

As the body must appear: contemporary performances in post-Marikana South Africa

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On the 16th of August 2012 ³⁴ Lonmin miners lost their lives at Marikana in South Africa. Marikana bears witness to the socio-economic inequality and precarious work and living conditions in South Africa's new globalized state. Two site-specific contemporary performances *Mari and Kana* (2015) and *Iqhiya Emnyama* (*The black cloth*, 2015) voice this sad event in a remarkable way. In this article we critically reflect on the performances' avenues of creating transformative encounters between performers, spectators and the performance sites in South African society. Both performances invoke for the audience members a remarkable awareness of the performance site as the spectator is obliged to navigate him- or herself in a politically induced public landscape in Cape Town's Company Garden. We concur that *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* both elicit a profound reflection on the daily life struggle of mourning women against inhumanity and socio-economic inequality in a neoliberal South Africa. Unsettling the dominant focus on resilient subjects, the omnipresence of women's vulnerability in the two performances nurtures a rethinking process on structural justice. In doing so, we more closely analyse the performances' intention to subvert the constructed category of 'the mourning South African woman' via multiple representations of mourning precedents as cultural elements. We conclude that both performances entail unique driving forces that question existing power systems that impact on SA and the problematic structural injustice at the heart of the massacre.

Key words: Marikana, South Africa, *Inflecting the City*, performance, gender inequality, neoliberalism, widowhood

Introduction

On the 16th of August 2012 thirty-four Lonmin miners lost their lives at Marikana in South Africa. They were killed by the police who – after failed, ignored or impeded negotiations between the striking miners – were assigned by the Lonmin Board of Directors and the mining unions to de-mobilize and dismantle the striking mass present at the Marikana area. The Marikana event, as a traumatic culmination of distorted socio-economic power, demonstrated that South Africa's road to resolving conflict, structural inequality and injustice still remains to be travelled. It demonstrated that organized violence, as it was previously conducted under apartheid, is still operative in the post-apartheid South Africa's globalized state within the context of transnational neoliberalism.

This state of affairs has, in turn, led to numerous theatre makers to take up this shocking event, which is now known as the Marikana massacre.

The site-specific performances *Mari and Kana* (2015) and *Iqhiya Emnyama* (2015), presented at the public arts festival *Infecting the City 2015* in Cape Town at a remarkable distance from the Marikana area, take the Marikana killings as their starting point.

Every South African autumn Cape Town's buzzing city centre is transformed into an art scene through the annual public arts festival, *Infecting the City*. This festival, which welcomed over 50 productions and 290 artists in March 2015, is praised for its efforts to democratize art via a well-considered multifarious programme and wide-reaching audience scope. From its earliest edition in 2008, at that time organised and curated by Jay Pather and Brett Bailey, the festival invited an equal number of artists from the inner city of Cape Town and artists from the surrounding townships to participate. As all productions are free, (semi-)public and take place in the heart of Cape Town, the festival attracts a very heterogeneous audience varying from artists to students, tourists to beggars. Only 19% of the festival's artists are international guests. In this respect, a significant number of performances at the festival are anchored in a contemporary South Africa, generating critical debate among myriad multi-cultural voices each year.

Mari and Kana is a production of South African theatre maker Mandisi Sindo and his company Theatre4Change Therapeutic Theatre (T3) in close collaboration with the company Lingua Franca Spoken Word movement, based in the township Khayelitsha. On the playbill of *Infecting the City 2015*, *Mari and Kana* is announced as a journey of two young men who provisionally leave prison to attend a Xhosa ceremony around the graves of their fathers. In line with Sindo's theatre oeuvre, *Mari and Kana* combines elements of traditional Xhosa ritual, contemporary dance, opera, poetry, live percussion and visual imagery (Fleishman & Pather, 2014). *Iqhiya Emnyama*, a performance that premiered at *Infecting the City 2015*, was created by Cindy Mkaza-Siboto, a director who specializes in physical theatre, storytelling and object theatre. As a performative exploration of grief, *Iqhiya Emnyama* (Xhosa for black cloth or doekie in Afrikaans) draws attention to the relation between the mourning widow and the black headdress.

This essay offers a reflection on the particular potential of the performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* to question existing power systems and problematic structural injustice, at the heart of the Marikana massacre and the world we live in.

