rehearsal the following day. On 28 March 1972, the play opened the newly formed Space Theatre, a venue for nonsegregated fringe drama—led by Bryceland’s husband, Brian Astbury—which grew out of *Orestes* and CAPAB’s theatre lab. Significantly, critics accustomed to viewing Fugard as a protest playwright attributed these collaborative works to his sole authorship. This pattern of attribution would continue with *Sizwe*.

In 1972, the Serpent Players began to break apart. Fugard had been gone for a while to pursue these various projects and to produce his play *Boesman and Lena* (1969) in South Africa and America. Several members were arrested for their political activities, while the remaining players attempted to balance work responsibilities with their production duties. Eventually, the only members interested in continuing to perform protest plays were Kani and Ntshona. In August of 1972, a brief tour to the Durban Arts Festival forced Ntshona to choose between his job and the Serpent Players; he was soon unemployed. Ntshona aligned himself with Kani, and the two decided to attempt to become professional actors. The possibility that two black men from New Brighton could make their living as actors was unheard of at the time. Even so, the two friends resolved that they would continue to produce protest theatre as long as they could. However, they agreed that if they were not able to make a living by February, when the universities reopened, they would enroll in college.

Sometime shortly after the Durban Arts Festival in early August, Kani and Ntshona asked Fugard if he would help them develop a play. After some convincing, Fugard secured a date at the Space Theatre in Cape Town and the three men entered the rehearsal room together. The trio sought appropriate material for their new collaborative venture. They explored several different possibilities before they hit upon the winning concept. First, the group attempted to adapt an unfinished text by Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka called *The Detainee*. When they were unable to complete Soyinka’s text, they began anew with a situation of two tearoom waiters named Sam and George who were practicing for a ballroom dancing competition.<sup>17</sup>

One day during rehearsal, when it was clear that the Sam and George scenario had devolved into cliché, either Ntshona or Fugard—their stories differ—mentioned having seen an intriguing photograph.<sup>18</sup> In one version of the story, the photograph was of a black man smiling broadly, wearing his best suit, a pipe in one hand and a cigarette in the other. In another version, the photograph depicted a black man standing with a newspaper tucked under one arm and a walking stick in his other hand. The two photographs shared common traits. Both pictures were consciously staged in the storefront photography studio, and both depicted happy black men. Using one, or perhaps both, of these two pictures as their starting point, the group drew on the Grotowski-inflected lessons of Fugard and Bryceland's earlier experimental workshop plays *Orestes* and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, along with the Brecht-tinged collaborative model the Serpent Players had explored, and attempted a new direction for their collaboration.

The influence of Brecht and Grotowski helped create the unique structure of *Sizwe*. Kani as Styles the photographer opens the play with a virtuosic monologue delivered directly to the audience. Each night, wherever they happened to be, Kani sat onstage with that day's paper and improvised the monologue based on its headlines. At a certain point, a man (Ntshona) enters who claims to be Robert Zwelinzima but who, in reality, is named Sizwe. After Styles takes Sizwe-as-Robert's picture, the stage picture dissolves into a transition scene in which Sizwe recites a letter to his wife that explains why he is now called Zwelinzima. As Sizwe describes meeting his friend Buntu, the play dramatizes their conversation. Much of the rest of *Sizwe* unfolds in flashback. The two men get drunk, find the dead man's passbook, and exchange the pictures. Then, after Buntu has taught Sizwe his new passbook number, the scene returns to Sizwe's letter to his wife before finally ending back in the Styles photography studio at the precise moment when the picture that began the play is taken. This somewhat convoluted structure, with its stark, spare settings and nervous pace, mirrored the confused and desperate circumstances of the actors' own lives. This parity between the form of *Sizwe* and that of its actors' lives was no coincidence. With Fugard, Kani and Ntshona crafted their own experiences as black men living under the racist policies of apartheid into this play.

Fugard's view of the men's collaboration is complex. One possible means of better understanding it might be through Mark Sanders's conception of complicity. According to Sanders's *Complicities*, "apartheid, though by no means unique, was exemplary as a venue for the intellectual as a figure assuming responsibility in complicity."<sup>19</sup> Sanders affirms what has long been understood, that "specific acts of opposition (in the narrow sense) [such as *Sizwe*] remain complicit in what they oppose" (10). This complicity occurs because the acts of resistance are "dependent on a generalized complicity that is irreducible" (10). Through his collaboration, then, Fugard, like the South African and French intellectuals Sanders discusses, announced his complicity in apartheid "in order to assume responsibility for what is done in one's name without simply distancing oneself from the deed" (4). Sanders links this complicity and its attendant pejorative connotations with "the duty to speak out," which is

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connected to a “desire not to be an accomplice” (4). This desire drives intellectuals, such as Fugard, “at least tacitly, to accept and affirm a larger complicity—etymologically, a folded-together-ness (*com-plic-ity*)—in human-being (or the being of being human)” (5). Certainly, this “folded-together-ness” served as Fugard’s project in his collaboration with Kani and Ntshona; and yet, as Sanders suggests, the South African playwright could not avoid his complicity in the effects of apartheid.

In his 1974 introduction to the play, Fugard described his function in the *Sizwe* rehearsal room as one of facilitation, of “releasing the creative potential of the actor.”<sup>20</sup> However, by claiming in the same introduction that he was able “to write *directly* into [the stage’s] space and silence via the actor,” Fugard threatened to reduce Kani and Ntshona into the conduits through which he wrote.<sup>21</sup> He recalled achieving this “direct mode of composition” through the use of what he termed “mandates,” which took the form of “challenge and response.”<sup>22</sup> Yet by issuing these “mandates,” Fugard, paradoxically, claimed the privilege of giving power to Kani and Ntshona to act on his behalf. The South African playwright wrote of his interaction with Kani and Ntshona in the *Sizwe* rehearsal room: “I have challenged, and the actors have responded, not intellectually or merely verbally but with a totality of Being.”<sup>23</sup> In this passage, Fugard acknowledged and demonstrated respect for the intellectual and verbal engagement of his collaborators in the rehearsal room, yet he also cast them as respondents to his will. Furthermore, Fugard’s statement suggested that Kani and Ntshona’s “totality of Being” legitimated their collaboration. According to Fugard, the two photographs that he found of smiling black men became the group’s “mandate.” He “challenged” Ntshona and Kani to interrogate the implications of the smile on the black man’s face in both pictures. Reasoning that no black man in South Africa would appear that happy unless he had his passbook in order, the actors “responded” with the stuff of their lives.

Right from the start, however, tension developed over who originally discovered the photographs. This tension deepened after the 1974 Oxford University Press publication of *Sizwe*. The play was collected along with the trio’s second collaboration, *The Island*, and Fugard’s earlier work with Bryceland, *Statements after An Arrest under the Immorality Act*, under the title *Statements*. Before the publication of Fugard’s Oxford script of *Sizwe*—culled by consulting his rehearsal room notes and listening to audiotapes of several live performances—the play had no written script; it existed in the minds of the play’s three collaborators. In fact, Kani addressed the crucial issue of *Sizwe*’s origins in a 1973 interview appropriately entitled, “Kani the Actor *without* a Script.”<sup>24</sup> “Let me tell you how the play was born,” Kani declared. “Athol Fugard, Winston Ntshona and myself found an old photo of an African man with a lit cigarette in one hand and a lit pipe in the other.”<sup>25</sup> Prior to the play’s success at the Royal Court, then, Kani had described the discovery of the photographs as part of the collaborative process, a task in which all three men had been involved. After *Sizwe*’s Royal Court triumph, however, according to a 1974 interview with Elenore Lester of *The New York Times*, Fugard contradicted Kani’s statement. Lester wrote: “For the kernel of the story of ‘Sizwe Banzi’ Fugard told his two

actors about a haunting photo he had seen in a photographer's shop window. 'The picture had built-in dynamite for me,' said Fugard. . . . 'It showed a black man in his best suit—ill-fitting, but clearly his best—pipe in one hand, walking stick and newspaper in the other, and on his face, this seraphic smile.'<sup>26</sup> Here, in Lester's widely distributed description, Fugard seems to take credit for spotting the photograph and bringing it to the attention of his fellow collaborators. Further complicating matters, in 1975, Kani offered a third explanation for the inception of *Sizwe*: "[Ntshona] was paging through a friend's photo album and he saw a picture of the friend, smiling."<sup>27</sup> Later in the same interview, Kani stated that he and Ntshona, without aid from Fugard, had given themselves the "mandate" that resulted in *Sizwe*.<sup>28</sup> The two men maintain this version of the events that led to *Sizwe* up to this day.

Setting aside this conflict over the photographic "mandate" that began their project, the published Oxford edition of the play remains problematic, due, in part, to its inability to capture Kani's opening improvised monologue. In her 1973 interview with Kani, Linda Charad of the *Sunday Times* described the monologue: "If you had not read that night's newspaper you might be excused for thinking that he said the same things every night. Having read it, I knew that he was actually talking about that night's news."<sup>29</sup> The monologue was improvised anew each night, extending Kani's authorship of *Sizwe* in a fashion that the archive is ill equipped to document. In this same 1973 interview, Kani remarked: "We did not write anything down, except for the letter which Sizwe Bansi sends his wife. The rest is in my mind. I know what I want to say."<sup>30</sup> Here, Kani casts himself, instead of Fugard, as *Sizwe*'s primary author.<sup>31</sup> Kani's improvisation constituted an alternative form of authorship that the history of the play in print has in large part erased. Through his postapartheid revivals of *Sizwe*, however, Kani can perform his ever-changing repertoire, reinforcing his ownership of the play as well as his political and personal engagement with the South African struggle.

Twenty-one days after the three men had launched their collaboration, they premiered *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* in the living room of Fugard's next-door neighbor to a small audience of domestic workers and close friends. Shortly afterward, on 8 October 1972, the play opened at the Space Theatre in Cape Town. The men's struggle over the ownership of the play, and, by extension, over their political and artistic identities, surfaced immediately. During what was meant to be a one-off performance that evening, Kani's opening monologue turned from a twenty-minute vamp to warm up the crowd into an epic, hour-and-a-half-long rant. Kani controlled the performance by extending the length of his monologue. Backstage, Fugard paced, while Ntshona, normally quieter than Kani, grew furious. Eventually, Fugard pushed Ntshona onstage and the fully scripted portion of the play began. When the play was over after nearly four hours, the audience, which Kani described in a 1972 interview as the "third actor in the drama," would not leave.<sup>32</sup> Half the audience stayed in the theatre after the epic play to have an impromptu discussion with the actors.

As a result of the play's opening-night success, thirteen extra performances were immediately arranged. After its sensational stint at the Space Theatre in

Cape Town, the play spent one night at the Port Elizabeth Opera House before being called back to the Space for another two-week run. The play then toured South Africa from November 1972 to August 1973, playing unannounced before black township audiences and white university students. Often, students were told simply that there would be a performance of some sort if they arrived at a specific time and place. Scholar Stephen Gray, who attended one of these early university performances of *Sizwe*, recalled in a 2006 interview that students were afraid that they might be arrested at any moment because of the highly political content of the play.<sup>33</sup>

When *Sizwe* was performed before an all-white audience in Johannesburg on 22 December 1972, however, critic Jean Marquard wrote of vast cultural differences and the difficulty Kani and Ntshona had in engaging the white audience: “White audiences, under any circumstances would tend to be suspicious of demonstrative audience participation; and when invited to respond wholeheartedly and without inhibitions to the plight of a black man entangled in the nightmare of influx control [another term for the passbook issue at the heart of *Sizwe*], reactions can only be complex.”<sup>34</sup> Marquard was quite right to point out the conflicted position of the white South African audience with regard to *Sizwe*. On one level, whites would not have attended the play if they were not in some way sympathetic to the plight of the black South African and were loathe to be complicitous; yet on another level, the audience may have worried that their attendance at the performance event would be construed by the apartheid government as deliberate resistance to their policies.

In *Sizwe*, Fugard, Kani and Ntshona had devised a play that directly attacked the policies of the Afrikaner government with unheard-of boldness and resolve, and it did not take long for international theatre managers to take notice of the play’s political stand. Nicholas Wright and Donald Howarth, both of the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London, witnessed the Space’s production of *Sizwe* and informed noted theatre and film producer Oscar Lewenstein of the play’s potential. Lewenstein invited Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona to bring *Sizwe* to London. Despite Fugard’s insistence in an April 1973 *Newsweek* article that he and his fellow artists were “not especially interested in showing this play abroad,” six months later, *Sizwe* opened at the Royal Court Upstairs on September 20, 1973.<sup>35</sup> Here again, Fugard performed the enduring contradictions of his simultaneous attraction toward and resistance to international fame and its trappings. This early uneasiness with the clamor of critics, scholars, and audiences is part of what allowed Fugard later to detach his identity from *Sizwe*’s runaway success. On one level, of course, Fugard desired the success that comes with politically minded “playmaking,” but on a more personal level he remained ambivalent even during what became one of the most successful periods of his career.

Kani and Ntshona enjoyed what appeared to be a somewhat less ambivalent attitude toward their international success, arguably as a result of their different relationship to *Sizwe*. In 1975, Kani told critics who questioned *Sizwe*’s ability to evade censors within South Africa that “people fail to see the fact that this is a piece of work devised to survive under these conditions.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to

being “devised to survive” the harsh climate of racist Nationalist policies, *Sizwe* was also literally “devised” in order for Kani and Ntshona to survive after both had quit their jobs and decided to pursue theatre full time.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Kani and Ntshona welcomed their reputations, when they arrived, more unreservedly than Fugard. When asked in a July 1975 interview if their newfound preeminence on the world stage would significantly change their lives within South Africa, Ntshona responded: “We are just a tiny noise in that society. It may be harder to silence it now.” Ntshona added, “International exposure does afford a measure of security against harassments, but it doesn’t guarantee it.” Clearly, the success that awaited the two black artists as a result of *Sizwe* at the Royal Court gave them great renown. With great renown came greater mobility and, more important, a modicum of safety, however illusory. In spite of their increased freedom, Kani and Ntshona insisted in the same interview: “We are not defectors. You are talking to men who are going to continue to do the work they believe in, who have a great responsibility to their people, and who at the end of this tour will go home.”<sup>38</sup> In 1982, Kani and Ntshona did return home to South Africa at the end of a ten-year world tour.

#### *SIZWE BANZI IS ALIVE AT THE ROYAL COURT (1973–4)*

The Royal Court’s sixty-seat studio Theatre Upstairs became the staging ground for the making of the new artistic and political identities of Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona. Through this play about false identity, the three men carved out reputations for telling the truth about apartheid, not only in the theatre community but also in the political circles that were battling the white government of South Africa. This rise to prominence within a global artistic and political community gave them greater freedom to ply their trades and associated them, at least in the short term, with the resistance movement.