The reflection opens with a thick description of the performances, as experienced during the *Infecting the City* festival in 2015. Next, in a first part, patterns of inequality at the backdrop of neoliberalism in post-apartheid South Africa are outlined and the affinity of the actual South African government with the neo-liberal body of thought is unpacked. We then zoom in on 'the strategic memory' produced by the government in response to the Marikana massacre. In a second part we analyse the performances' aesthetics with regard to their political imperatives, and investigate how they face and challenge racial, spatial and gender-based patterns of inequality against the backdrop of neoliberalism in post-apartheid South Africa. We investigate how both performances provide an opportunity for a participatory and reflective encounter between audience members, the per-

formance site and the performers, creating a ritual of mourning and grief in a politically burdened landscape. By the enabling of a public act of mourning, the performances seem to subvert the hierarchy of grievability and hence, pose a challenge to political authority. Furthermore, we highlight the feminine identity of the main performers in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*. Both performances put an emphasis on the ones who were left behind after the media had moved on, the commission's report was published and the strikers went back to work: the widows of the 34 killed Lonmin miners. We connect the focus of the performances on the individual bodily daily practices of women with the dismantling of the dominant, mediatised discourse of commemoration of the Marikana killings, which focussed on the masculine, violent and 'tragic' nature of the event. In this respect, we explore the omnipresence of feminine vulnerability in the two performances as a nurturing process to rethink structural justice. Starting from an analysis of the concept of resilience that might become, under neo-liberalism, a fetishized coping mechanism, we unravel the resistance of the mourning women against resilience in both performances. In addition to these seeds of resistance, we analyse the staged mourning women, the main performers, in relation to the dominant role of widows in South African cultures as both performances enact alternative identities in public space. We conclude that both performances elicit a critical reflection on the value of representing the daily life struggle of the mourning women against ongoing inhumanity and socio-economic inequality in the 'new' South Africa.

Mourning in the Company Garden

On the evening of the festival performances of *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, one of the first things the audience notice is the transformation of the Company Garden into a graveyard with small white crosses. Via their inherent religious character, these crosses mark the scene of the public performance *Mari and Kana*. The expanding audience, searching for a seat around an absent stage, remains at a respectful distance from the graves. Referring to the widespread image of the graveyard at Wonderkop Koppie (the rocky hill where the strikers gathered), these white crosses install a distinctive atmosphere. Words such as 'mineworkers' and 'Marikana' are whispered throughout the gathered crowd and some people explicitly request silence. This graveyard-scene seems to produce an instantly respectful attitude and stimulates emotional dynamics.

As soon as the audience has gathered around the graveyard, two musicians in working clothes start to play a repetitive tune. One does not realize the impact of the hypnotizing sound until a drum briefly slips out of the musician's hand and the beat is interrupted. This haunting soundscape will last throughout the performance, strengthened by the voices of two female choir members carrying white umbrellas. Suddenly a car drives up and two policemen roughly drag two young prisoners on stage and remove their handcuffs. Although the presence of the policemen and the men in orange prison suits is impressive, our attention is continuously drawn to two women near to the audience. Sitting with legs stretched on the gravel, with downcast eyes, these women slowly perform a dance of simple mourning gestures. They light a small fire at a cross and then walk

around and pray alongside the cross. The prayer gestures enlarge and become expressive movements of despair. Combined with a heart-breaking lament and a mirrored dance by the two young prisoners in the background, the performance becomes a choreography of pain and grief.

The roles of mothers and sons are clarified through the interactions between the women and the men. The two sons called *Mari and Kana* hold their mothers during their lament while the mothers hold their sons in an attempt to bath them. In contrast to the women, the two young men also challenge each other physically through a play-fight in bare torso. Only once do they arrange themselves all in one line, alternating gestures of grief with a military mark time step.

Every movement is enriched by the continuous singing of the choir. The lament is interrupted by poetry fragments and exclamations of the real names of the dead Marikana mineworkers. When the song *Vuka Mntomnyana* (translated as “Wake up Blackman”) softens and the dark night falls over the Garden, the audience realizes the performance is over, though, the presence of the remaining white crosses and the indelible sounds maintain the performance’s affect long after the applause.