Alan Seymour, reviewing the production for *Plays and Players*, attributed *Sizwe*’s effective political stance to the fact that “it respects its own humanity and ours and, in doing so, uses one of theatre’s most enduring assets, the personality of the actor.” Kani’s performance especially gripped Seymour. Referring in his review to Kani as a “magic man,” Seymour wrote:

Watching John Kani, then, one understood at last just what redemption for our sickened society today’s Black people had to offer; not so much a high moral integrity as a great generosity: of emotion, of wit, of intelligence, a generosity not forever anxiously hedging its bets lest it be thought “naïve”. To think of this as a new Noble Savagery would be to fall into the usual trap set by Black sophistication for soppy White liberals.<sup>39</sup>

Seymour may be guilty of the very white liberal thinking that he meant to censure: in his estimation, the “magic” of Kani’s “personality”—his performance of his own identity as a black South African, rather than his coauthorship or acting skills—delivered the special meaning of the performance. Seymour celebrated Kani’s presence, and to a lesser degree that of Ntshona, as the arrival of black political identity on the British stage, which, in Seymour’s view, offered

white liberals “redemption.” In doing so, however, Seymour denied Kani and Ntshona the mastery of their craft by insisting that they were merely playing themselves.

Benedict Nightingale of the *New Statesman* said that *Sizwe* distinguished itself from Fugard’s *The Blood Knot* by being “altogether more disjointed, less spare and terse, and far more direct and explicit in its criticism of a system shown to reduce men to [passbooks].” This alteration in Fugard’s customary playwrighting style caused Nightingale to wonder: “Could the explanation be that . . . Fugard has enrolled his two-man cast as co-authors?” Nightingale was one of the only London critics to name Kani and Ntshona as Fugard’s coauthors. Although Nightingale acknowledged that the play was guilty of didacticism at points, he reported that the audience offered the two actors/coauthors “much more than the automatic reverence guilty liberals are apt to accord victims of prejudice.”<sup>40</sup>

In Nightingale’s opinion, although Fugard’s collaboration with Kani and Ntshona led to “a certain looseness and crudeness,” *Sizwe* also possessed “a sense of involvement, both in the writing and the playing, that neither a white South African author nor a black British actor could easily reproduce.”<sup>41</sup> Given the comments of both Nightingale and Seymour, it seems likely that one possible reason, among many, for the success of *Sizwe* in London and the failure of *The Blood Knot* a decade earlier may have been the influence of Kani and Ntshona in dramatizing a practical political concern rather than the more philosophical apprehensions of Fugard’s *The Blood Knot*.

Kani and Ntshona were the clear attractions of offerings at the Royal Court Upstairs, yet a seed planted with critic John Elsom’s review for the *Listener* began to take root as news of their success trickled back to their native South Africa. “Any betting shop enterprising enough to offer odds on the theatre would have made a killing last week. A rank outsider won, a runner without any form or pedigree and only a notable trainer (Athol Fugard) to commend it.”<sup>42</sup> Elsom’s patronizing praise of the play reduced *Sizwe*, and by extension its actors, to a racehorse trained by the already somewhat established figure of Fugard. The two black actors’ contributions to the protest play were marginalized in favor of championing the figure of Fugard as author.

Following this trend, Betty Trew of the South African paper *Eastern Province Herald* wrote excitedly that “Athol Fugard’s *Sizwe Banzi is dead* at the Theatre Upstairs” merited a “long and enthusiastic ovation.”<sup>43</sup> It wasn’t until after 12 December 1973, when *Sizwe* moved into the Royal Court’s four-hundred-seat Theatre Downstairs and began to run in repertory with the second collaborative effort from the three men, *The Island*, that *Die Burger*, the progovernment Afrikaans-language newspaper of the Western Cape, headlined a story about Kani and Ntshona’s success that read: “Two Fantastic South African Actors.”<sup>44</sup> According to an interview with the *Guardian*, this headline from *Die Burger* caused Kani and Ntshona to “laugh with pride because that newspaper called us ‘South Africans’ not ‘natives’ or ‘Bantus.’ Not only do our black brothers and sisters share our success but our entire beautiful country shares it.”<sup>45</sup>

Elsewhere, however, several South African papers excised the two black actors from the proceedings altogether. The *Cape Times* made no mention of

either Kani or Ntshona when it reported that the London critics were “rating [Fugard] among the greats, not because he mirrors the South African scene, but because he expresses the universality of suffering by all people.”<sup>46</sup> In fact, the headline of the *Cape Times* article referred to Fugard as the “Lone Voice” of antiapartheid drama.<sup>47</sup> Kani and Ntshona’s contributions to *Sizwe* and the black South African struggle for freedom can be read through the silences of such reportage.

As *Sizwe* and *The Island* continued to draw crowds while running in repertory together, producer Oscar Lewenstein asked Fugard to restage the first play of the triptych, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*. On 22 January 1974, *Statements* was added to the London bill under Fugard’s direction, with Ben Kingsley and Yvonne Bryceland in the roles of the school principal and librarian, respectively.<sup>48</sup> In this way, *Sizwe*’s six-week engagement at the Royal Court Upstairs gradually became nine months of what Lewenstein termed “The Royal Court’s South African Season.”<sup>49</sup> However, the addition of *Statements*—which was originally improvised with Bryceland but was so completely rewritten for its London opening that Fugard claimed sole authorship—slowly transitioned the season at the Royal Court from a “South African Season” into “The Fugard Season.”<sup>50</sup> Critic Alastair Niven wrote in an article entitled “Athol Fugard in Britain” that the “season of plays by Athol Fugard was the most ambitious programme of its kind yet seen in Britain.”<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps as a result of this shift in the Royal Court’s bill, Fugard gave his first interview as an internationally recognized antiapartheid playwright in January 1974. His interview with Colin Smith of the *Observer* contained many key pieces of the public persona that would serve Fugard for much of the rest of his career, including this: “I’m a bastardized Afrikaner, a product of cultural miscegenation.”<sup>52</sup> Within the South African context, the term “miscegenation” referred to the (illegal) sexual “mixing” between black and white races. Here, however, Fugard co-opted the phrase “cultural miscegenation” to refer to his English father and Afrikaner mother. Fugard’s mixed blood became a touchstone of the white liberal guilt that he also attempted to establish through the course of the *Observer* interview: “I am a classic example of the guilt-ridden impotent white liberal of South Africa.”<sup>53</sup> The article also included certain details of Fugard’s backstory that became permanent fixtures of his persona, such as a 1953 Bombay pub brawl during Fugard’s time aboard the tramp steamer S.S. *Graigaur* in which the Malaysian crew members came to his aid. Fugard told Smith—and many reporters after him—that the incident had cured him of any lingering racial prejudice.

What began as collaboration among three like-minded men transformed into something else entirely as each man shifted his relationship to the play and his own identity as a recognized figure in black South Africa’s struggle for freedom. For Fugard, *Sizwe*’s triumph at the Royal Court also laid the foundation of what would later complicate and threaten to dismantle his position as an antiapartheid spokesman. For Kani and Ntshona, *Sizwe*’s success offered freedom first and foremost. Fugard discussed the joy he felt when he, Kani, and Ntshona first arrived in England and were able to walk down the street together and drink a

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beer together in a pub.<sup>54</sup> Reflecting on their experiences in England, Kani and Ntshona were surprised by the universal nature of *Sizwe*'s message.<sup>55</sup> This universality of *Sizwe* also gave Kani and Ntshona recognition throughout the world. With it, they traveled continuously for ten years. They performed *Sizwe* and raised consciousness of the human rights abuses of the Nationalist government of South Africa, fueling an international antiapartheid movement. Yet, Kani and Ntshona were celebrated as struggle actors who played themselves onstage each night, not creative artists who, along with Fugard, had crafted their experiences into a profoundly universal story of human survival. Throughout their travels, their government-issued passbooks still listed them as Fugard's domestic servants.<sup>56</sup>

### SIZWE AFTER LONDON (1974–82)

Once all three men returned to South Africa in September 1974, the authorship issue became even more complicated, as the trio felt sufficiently protected by their London success to hazard a performance of *Sizwe* for the first time before an all-black audience in the Port Elizabeth township of New Brighton. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona discovered, or perhaps they knew all along, that another factor also desperately needed to share their protest drama: the township audience.

Nearly nine hundred blacks filled the 450-seat St. Stephen's Hall in New Brighton. Some, worried that the police would raid the theatre, left as Kani began his opening monologue. In a 1983 interview with the *Observer*, Fugard recalled that those who stayed reacted in "disbelief, panic and fear that these things were actually being talked about out loud and then there was joy that this was a celebration of small things in their lives."<sup>57</sup>

Fugard reported in a 1982 essay that during the scene in which Buntu exchanges the photographs in the two passbooks, the New Brighton audience watched in stunned silence. Suddenly they were moved to speak:

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." That was the cue for the most amazing and spontaneous debate I have ever heard. As I stood . . . listening to it all, 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.<sup>58</sup>

The reaction of the township audience was vastly different, culturally, from the Western tradition of silent polite attention the actors had encountered with white audiences in Johannesburg and London. Within the African tradition of call and response, the very purpose of theatre was to provoke debate. The impromptu midplay debate seemed suitable to the black New Brighton audience.

African studies scholar Loren Kruger wrote of this New Brighton performance of *Sizwe*: "The audience's debate, like the show it interrupts, is a *performance*; its

enactment here . . . is significant precisely because it is impossible outside.”<sup>59</sup> Kruger’s comments suggest that the liminal space of the township performance provided a safe place in which a discussion of the government’s senescent and oppressive pass laws could ensue. According to Kruger, “by intervening in the play, the members of the audience do not abandon the fiction; they *use* it.”<sup>60</sup> Beyond simply “using” the play, the New Brighton audience—and hundreds of other audiences like it throughout *Sizwe*’s production history—created a one-time-only coauthorship of the play that, like Kani’s opening improvisatory monologue, lives in memory rather than the archive. After several minutes of audience intervention, one of the Serpent Players dimmed the lights, the debate resolved, and Kani and Ntshona continued, somewhat anticlimactically, with the play.

After the New Brighton performance, *Sizwe* embarked on an American tour, opening at the Long Wharf Theatre in Hartford, Connecticut, on 10 October 1974. Because of its warm reception in Hartford, the production transferred to the Edison Theatre on Broadway, opening there on 13 November 1974. New York critics initially continued the trend from London and Hartford of ascribing the success of the collaborative work solely to Fugard’s involvement with the project in spite of Fugard’s published protestations to the contrary. Earlier that year, in April of 1974, Fugard had told Phillip Oakes of London’s *Sunday Times*:

Writing is only one link in the chain of producing a play. I aim for that moment in the theatre in which the actors, in space and silence, communicate with the audience. The writer simply gives the process the first push. When I look at the text now I can’t tell where Fugard ends and the others begin.<sup>61</sup>

Despite Fugard’s insistence that he was not the only author of *Sizwe*, Martin Gottfried of the *New York Post* wrote, “Athol Fugard’s *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* is unadorned playmaking by a born dramatist in ardent pursuit of truth and the staged encounter.”<sup>62</sup> Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* seemed to react against this established narrative. He wrote that contrary to his early assumptions that the play was “just a tribute to liberal Britain’s guilt over South Africa,” it in fact deserved all the praise lavished upon it as a result of the contributions of all three men to its script. In fact, Barnes made a point of acknowledging that *Sizwe* was devised by Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona with Fugard directing and “presumably act[ing] as some kind of umpire to its creation.”<sup>63</sup>

Five months after their New York opening, John Kani and Winston Ntshona won the Tony Award for Best Actor on 25 April 1975. For the first time in the history of the award, two men shared the award for best actor. Kani and Ntshona were also the first South Africans to win the prestigious award, a source of more embarrassment than pride for the white Afrikaner government. Upon their return to South Africa after receiving the Tony, Kani expressed to the *Eastern Province Herald* his desire for more respect from the Afrikaner-led government: “I hope that the winning of this award by Winston and myself will make White South Africans give Black artists in this country the recognition due to them. In England and America we received red carpet treatment, but here we are almost nothing.”<sup>64</sup>

## Resurrecting *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972–2008)

One year later, in 1976, Kani and Ntshona were arrested while performing *Sizwe Banzi* in South Africa's Transkei homeland, three weeks before Transkei won independence as one of nine homelands that the apartheid government attempted to give to blacks for self-governance. *Sizwe's* script disparaged this homeland strategy by implying that the black officials given power in the Transkei were merely puppets of the racist Afrikaner government. In their decision to arrest Kani and Ntshona, the newly installed black government may have proved the actors right. Chief George Matanzima, the Transkei minister of justice, called *Sizwe* a play "which is alleged to have highly political overtones and also to be vulgar, abusive and highly inflammatory."<sup>65</sup>

The Tony Awards provided Kani and Ntshona with a strange immunity. News of their arrest caused an outcry from their fellow artists all over the world, after which Kani and Ntshona were released once the vote for Transkeian independence had passed. The Afrikaner government, through the vehicle of the Transkeian chiefs, may have felt that they could suppress the strong voices of Kani and Ntshona by jailing them, but being incarcerated for performing *Sizwe* only contributed further to the artists' international reputation and made their voices even louder.

In January 1977, Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona returned to London to stage a revival of *Sizwe* at the site of the play's original success: the Royal Court. During the four years since the group's initial triumph there, Kani and Ntshona had both won Tony Awards and been detained for their political beliefs. Commentators viewed them as deeply committed protest artists. In June of that year, Kani and Ntshona told Robert Greig of *The Star* that "We're involved here in what we call 'meaningful theatre.' There's a responsibility. It means you stake yourself out as a sacrifice. Then you can never go wrong."<sup>66</sup> Fugard, on the other hand, had, starting with his personal existentialist drama *Dimetos* (1975), begun to grow increasingly uncomfortable with the designation of "political playwright" given him by the liberal press in South Africa, England, and the United States. His artistic aims and poetic sensibility were increasingly at odds with both the political situation in his native South Africa and his constructed public persona.

Despite reservations that *Sizwe* might become easy agitprop, Fugard seemed optimistic about the Royal Court's 1977 revival. He wrote in his notebook that "John and Winston hand themselves over to it, are taken over by it, with the same spontaneity of four years ago," adding that he was "as confident of the integrity and honesty of its 'witness' now as [he] was then."<sup>67</sup> Upon his return to South Africa three weeks later, however, Fugard told a different story in his notebook:

[*Sizwe* is] a play which always walked the tightrope between poetry and propaganda. Time, all that has happened to John and Winston and my own utter exhaustion, has allowed the scales to tip on the side of propaganda. How stupid! How pointless! How wasteful of Life's splendor.<sup>68</sup>

Fugard's two statements about the 1977 Royal Court revival of *Sizwe*, separated by three weeks, offer a case study in how Fugard's old habit—dating back to *The Blood Knot*—of growing dissatisfied with and dismantling his

previous successes had opened a wide gulf between himself and his collaborators. Fugard seemed to feel that because of Kani and Ntshona's newfound celebrity, the heightened political situation within South Africa in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, and the playwright's own "utter exhaustion," the political aspects of the play, which had always been present, had overshadowed the poetry. In Fugard's view, the play had transformed into exactly what Fugard meant to avoid ever since he stepped into the rehearsal room with Kani and Ntshona in 1972: an agitprop protest drama.