Subsequently, a festival guide invites the spectators to move on to the next performance in the Company Garden. Following a video work and a performance of two comedians, three women, almost unnoticeable, appear in the audience. They stand out due to their long black clothes, similar to the clothes worn by the women in *Mari and Kana*. These women drag along a big mattress and slowly make their way through the crowd. The crowd, still shaking with laughter from the previous comic cabaret-show, swarms extensively and noisily around the silent women. The women, however, keep their slow pace and serene expressions, walking perfectly in line down to the Government Avenue. When the women meet a fourth woman with a mattress and a seated fifth performer, who plays traditional Xhosa instruments, the spectators understand that they have reached the site of the last performance of that evening, entitled *Iqhiya Emnyama*. The audience finds a standing or seating position. The four women place themselves in the middle of the crowd and lay down their mattresses. What follows is the presentation of visually associated fragments of mourning customs. The women cover themselves in black clothes and cloths and sit in frozen poses on the piled mattresses. They circle around the mattresses and use the mattresses as walls of an improvised house. Daily customs such as making a lunchbox and drinking tea are combined with abstract gestures of pain, despair and disgust. The women sing, cry and loudly shout out their pain. Finally, they rip off their black cloths and take off their shoes followed by a re-enactment of a protest march on the mattresses. At the end, the repeated words “A piece of me died that night” announce a burial ritual, in which the performers invite the audience to participate. A prayer song is initiated, immediately responded to by the audience singing along. With this song the full-evening program in the Company Garden ends.

In sum, the spectator at *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* co-creates with the performers rituals of mourning and grief. Before we analyse in the following section the performances' aesthetics in regard to their political imperatives, the affinity of the actual South African government with the neoliberal body of thought needs to be unpacked.

Neoliberalism in (post-apartheid) South Africa

Although South Africa is officially classified as a middle-income and post-apartheid country, patterns of inequality remain distinctive products of the modestly growing economy (Marais, 2011). Against the backdrop of remaining socio-economic inequalities since the official end of apartheid in 1994, scholars have pointed to the government's uncritical embrace of neoliberal economic policies and its further integration of the South African state into the global economy, which undermines the developmental aspirations for poverty reduction (Satgar, 2012). Like this, the post-apartheid economic policies consolidated the offspring of the apartheid regime and its neoliberal body of thought.

Critics have argued that the transition towards a post-apartheid state favoured a small new ruling black elite and the old beneficiaries of the apartheid regime as after 1994 "they were cementing their alliance with the corporate raiders in the advanced capitalist world" (Desai, 2003). At the heart of governmental economic policy, profound contradictions are found. On the one hand the ANC's revolutionary principles and responsibility towards the poor and the working class are reflected in the pro-poor social programs and 'The New Growth Path Framework'. On the other hand, the ANC government permitted massive capital flight that has increased significantly since the end of apartheid, maintained high interest rates and cut the budget deficit (Ashman, Fine, & Newman, 2011). A loss of capital leads to a loss of investments, which in its turn influences the unemployment and inequality levels and "the ongoing failure to confront the legacy of the apartheid past" (Ashman et al., 2011: 23). Although the above mentioned policy choices in the post-apartheid era have shored up a neoliberal economic orthodoxy in South Africa, Marais (2011) highlights the importance of capturing neoliberalism within a global unified class project that refers to "the systematic use of state power to recompose the rule of capital in economic and social life" and strengthens "the supremacy of the ruling class" (134).

After the end of apartheid, South Africa was integrated into the global economy primarily as a mining exporter heavily reliant on foreign capital inflows (Jacobs, 2009). Pro-capitalist economic policies further subjected the South African mining industry to the rule of transnational capital and free markets. As part of a global economy, South Africa must meet the need for flexibility in work conditions. Since the democratic transition, employment has for example shifted dramatically from direct to third party employment and from life-long towards temporary employment (Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu, 2011; Chinguno, 2013). To maximize profit and minimize risks, mining work has become increasingly fragmented paving the way for precarious work conditions. Furthermore, by stimulating contract employment and third party employment, solidarity among union organisations and labour movements that fight against exploitation are being weakened

(Alexander, 2013). The precariousness of the miners' working conditions is mirrored by their poor living conditions in the informal settings where a myriad of the miners live. The informal settings are characterized by a lack of basic facilities such as running water and electricity, and a lack of safety. The multinational Lonmin Company, the third largest producer of platinum in the world, acknowledged that a great number of the surrounding inhabitants of its mines live in informal settings. Specifically in Rustenburg, a municipality area located 100 km from Johannesburg, the so called "hub of the world platinum mining production" (Chinguno, 2013: 641), formal housing of the mining communities has even decreased from 47 to 42% between 2001 and 2007 (Rustenburg in Chinguno, 2013), underlining the precarious conditions the workforce faces.