The three men produced the play two more times, once at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 1978 and again at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town in 1982. When John Kani and Winston Ntshona finished the final engagement of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* at the Baxter Theatre, they had been performing the play (and *The Island*) nearly continuously for ten years. They had traveled all over the world: from South Africa in 1972 to England, Scotland, Wales Ireland, Hartford, and New York from 1973 to 1974; to Washington, DC, in 1975; to Australia and South Africa in 1976; back to London in 1977; and finally back to South Africa in 1978. The success of *Sizwe* transformed its three collaborators into internationally recognized protest artists, a label with which all three artists have struggled to come to terms. In fact, the post-*Sizwe* output of all three can be seen as a series of attempts to gain recognition as not only protest figures but also as universal artists.

#### REVIVING *SIZWE BANZI* IN THE POSTAPARTHEID ERA (1982–2008)

The three collaborators responded disparately to the end of *Sizwe's* world tour. Fugard tried to distance himself from his involvement with the propaganda that, in his eyes, *Sizwe* had become. "*Master Harold*"—and *the boys* (1982)—an autobiographical account of apartheid set in 1950 inside the tearoom that Fugard's mother had managed during the playwright's childhood—allowed Fugard to reconfigure the effect of *Sizwe* on the mantle of "political playwright" that Fugard wore uneasily. "*Master Harold*" was his story. It became the first of Fugard's plays to receive its premiere outside of South Africa, opening at the Yale Repertory Theatre on 12 March 1982.

After the worldwide tour of *Sizwe* had ended, Kani negotiated his post-*Sizwe* identity partly by continuing to work with Fugard, although not collaboratively as coauthor. Rather, he concentrated his energies on acting in Fugard-authored plays and in other projects. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, he appeared as Sam in the South African production of "*Master Harold*" at the Market Theatre and as Willie in the 1985 filmed version of the same play starring American actor Matthew Broderick as the lead character, Hally, and Zakes Mokae as Sam. Fugard also cast Kani as Mr. M in *My Children! My Africa!* (1989), which was perceived by critics as Fugard's return to political playwriting.<sup>69</sup> The last role Kani portrayed in a Fugard premiere was that of Martinus Zoeloe in *Playland* (1992), a play that anticipated the collapse of apartheid in 1994.

Ntshona, however, who had always existed in the shadow of Kani, playing the low clown Sizwe to Kani's highbrow Styles, never worked with Fugard again.

## Resurrecting *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972–2008)

When the Baxter Theatre revived *The Island* in 1985 under the auspices of famous South African director Barney Simon instead of Athol Fugard, Ntshona was living in New Brighton and managing a grocery store. He had not acted professionally in three years. In a 1985 interview, Ntshona attributed this fact to the policies of the South African government: “John and Winston have respect all over the world. We are called something above any artist in this country. What do we get? Three years without a job.”<sup>70</sup> Although Ntshona included his acting partner Kani in this statement, the difficulty of finding work as an actor was Ntshona’s alone and may have precipitated his decision to withdraw from the international theatre scene with the exception of revivals of *The Island* and *Sizwe*.

After a 1985 meeting in which Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona discussed a possible Off-Broadway revival of *The Island* that never came to fruition, Fugard wrote in his notebook:

First meeting with Winston [Ntshona] in about three years. During that time not a single offer of work has come his way and I’m inclined to agree with John [Kani] that it has had a very sobering effect on him. There was certainly none of the old arrogance and conceit that finally alienated me from him.<sup>71</sup>

While Ntshona’s response to this meeting is not recorded, one cannot help but wonder what he thought of Fugard at this point. Perhaps he still saw him as a potential coauthor. According to Fugard, during the meeting Ntshona suggested that the three theatre practitioners work together again on a new project. Ntshona pointed out that reestablishing the trio as a creative entity would be a powerful political statement for the desperate and unruly times of 1980s South Africa. Fugard, however, who had enjoyed the success of a solo venture with “*Master Harold*,” asked himself in his notebook: “Could I ever return to collaboration?”<sup>72</sup>

Given Fugard’s post-*Sizwe* work, which now encompasses the bulk of his oeuvre, this has emerged as the crucial question of his latter-day career. Can he “return to collaboration” and by association return to South Africa, or is the old adage that you can’t go home again true? Throughout Fugard’s career, traveling as far back as his time aboard the tramp steamer in 1953, he continually insisted in his notebooks, letters, and interviews that South Africa was his home and that he could never write anywhere else. After “*Master Harold*”—and the boys, however, these statements of national identity concealed the fact that Fugard had been living for some time in the United States, visiting South Africa only occasionally.

Kani and Ntshona, for better or worse, stayed in South Africa after the collapse of apartheid and the birth of the new democracy in 1994. In fact, in 1995 Kani was named chair of the inaugural National Arts Council of South Africa, making good on the claim he made when he was introduced to musician Paul Simon in 1991 that he was “the custodian of culture in South Africa.”<sup>73</sup> That same year, 1995, he became the first postapartheid artistic director of Johannesburg’s Market Theatre. Stephen Nunns’s recent retrospective article on the Market hails Kani as a playwright, noting his success with *Nothing but the Truth*.<sup>74</sup>

Also in 1995, former political prisoner and now president of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, invited Kani and Ntshona to revive *The Island* for an audience of himself and three hundred other political prisoners who had been incarcerated on Robben Island, the very island from which the 1973 play took its inspiration. The original cast revival was later remounted by Peter Brook at the Market Theatre in 2000. The production moved to the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town before traveling to the British National Theatre. When Christopher Goodwin of the *London Times* asked Fugard about the 2000 revival, he responded:

I don't want to live in the past. ... I want to walk away from those years. I don't want to forget them—God forbid that one should ever forget them—but you can't go back again and again and again, and there is a centrifugal force in South Africa that tries to suck people back, into the misery, into the recriminations. No, that is not for me.<sup>75</sup>

Kani and Ntshona positioned themselves differently in relation to *The Island* by continuing to perform their memories of apartheid through revivals of the play. They revived *The Island* once again in 2003 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where they both earned special Obie awards for their contributions to the theatre.

When interviewed, both Kani and Ntshona cited this revival of *The Island* as one of the complex reasons why they chose to revive *Sizwe* in 2006; they wanted to give *Sizwe* the same treatment. According to Kani and Ntshona, the postapartheid revivals of *Sizwe* also grew out of a response to popular demand. As Kani explained, many people asked, "Why don't you do *Sizwe Banz!*? I was in exile. I was in prison. I was too young to see it. It drives me crazy when I take my Dad to a good play, he says, 'You ain't seen nothing until you see *Sizwe Banz!*.'"<sup>76</sup> Besides responding to these public requests, Kani and Ntshona's revival of *Sizwe* celebrated two major theatrical anniversaries: the Market Theatre's thirtieth and the State Theatre's twenty-fifth. During apartheid, the Market staged protest drama while the State Theatre, which was controlled by the Nationalist government, primarily produced escapist fare. By commemorating these two very different anniversaries together, Kani and Ntshona marked the distance between the past and the present and offered a comment on the future.