Strategic mourning

After August 2012, the above-mentioned words 'Lonmin' and 'Rustenburg' cannot be spoken without referring to the miners' strike at Marikana. The strike resulted in the largest state massacre of South African citizens since the Soweto Uprising in 1976 (Alexander, Sinwell, Lekgowa, Mmope, & Xezwi, 2013). The state police brutality and gunfire were without a doubt the immediate cause of the loss of 34 striking mineworkers on 16 August 2012. Nonetheless, critics have fundamentally questioned the objectivity of NUM (the National Union of Mineworkers) and its collaboration with Lonmin's management (Alexander, 2013), as well as the final responsibility of the government in this horrific event during the strikes that preceded the massacre on the 16th of August. The initial demand of the workers was a simple request to open up a reliable dialogue for a decent wage. However, on this point, their claims immediately ran up against the stonewalling of the NUM, which in turn underscored the violence used against the striking miners. A mineworker testifies: "When the NUM saw us approaching its offices it didn't even ask, it just opened bullets on the workers," (Alexander, 2013: 33). Although pre-massacre violence was unquestionably present on both sides, only the unruly strikers were portrayed and commemorated as responsible violent actors in the media (Alexander et al., 2013). As Alexander et al., (2013) observe: "The consciousness of South Africans and others has been scarred by media footage that makes it seem like strikers were charging the police, and defending themselves against savages" (Alexander, 2013: 16). This discourse was followed by the heavy presence of military and police at Marikana while the government openly assured international investors that mining investments in South Africa are very secure. According to Satgar (2012), "The Marikana massacre affirms this reality and the willingness of ruling elites to go beyond market mechanisms to the point that state violence is utilised to maintain and manage a deeply globalised economy" (57).

A locus of thoughtful concern in this essay is the so-called "strategic memory" induced by the government and media. It is arguable that the role of "a particular purpose as part of a strategic political project" (Thompson, 2009: 98) is profoundly apparent in the government's reaction to the massacre. The following words derive from President Zuma's statement on the Marikana events on the 17th of August 2012: "However, today is not an occasion for blame, finger-pointing or recrimination. (...) as I said, this is not a day to apportion blame. It is a day for us to mourn together as a nation." (Zuma, 2012).

The government's first reaction to the Marikana massacre involved two practices that are here considered as components of strategic memory and forgetting: the enforcement of one week of silent mourning and the formation of the Marikana Commission of Inquiry. By these measures, the government seemed to instantly create a vacuum of alternatives and responsibilities to construct a suitable "narrative" (Thompson, 2009: 98). In the wake of Marikana the South African government strongly repudiated any comparison with analogous massacres from the apartheid era. Still, haunting images from the past spread like wildfire; images of "singing protesters dancing in the faces of uniformed, well-armed police, followed by shots and slowly settling dust" (Magaziner & Jacobs, 2013: 138). More importantly, the government seemed to ignore clear comparisons to significant events such as the Soweto Uprising and Sharpeville massacre, ubiquitous on social media, and to the continuous historical economic struggles that resulted in massive labourers' strikes in the 20th century (Buitendag & Coetzer, 2015).

Instead, the official narrative has a tendency to reduce the massacre to a tragedy that should simply be mourned on all sides, rather than a 'massacre' (Alexander, 2013). This rhetoric seems to restrict the event to an act of nature comparable to a tornado or a hurricane (Fogel, 2014). In the aftermath of Marikana 270 mineworkers were initially charged with murder. In 2015, three years after the massacre, president Zuma responded to a student's question about the use of violence as follows: "Those people in Marikana had killed people and the police were stopping them from killing people." (Brock, 2015). Even years later and after the official report of the commission was published, the initial strategic image of the violent mineworker becomes continuously reinforced by the government in its unrelenting focus on the clash between the police and the violent mineworkers. This kind of strategic remembering and forgetting does not touch upon the continuous struggle that the remaining mineworkers and the families of the dead miners undergo.

In contemporary South African political life, this strategic narrative and its specific mechanisms of power reveal the attempts to achieve a "differential distribution of grievability" (Butler, 2009: 24) in public life. Butler shines a light on grievability as a fundamental presupposition for a life or subject that matters: "Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed" (Butler, 2004: xviii). The dominant public representation of Marikana and their miners reproduces and regulates the events in such a way that the population tends to remain ungrievable.

Sharing mourning in a co-transformed public space

Mari and Kana and *Iqhiya Emnyama* challenge this dominant strategic memory practice. Both performances unsettle and interrogate politically-induced conditions of grievability by creating a public grieving ritual that encourages audience members to bodily engage and participate in grieving with representatives of the communities involved. In the spirit of Antigone's public mourning for her brother, the widows of the Marikana

miners in both performances chose to grieve the death of their husbands openly, highlighting the fraught nature of hierarchy in grievability. Reacting to the highly controlled regimes of power, the widows' open grieving designates expressions of outrage. Butler (2009) allocates political potential in the disruptive character of the act of public mourning itself as it troubles the order and hierarchy of political authority. Both performances as performative public mourning rituals in the Company Garden shape such interventions into the actual debate on the Marikana massacre. The disruptive character is complicated further as the boundaries between reality and fiction in the performances are blurred.