The postapartheid revival of *Sizwe* served another theatrical anniversary: the Royal Court's fiftieth. Although Kani could not attend, on 14 February 2006, Ntshona performed a staged reading of *Sizwe*. Spectators witnessing this reading of *Sizwe* at the Royal Court, the site of its 1973 success, might have been struck by the manner in which the play's meaning resonated not only with the climate of postapartheid South Africa, but also with a United Kingdom that has continued to struggle with issues of discrimination in various guises. At least one member of the audience that night, who was also present for the 1973 production of *Sizwe* at the Royal Court, told Ntshona that the play was "even more poignant than [when Kani and Ntshona performed it] in the seventies."<sup>77</sup>

## Resurrecting *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972–2008)

While other major antiapartheid plays, including *The Island*, were routinely revived throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, there had not been a professional production of *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* in South Africa since 1982. This lacuna in *Sizwe*'s production history was a direct result of the fact that Kani withheld the professional rights to produce the play. Kani's refusal to supply production rights implies another reason for reviving *Sizwe Banzi* in 2006. The revivals may have been a way for the two black artists to claim the play as their own by bringing *Sizwe* into the postapartheid era before handing the play over to the younger generation of postapartheid performers. As Ntshona explained: "This is the twenty-first century, everybody young . . . very little do they know of the twentieth century, so there is a gap. Now, find a story like *Sizwe*, then you bridge the gap."<sup>78</sup> Kani confirmed this motive in an interview with the *Sunday Sun*: "After [this revival] Ntshona and I will never do *Sizwe Banzi* again. Instead we will release the rights for other people to stage it."<sup>79</sup>

Critics seemed to seize upon this narrative. Adrienne Sichel, reviewing the revival when it ran at the Market in October 2006, positioned *Sizwe* as "a cultural document, a link in [South Africa's] theatre history" and Kani and Ntshona as curators "of a theatrical tradition which is singularly South African."<sup>80</sup> On one level, nothing in this "singularly South African" struggle play had changed during its 2006 revival. The postapartheid spectators were presented with the very same men who had captivated audiences during apartheid thirty-five years earlier. Though somewhat softened by age, the actors cast themselves into their roles with comparable vigor. Yet on another level, everything had changed. Apartheid had ended in 1994. South Africa was twelve years into a new democracy, one that many South Africans feel had not lived up to the promise of its first few years. No longer was *Sizwe Banzi* a protest play intended to help end apartheid. Instead, the play had become required reading, a history text. But the resurrection of *Sizwe* prevented the new generation of South Africans from forgetting the abuses of apartheid and enjoined them to continue the South African struggle. As critic Wilhelm Snyman, reviewing the July 2006 incarnation of the play at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, put it: "There's a new generation out there that simply must see this superb production with two of South Africa's theatre legends, John Kani and Winston Ntshona. It's a parent's duty."<sup>81</sup>

Through the eyes of these critics, and perhaps in Kani and Ntshona's view as well, *Sizwe*'s postapartheid revival inculcated South African youth with the knowledge of the distance the struggle has traveled and the distance that is still to be traversed in order to create a fuller democracy. This project had the added effect of rejoining Kani and Ntshona (and Fugard, in absentia) to their identities as protest artists. Yet this time, the spotlight focused firmly on Kani and Ntshona. The two black artists may have endeavored, through the 2006–8 revival of *Sizwe*, to separate their identities from the figure of Fugard as author that had hung over much of the play's production history. In order to further this aim, revival director Aubrey Sekhabe, a playwright in his own right, relied on a late 1970s BBC live recording of *Sizwe* and not the 1974 Oxford-published script identified as authored by Fugard. In this way, Kani and Ntshona restored to a whole new generation their improvisational coauthorship of the play.

In my 2006 interview with Kani, he recognized the nuance and interplay of his relationship with Fugard: “I’m John Kani; he’s Athol Fugard. There is a thread that keeps us together as a bond of friendship, of compatriots in the struggle for liberation, but also as fellow—I call ourselves comrades, cultural comrades.”<sup>82</sup> Kani’s statement suggests that more personal narrative governs *Sizwe*’s postapartheid revival: the opportunity to revisit and perhaps recast the formative collaboration with Fugard in 1972.

Kani and Ntshona’s recollections of *Sizwe*’s inception differ. In fact, Ntshona’s 2006 description of his relationship with Kani echoed the distinctions Kani drew between himself and Fugard. “John [Kani] looks at me sometimes,” said Ntshona, “and then he hears me say, ‘I’m a quiet person,’ and then he says, ‘Quiet?’ because he knows me. But quiet only compared [to Kani]—John and myself are two different persons, so really, and I’m sure it does come out . . . when we do collaborative efforts.” From the vantage point of 2006, Ntshona saw himself as a leader in the partnership. He said that he first suggested to Kani that they attempt to become professional actors. He told Kani, “I’m not going back to work . . . let’s turn professional.” Ntshona’s initial “curiosity” about the white playwright who wanted to work with black artists soon morphed into respect as he became impressed by Fugard’s “willingness to learn.”<sup>83</sup> Ntshona even suggested that by working collaboratively with Fugard, he and Kani were able to protect themselves in a certain way from the reprisals of the apartheid-era government.

Kani, in contrast, spoke of the uneasiness he felt at the outset of his and Ntshona’s collaboration with Fugard. When asked to describe his initial reaction to Fugard, Kani responded: “Here we go again, here’s another white man who’s going to pretend to be interested in the work of black artists and write a huge volume saying, ‘I know them.’”<sup>84</sup> Kani remembered that he viewed the Serpent Players as “weak” for their willingness to collaborate with an Afrikaner. But as Kani reconstructed the narrative in 2006, his suspicions then fell away and he noticed Fugard’s “passion, honesty, and his burning desire to use theatre as an instrument, as a tool of change.” According to his retrospective narrative, Kani understood, “We’re sharing the same theme. So, maybe there’s something common between the two of us. Maybe we can learn from each other. Maybe we can even work together.”<sup>85</sup>

In their interviews, both men moved on to discuss the photographic mandate that began *Sizwe*. Ntshona told of the brief period of time while he was unemployed and staying at a friend’s house. Ntshona’s friend had a lodger who always seemed to have money; he was always drinking whiskey. According to Ntshona, he entered the man’s room one night to steal a shot of whiskey and instead found the photo album: “I was paging through and I saw the face of this guy with a bevy of girls, pipe and cigarette lit.” Ntshona continued, “This was to be a story that was related to the Serpent Players and Athol [Fugard] and those are the photographs that we used. And then John [Kani] and myself, together with Athol, put our heads together and decided to work professionally, full-time.”<sup>86</sup>

In a separate 2006 interview, Kani supported Ntshona’s version of the events while crediting Fugard for asking the crucial question about the

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photograph and recognizing himself for answering that question. Kani maintained that “the photograph was seen by Winston in a friend’s photo album, where a township clever, quite an urban guy, has a photograph of himself with a pipe and a cigarette lit and the photograph is taken at those downtown photographic studios.” According to Kani, Ntshona told the other two men about the photograph while in rehearsal. “Athol [Fugard] said, ‘Tell me more about that photograph.’ We said, ‘Come on Athol, we got work to do.’” But Fugard pressed his collaborators further: “‘We’re working on it. Just tell me more about this photograph. Why would a man walk into a photographic studio, so wrapped up in ecstasy and joy, take a photograph of himself, cigarette lit and pipe lit.’ We said, ‘Now, this guy was clowning, we know him.’ He said, ‘No, no, let’s assume he was an ordinary person.’” In Kani’s version of the story, when Fugard asked why the man in the picture was smiling, Kani replied, “He’s got his passbook in order.”<sup>87</sup> Although Fugard said in his 1974 introduction to the play that he issued “mandates,” Kani reconstructs these “mandates” in 2006 as the same question about the photograph asked again and again. Ntshona also remembers that the rehearsal process centered on a series of questions, but in his version, all three men asked and answered questions about *two* photographs:

We followed these two photos, and then questions, which was the way of working, the angle we entered into any production. . . . What was dominant in the feature of this man was happiness. What would drive a man happily, so happily that he would forget that he’s got a pipe and a cigarette both lit at the same time? Then something must have happened to him. What is that? Then we found that something special. He has gotten his passbook fixed and then [we] followed that, the rest is history.<sup>88</sup>

In 2006, this issue of the photograph(s) was as much a hotly contested touchstone of Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona’s identities as it had been in 1973.