Figure 1: *Mari and Kana* by Mandisi Sindo at *Infecting The City* 2015, produced by the Africa Centre © Oscar O’Ryan.

Encountering the naturalistic set-up of the crosses and the haunting soundscape, from the very start the audience in *Mari and Kana* is absorbed into the emotional journey of the performers even before their appearance. In the beginning, the dramatis personae of the dead mineworkers, the fathers of the prisoners, are the only ones present. These two static figures with white-painted faces form an immobile part of the performance’s backdrop throughout the performance. Their particular presence generates a peculiar tension as these figures operate as both the spirits of the people mourned during the staged ritual and as vibrant characters on scene. This tension, climaxing in the calling

out of the real names of the lost mineworkers, seems to facilitate the audiences' engagement with the intended ritual of grieving and incorporates the lack of a definitive closure of grief due to unanswered questions. Accordingly, Thompson (2009) notes that "rather than taming the past in a strategic project, performance can maintain its difficultness, its incompleteness, in the present" (107).

Various sensory ritual mourning acts are performed, such as, for example, the women blowing ash over the crosses. However, the intended ritual is primarily created by the incredible energetic bodies of the performers. Their close-up and at times explosive bodily expressions of grief, enveloped by the non-stop singing, continuously contribute to the creation of a shared emotional state of despair. Moreover, it facilitates our being able to grieve the dead, and thus acknowledge their worth as South African citizens. In contrast to the government, which strategically plays upon grief as a tool for closure, these performances display an ongoing harmful grief that seems to unite, even beyond every particular horrific event, the gathered mourners.

Similarly, in *Iqhiya Emnyama* the ritual is shaped and legitimized by an intended and literal sharing of grief. As Mkaza-Siboto elucidates in an interview: "I wanted to orchestrate a ritual for the public to be able to participate in the mourning, because not all of us could afford to go the place of the massacre or the funeral" (Mkaza-Siboto, 2015). Through the highly mediatized circulation of an image of a striking Marikana mine-worker in a green blanket, the mine workers of Marikana have been strongly associated with this item. The green blanket used in *Iqhiya Emnyama* is, thus, a theatrical object that personifies the mine workers and a supportive and highly symbolic element in the performance, which marks the performer as a mineworker. Further in the performance the blanket also transforms into the object of murder itself – as it is cut into pieces. The blanket remains visible throughout the performance and in this regard, the audience and the performers continue to share the focal point of their grieving. Furthermore, the slow and repetitive sound, mostly produced by a single traditional Xhosa instrument, generates an effect of shared trance in one enclosed auditory cosmos. In contrast, the urgent rhythms and the energetic crying of the women are accompanied by a dramatic howling wind. This fortuitous wind not only dramatizes the grief, it also seems to authenticate it and deepen the uniqueness of the moment of sharing. The wind underlines the temporal character of the performance, the consciousness of the ephemeral and unique shared presence of the performers, spectators and surroundings. At the end of the performance, this sharing is consolidated when some audience members are asked to engage in a burial ritual and throw earth on the grave portrayed by the torn green blanket. As the first tones of a prayer meeting song are launched, a number of spectators start to sing along, roar out 'amen', clap and dance. Some of them close their eyes and others fold their hands or embrace the persons nearby. Through these actions the performance calls for corporeal co-presence, a responsiveness and performativity on behalf of the spectator, and consequently a sharing of the mourning ritual, blurring constructed performance and lived ritual. Moreover, throughout the performance *Iqhiya Emnyama* the spectator is standing, sitting and walking together with the performers in the Company Garden. In this respect, the full

participation of the spectator's body "allows for a heightened receptiveness to corporeal responses" (Stalpaert, forthcoming) and provides the spectator with a "subliminal element of performativity" (Bal, 2002: 209).

This challenge for the spectator/participant in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* to reflect physically and conceptually, takes place, above all, in a politically-charged urban landscape. Both performances are presented in the Company Garden, a leisure park in the centre of Cape Town known for its impressive old trees and its authentic urban character, combining rushing businessmen with tourists, curious squirrels and exercising soldiers. The title 'Company Garden' entails, quite obvious, the loaded history of the park. In short: the garden was established on behalf of the Dutch East India Company in 1652, to supply fresh food for the sailors on their long travels between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies. Two decades later it was reshaped into a Dutch pleasure garden, and in the late 18th century restyled according Victorian sensibilities, as the British took over,

Temporarily transforming a historical site such as the Company Garden into a place of performance does imply a striking transformation of the relation between the spectators and that site. The audience's awareness of the site is continuously increased in both performances as the spectator is invited to participate, to make choices, to react and respond. The embodied encounter with the site in which the spectator is activated as a "co-creator of meaning" (Duggan, 2013: 152), promotes awareness and "responsibility" (Lehmann, 2006) to the political significance beyond the performance. Through the temporary transformation of the Company Garden into a place of performance, the spectator becomes part of a transcendental world. Hunter (2015) argues that through such a process of transcendence, the spectator's "present-ness" is even more developed "in a world in which the rules of engagement and behaviour are momentarily disrupted enabling a freeing-up of behaviours, actions and possible interventions" (185).

Furthermore, in *Mari and Kana*, the audience encounters the widows and the spirits of miners precisely in front of the Iziko South African Museum. Although the museum is never directly highlighted by performative interactions or technical effects, its presence is of primary importance. As the spectators watch the mourning women and hear the echoing of the real mineworkers' names, the museum remains immovably present. The museum itself is strongly associated with its exhibition of the Bushmen, the indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa which reduced them to "physical types" of a "primitive race" (Davison, 1998: 143). In this respect, the site of the South African Museum carries its history with it as an "animating absence in the present" (Butler, 2003: 473) and continues to embody the realm of social injustice during apartheid and beyond. Essentially, the spectator as political witness feels "exactly what it is to be in this place at this time" (Etchells, 1999: 18). The audience members are obliged to navigate this political landscape, in which the museum assumes responsibility as a third actor and a "governmental advocate" (de Smet, Breyne, & Stalpaert, 2015).

At the start of *Iqhiya Emnyama* the audience is positioned as active pedestrians on the Government Avenue. Once the audience has eventually arrived at the venue of the per-

formance, each individual finds himself between the performing women and the South African Parliament. “We are literally bringing our baggage in front of the parliament, and they have to deal with it”, explains director Mkaza-Siboto (2015). The audience’s attention is irrevocably directed towards the government and its ambiguous position in the Marikana massacre – a position that is neither clarified nor purified by the delayed publication of the investigative report of the Inquiry Commission of Marikana. The spectators function in the site-world as the physical joints between the performance and the parliament. Consequently, they are called upon to act and respond while assuming responsibility as South African citizens and, moreover, agents of social justice. In sum, both performances deliberately stimulate the audience members to reflect on what they see, hear and do in relationship to their experiences in the (political) world.

In what follows, we would like to highlight that these spaces in both performances are most importantly created through the presence of performing women, the ones who are left behind at Marikana trying to survive and continue their lives under disastrous economic conditions. In this regard, the performances tackle the particularly problematic, gendered dimensions of the Marikana massacre and entail remarkable messages in gendered-subtext within a general neoliberal discourse. The performance sites could be considered as “invented spaces” defined by Miraftab (2014) as “the spaces occupied by the grassroots that confront the authorities and the status quo, in the hope for a larger societal change” (1). Miraftab considers these spaces as a necessary refinement of the feminist project of citizenship. Due to a neoliberal appropriation of the discourse on civil society, feminist concepts of informal politics tended to focus solely on its separation from formal politics and not on the inherent potential of an informal arena to challenge existing structures and authorities.

Afterwards: Post-Marikana resistance to resilience

In the words of a Marikana widow:

“Actually, who ordered the police to kill our husbands, was it Lonmin? Or, was it the government that signed that the police must kill our husbands? Today I am called a widow and my children are called fatherless because of the police. I blame the mine, the police and the government because they are the ones who control this country. (...) Our future is no more and I feel very hopeless because I do not know who will educate my children. My husband never made us suffer. He was always providing for us. The government has promised us that they will support us for three months with groceries, but they only gave us three things: 12.5 kg of mealie meal, 12.5 kg of flour and 12.5 kg of samp. That’s it.” (quoted in Alexander et al., 2013: 20)