Yet controlling the photographic “mandate” was not the only way Ntshona and Kani recalled attempting to control *Sizwe* within the rehearsal room. Ntshona remembered that he and Kani held private rehearsals after their sessions with Fugard: “Of our own steam, not Athol’s steam, John and myself would organize rehearsal sessions . . . so by the time we got to rehearsal the following day, we had advanced.”<sup>89</sup> While Ntshona felt that the extra rehearsal time that he and Kani arranged “of their own steam” strengthened their collaboration with Fugard, Kani emphasized his role as the group’s scribe. He remembered that he kept daily notes of their progress in order to help in rehearsals. According to Kani, “When we created *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*, I gave up my first love, which is writing, because the actor got more famous than the writer.”<sup>90</sup>

Despite these attempts (filtered through memory) to claim *Sizwe* as it was being created in the rehearsal room, Kani ultimately felt that each member of the group gave what they could to *Sizwe*. He described the creation of *Sizwe* as “three Dr. Franksteins in a laboratory creating a monster because they’ve found a heart.”

The heart was this photograph. . . . So, today, to begin to say, “Who did what? Who contributed what?” It’s splitting hairs. The monster needed blood, I gave a pint. The monster needed an arm, Athol gave an arm. The monster needed a leg, Winston gave a—whatever the monster needed, that we were creating, we just gave at that stage.<sup>91</sup>

This final narrative, that of the three mad scientists creating a monster out of the pieces of their lives, perhaps comes closest to the meaning of *Sizwe* for Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona in a postapartheid context. After more than thirty-five years of turmoil and tension surrounding the 1972 collaboration of the three men, *Sizwe* has a life of its own irrespective of the improvised political and artistic identities of its creators. The success of *Sizwe* at the Royal Court in 1973 saddled each collaborator with an international reputation as a protest artist, which distressed Fugard and, to a lesser degree, Kani and Ntshona because they wanted to be viewed as universal artists. Fugard transcended this limiting label by continuing to write personal stories. Kani surpassed the view that he was merely a personality-driven struggle actor by writing a play on his own and becoming a cultural ambassador. Ntshona dealt with his identity by rejecting it and absenting himself from the theatrical world. Paradoxically, reviving *Sizwe* in a postapartheid context brought Kani and Ntshona, as well as Fugard by association, back into the realm of the protest artist. Yet the revival also built a platform from which Kani could call on Fugard to write a new protest play for the democratic South Africa:

When I look at what’s going on in my country today, I need him at the confusion. I need him as a light, because his work always brings the light there. These are my selfish needs, but I want Athol to write the stories, not necessarily about politics, but about this emerging new society. I just feel the need, if we don’t serve this new emerging society, if we do not lead the way to culture, to show them about reconciliation, to show them about what future lies ahead for us—I need him.<sup>92</sup>

Kani’s call is the challenge that greets all South African artists who are trying to remain relevant in the postapartheid era. Yet regardless of whether or not any of the three collaborators are up to the task a democratic South Africa presents, in the wake of Kani and Ntshona’s 2006–8 revival, *Sizwe*—Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona’s monster—moves independent of its creators. It is alive.

## ENDNOTES

1. John Kani, interview with the author, 20 August 2006, Pretoria, South Africa.
2. Winston Ntshona, interview with the author, 3 September 2006, Pretoria, South Africa.
3. Perhaps for this very reason, very few interviews from the period feature Ntshona.
4. I make this statement with some trepidation. Kani’s *Nothing but the Truth* (2002) is a matter of record. Evidence of Ntshona’s playwriting, however, is more difficult to unearth. Although Ntshona expressed a desire to revisit his play *Brother Sam, Where Is George?* during his 20 August 2006

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interview with me, I have found no other reference to this play. My understanding from talking to him is that Ntshona's plays have been community-based engagements.

5. In a 2004 joint interview with Kani, Fugard acknowledged: "My experience was rooted in my white reality. We have to face the fact that as South Africans, brothers as we call ourselves, we nevertheless come from different worlds. With John [Kani]'s play, [*Nothing But the Truth*, the audience] is going to get—for the first time, because no other black writer has done that—a take on the black experience [in exile] and the consequences of all that in the lives of black South Africans. That is a story I couldn't have written." Quoted in Don Shirley, "Theater; Healing Apartheid's Wounds; A New South Africa Presents Subtler Yet Still Complex Issues for Examination by Playwrights and Friends Athol Fugard and John Kani," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 2004, E33.

6. The cross-cultural casting of well-known Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) actor Ian Bannen as Morris alongside Mokae as Zach raised the ire of some critics because of the contrast between the RSC-trained syntax of Bannen and the thick South African accent of Mokae. *Evening Standard* critic Milton Shulman also derisively commented that the two men resembled each other "like I resemble Elizabeth Taylor"; Milton Shulman, "New Twist—Old Situation," *Evening Standard* (London), 22 February 1963, 4. Additionally, the length of the play—although heavily cut from its originally four-hour run time—may have been a deterrent to London audiences. Mokae later recalled that during curtain call on opening night of the Hampstead production of *The Blood Knot*, the house was nearly empty; Zakes Mokae, interview with the author, 15 August 2006, Johannesburg, South Africa.

7. Kenneth Tynan, "Under the Influence," *Observer* (London), 24 February 1963.

8. Roger Gellert, "Mates," *New Statesman* (London), 1 March 1963, 315–16.

9. Athol Fugard, notebook entry, 13 May 1963, Fugard MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Also quoted in Athol Fugard, *Notebooks, 1960–1977*, ed. Mary Benson (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), 81.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Athol Fugard, notebook entry, 13 July 1963, Fugard MSS. Also quoted in Fugard, *Notebooks*, 91. The Special Branch interrupted the Serpent Players' first rehearsal and recorded the names of everyone in the room.

12. This incarcerated Serpent Player later staged a one-man version of *Antigone* for the inmates of Robben Island that led indirectly to the premise for Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona's second collaboration, *The Island*.

13. Ntshona, interview with the author.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Athol Fugard, *Statements: Three Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), xi.

16. *Ibid.*, x.

17. Fugard later revisited this situation in his play "*Master Harold*"—and the boys (1982).

18. This tension over which one of them brought the photos into their collaboration reveals their ongoing struggle over the authorship of the play. This issue resurfaces in my 2006 interviews with Kani and Ntshona that I discuss later.

19. Mark Sanders, *Complicities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), x. Subsequent page citations are given parenthetically in the text.

20. Fugard, *Statements*, ix. Subsequent page citations are given parenthetically in the text.

21. *Ibid.*, xi. Fugard's emphasis.

22. *Ibid.*, xii.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Linda Charad, "Kani the Actor without a Script," *Sunday Times* (South Africa), 29 July 1973, 20–1. My emphasis.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Elenore Lester, "I Am in Despair about South Africa," *New York Times*, 1 December 1974, Arts & Leisure §, 165.

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27. David Richards, "Black Actors on Living in South Africa," *Washington [DC] Star*, 31 July 1975, 1.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Charad, 20.
30. *Ibid.*, 20–21. "Banzi" was the original spelling. Its reproduction as "Bansi" was the result of a typographical error in press materials for the Royal Court production. The error appears in many reviews of *Sizwe* from this period. Its appearance in the 1974 Oxford publication of *Sizwe's* script suggests a decision to retain the alternative spelling. This seemingly trivial issue has wide-ranging implications, since "Sizwe Banzi" means "strength of the nation," whereas the alternative spelling does not have the implication of resistance.
31. This view of *Sizwe's* authorship contrasts starkly with Ntshona's statement in a 1986 interview that an Oxford University Press representative told him that he "ought to be grateful that John [Kani] and [Ntshona's] name[s] were even mentioned in the credits. It was obvious . . . that only Athol Fugard could have written such plays." Quoted in Joe Podbrey, "Ntshona—Artist with a Conscience," *Business Day* (London), 2 March 1986, 14.
32. Jean Marquard, "Sizwe Banzi Is Alive and Well," *To the Point* (London), 23 December 1972, 46A.
33. Stephen Gray, interview with the author, 30 August 2006, Johannesburg, South Africa.
34. Marquard.
35. Peter Younghusband, "South Africa: Breaking the Silence," *Newsweek*, 30 April 1973, 21. See also Mary Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon: Bare Stage, A Few Props, Great Theatre* (Randburg, South Africa: Ravan Press, 1997), 103.
36. Quoted in C. Gerald Fraser, "2 Actors Find a Universality in 'Sizwe,'" *New York Times*, 1 April 1975, 29.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Quoted in Richards.
39. Alan Seymour, "Sizwe Banzi Is Dead," *Plays and Players* 21.2 (1973): 51–2.
40. Benedict Nightingale, "Sparks of Life," *New Statesman* (London) 28 September 1973.
41. *Ibid.* Nightingale's statement is racist to the extent that he equates "crudeness" or "looseness" with black people.
42. John Elsom, "Styles and Sizwe," *Listener* (London), 3 January 1974.
43. Betty Trew, "'Sizwe Bansi' a Success on London Stage," *Eastern Province Herald* (Port Elizabeth, South Africa), 21 September 1973, 11. My emphasis.
44. "Separate Fables," *Guardian* (London), 8 January 1974.
45. *Ibid.* The word Bantu, which means "people," has a slightly derogative connotation in South Africa.
46. "Fugard 'Lone Voice,'" *Cape Times* (Cape Town, South Africa), 14 January 1974.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Stephen Gray, *File on Fugard* (London: Methuen, 1991), 43.
49. Benson, 103.
50. "The Fugard Season," *The Stage* (London), 17 January 1974.
51. Alastair Niven, "Athol Fugard in Britain," *Commonwealth Newsletter* 7 (1975), quoted in Stephen Gray, ed., *Athol Fugard* (Johannesburg: McGraw–Hill, 1982), 88. On 25 February 1974, *Sizwe* shared with Christopher Hampton's *Savages* the coveted London Theatre Critics Award for Best Play for the 1973–4 London theatre season.
52. Quoted in Colin Smith, "White Man on a Tightrope," *Observer* (London), 6 January 1974.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Lester.
55. Fraser.
56. Lester.
57. Dennis Walder, *Athol Fugard* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 87.

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58. Athol Fugard, “*Sizwe Banzi is Dead*,” in *A Night at the Theatre*, ed. Ronald Harwood (London: Methuen, 1982), 26–33.
59. Loren Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants, and Publics since 1910* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 161. Kruger’s emphasis.
60. Ibid. Kruger’s emphasis.
61. Phillip Oakes, “The Liberty Man,” *Sunday Times* (London), 7 April 1974. Although Fugard is giving credit to Kani and Ntshona, it should be noted that he refers to them as actors and not as coauthors.
62. Martin Gottfried, “Fugard Copes with Africa,” *New York Post*, 14 November 1974.
63. Clive Barnes, “‘*Sizwe Banzi*’ Is a Message from Africa,” *New York Times*, 14 November 1974, 56.
64. “Black Actors Home after US Success,” *Eastern Province Herald* (Port Elizabeth, South Africa), 22 May 1975. In a 2004 interview, John Kani recalled that not only did the Nationalist government ignore their achievement but the black residents of their home township of New Brighton also resented the actors for their success: “When we came back from America and winning the Tony Award . . . New Brighton was not interested in celebrating the thing at all. We had to organize some small reception at the St. Stephen’s Church Hall [the same location as their performance of *Sizwe* the previous year] and the people just came for the food. They didn’t wait for the speeches about what a Tony Award was. The fact that you had more food than the others—you got resented.” Quoted in Shirley.
65. Bruce Loudon, “Actors Held over Satire on Apartheid,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), 13 October 1976.
66. Quoted in Robert Greig, “Two Black Political Prisoners Leave the Mythical Island and Come to Town,” *The Star Tonight* (Gauteng, South Africa), 22 June 1977, 14. The article interviews Kani and Ntshona about a revival of *The Island* at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg. The eponymous island refers to South Africa’s far-from-mythical Robben Island. Greig may have referred to a “mythical island” because there were laws against referencing Robben Island.
67. Fugard, *Notebooks*, 226.
68. Athol Fugard, notebook entry, January 1977, Fugard MSS. Fugard’s emphasis. This is the second of two passages concerning the 1977 Royal Court revival of *Sizwe*. The first, written during the rehearsal process, spoke of Fugard’s optimism. The second, written after he had returned to South Africa, displayed his disappointment with the production. In Fugard’s published notebooks, however, the two passages are combined in such a manner as to suggest that the opposite was true—that Fugard initially felt wary of mounting the revival but changed his mind as a result of the rehearsal process and embraced the play and its production.
69. Kani mentioned in his interview with me that his passport during the 1980s listed his nationality as “undetermined” because the Nationalist government did not consider him a good ambassador for South Africa.
70. Kani, interview with the author.
71. Athol Fugard, notebook entry, undated, 1985, Fugard MSS.
72. Ibid.
73. “Talking about Culture with John Kani,” *New Nation* (Johannesburg), 10 September 1992.
74. Stephen Nunn, “The Market Turns a Corner: The Revolutionary South African Theatre Is Facing a Complex New Century,” *American Theatre* 24.2 (September 2007): 54–60.
75. Christopher Goodwin, “White Man’s Burden,” *Sunday Times* (London), 23 January 2000. It is important to note that while Fugard has avoided involvement in revivals of his apartheid-era work since the mid-1980s, his postapartheid output of about one play a year has in large part dramatized personal stories of his years as a South African living under the Nationalist government.
76. Kani, interview with the author.
77. Ntshona, interview with the author.
78. Ibid.
79. Quoted in Mpumi Zulu, “Theatre Greats Reunite in Classic,” *Sunday Sun*, 25 June 2006.

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80. Adrienne Sichel, "Theatre of a Lifetime," *Star Tonight*, 3 October 2006.
81. Wilhelm Snyman, "Challenging a Sense of Ourselves, Protest Theatre Transcends Time, Racism and Hatred," *Cape Times*, 18 July 2006.
82. Kani, interview with the author.
83. Ntshona, interview with the author.
84. Kani, interview with the author.
85. Ibid.
86. Ntshona, interview with the author.
87. Kani, interview with the author.
88. Ntshona, interview with the author.
89. Ibid.
90. Kani, interview with the author.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.