This testimony illustrates the disastrous conditions of the households of the Marikana widows. *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* focus specifically on this daily life struggle in the aftermath. This performative struggle is however not represented by resilient subjects, but by genuinely vulnerable subjects. The ethos of resilience as part of the moral code for neoliberal subjects has been hotly debated in the last decade in the social sciences (Bracke, 2016; Neocleous, 2013). This criticism calls into question how resilience

might divert the attention from state intervention and how it might be (ab)used in policy thinking by focusing on individual adaptation to adversity (Garrett, 2015; Harrison, 2013). At the price of denying vulnerability, the ubiquity of the strong support for resilient subjects that “act as rational agents within market-governed contexts” and are “capable of organizing their collective well-being” (Marais, 2011: 222) hides a neoliberal undertone. Resilience implicitly suggests acceptance, endorsement, and the fact that “there is no alternative” (Neocleous, 2013: 4). In the context of the Marikana massacre, we denote such a lack of alternative in the dominant tendency to reduce the massacre to a tragedy. In the president’s statement on Marikana we perceive a strong collective exhortation towards “overcoming” such challenges as the South African society did in the past in order to uphold the nation’s progress:

“We have gone through painful moments before, and were able to overcome such challenges through coming together as a nation, regardless of race, colour, creed or political affiliations. We must use that national trait again during this difficult period. Most importantly, we will not be derailed from the progress we have made as a country since 1994. We will continue with our task of consolidating our hard-won freedom and democracy. And we will continue working tirelessly, to build a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa.” (Zuma, 2012).

The tendency to over-emphasize resilience in an afro-neoliberal economy such as South Africa undermines the possibility of substantial transformation while the statistics cry out for more inherent re-thinking of social relationships in the ANC-guided neoliberal discourse. Marais (2011) has referred to this ubiquity of resilience in the South African state as the “the fetish of coping” (221). In fact, he denotes an additional profound quandary demonstrated in the contradictory fusion of Ubuntu and neoliberalism. Ubuntu as an African philosophical concept, calls for human principles of communitarianism, mutual assistance, and obligation based on the bonding sense of a shared humanity and wholeness. The concept became an indispensable symbol of identification for the new South Africa in the light of a united rainbow nation during the reconciliation discourse and even more in the post-Mandela era (Verdoolaege, 2008).

As respect for human dignity, solidarity, restoration and justice are values preached by Ubuntu, it incorporates the rudimentary conditions for community-level resilience. Through continuous privatization, the state removes itself from responsibility for social life, which becomes increasingly subordinate to market forces. This discourse contrasts to the resilience and perseverance of the altruistic Ubuntu community that takes responsibility in order that households will survive. Marais (2011) observes that “the home- and community-based care system, for instance, fits snugly in the mould of coping dogma – not least in the central roles assigned to the sphere of the home (and to women within it)” (223). According to Marais, the female resilient subject in particular, active in South African society and specifically in a post-Marikana society, continues to practice the oxymoron of successful coping strategies as she restores continuously “a parlous and chronically insecure state of household ‘viability’” (Marais, 2011: 221) that however cannot be considered as a success story. International analyses have not been silent on the particularly

problematic, gendered dimensions of the costs of resilience at the level of the household carried out by women within the families. Those costs of resilience in the form of domestic labour, unpaid work and the work of social reproduction are being “rendered invisible and compounded over time” (Harrison, 2013: 99). The widows of Marikana increasingly meet the demands of coping with the direct and indirect consequences of the neoliberal mind-set of ‘flexicurity’. Bracke has defined this as post-feminist resilience (Bracke, 2016).

However, in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* the spectator is not confronted with the fetish of coping. On the contrary, the two South African performances entail remarkable messages in gendered-subtext by eliciting a reflection on the value of representing the daily life struggle of the mourning women against inhumanity and socio-economic inequality in a new neoliberal South Africa. Furthermore, they explicitly expunge a denial of vulnerability. Therefore, they foreground issues such as grief and loss as “the fundamental sociality of embodied life” (Butler, 2004: 28). The mourning of the mother figures in *Mari and Kana* is expressed in the choreography, physicality, and musicality. They throw their heads back and look up, turn their hand palms towards the sky, fall on their knees, bow, reach their hands towards the crosses. These everyday “sedimented acts” of mourning reflect “a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (Butler, 1988: 39-40; Le Roy, 2012).

Critics argue that through its de-politicizing effects, resilience undermines every expression of resistance and stimulation of state responsibility and, hence, undermines a re-evaluation and re-conceptualisation of the given world (Bracke, 2016; Mohaupt, 2009). The transformative power of accepting vulnerability lies exactly in the generation of such a rethinking process as “vulnerability suggests moral responsibilities for those in positions of power towards those who are less powerful” (Harrison, 2013: 110). The focus on the intensive grief and loss expressed by the women in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* can involve such a point of departure to re-think another world and “critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others” (Butler, 2004: 30). In this respect, by calling for resistance to resilience, *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* re-politicize both the Marikana massacre itself and the precarious social arrangements of the mourning women that demand the responsibility and interrogation of politically infused power systems and structural arrangements. In conclusion, they both provide an alternative and ambiguous approach to resilient subjects and call for resistance to resilience expressed by embodied daily practices of mourning and grief. This embodied aesthetics of vulnerability moves beyond reassuring the known and familiar but instead “pleads in favour of a logic of sensation that forces the spectator to think the yet unthought, to move beyond the solid ground of common sense and recognition” (Stalpaert, 2015: 67).



Figure 2: *Mari and Kana* by Mandisi Sindo at *Infecting The City* 2015, produced by the Africa Centre © Oscar O’Ryan.

South African widowhood

Globally seen, widows are often condemned to financially precarious living conditions due to “discrimination in matters of inheritance, land and property right” (Owen, 2001: 618). In addition to this economic impoverishment, widows in diverse South African cultures are confronted with a cultural burden as widowhood, within these particular cultures, involves more than merely the loss of a husband. It differs strongly from widowhood in which widowers find themselves in a “transient phase” while widows occupy a “liminal status” (Ramphela, 1996: 100). A widower is always reminded that he should and can be strong. In contrast to widowers, widows and their “relatively frail body” (Ramphela, 1996: 103) are primarily present to give meaning to the deceased man’s body. Considered as still being married to her deceased man, the widow stays in an ambiguous state characterised by impurity and negative beliefs. A widow is said to possess negative spirits and even to embody the cause of her own man’s death (Manala, 2015). Hence, this liminal status is expressed in variable and often ritualized customs in which the widow’s body is turned into a focal point. A widow is supposed to eat with one hand, to wear only

one shoe and to shave her head. She is prohibited from leaving the house and participating in public ceremonies (Ramphele, 1996).

Scholars have acknowledged the beneficial effect of these often ritualized customs as it heals grief (Makatu, Wagner, & Ruane, 2008; Nowye, 2005), removes bad luck or *senyama*, and consequently facilitates the integration of the widow within the community (Manala, 2015). Yet, analysing the treatment of these South African widows in the light of the Ubuntu principles of community, Manala (2015) points out that these customs are also “deliberate uncaring, disrespectful, discriminatory, impolite and unjust” (1). According to Manala’s fieldwork in South Africa, many widows feel encouraged by the internal and external support systems. Despite this support, he also mentions feelings of isolation and stress due to the stigmatisation of widowhood and customs imposed by society. Manala concludes that widowhood in Africa is an “extremely difficult and problematic stage in women’s lives” (Manala, 2015: 4).

The performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* choose to stage the unsettling stories of the widows of the Marikana massacre. Consequently, they explore the role of these South African mourning women countering a neoliberal discourse that possesses a deceptive force of encapsulation. Beyond providing a critical approach toward the coping fetish in the context of structural vulnerability and social inequality, the performances elicit, through a focus on the individual daily practice of the widows, a reflection on the value and feasibility of representing the daily life struggle of these women and the culturally stipulated aspect of their lives as widows.

It is most probable that the widows of the Marikana massacre form a combination of South African cultures, though both performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, choose to focus on mourning signifiers that refer to the daily life of a woman inhabiting the Xhosa culture. The black clothes and headscarves immediately distinguish the female performers from the audience and define them as widows. In *Iqhiya Emnyama* the dragged mattresses, central objects in the performance, refer to the domestic space to which a widow is restricted during her mourning period. Further on, the repetitive flat handed face wiping and the constructed silent poses of the women, recalling photographs, remind the audience of the public silence these widows are supposed to maintain.

Certainly, in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, the mourning women are manifestly symbolized through the customs of widowhood in Xhosa culture. But, through displaying a rupture within these customs, the performances also further the emerging criticism of these customs and question their legitimacy. Both performances present widows who share their grief publically in the midst of what seems their mourning period. Before, we mentioned how widows may suffer from isolation due to the stigmatization of widowhood. “I must just stay at home, it means I am in prison. I am not supposed to visit any house and I cannot talk to people” (Manyedi, Koen, & Greeff, 2003: 78). This isolation of the widows heightens the feeling of imprisonment especially because of the expulsion from their own community in the name of cultural beliefs (Manyedi et al., 2003). By staging the widows in public as mature actors, *Iqhiya Emnyama* and *Mari and Kana* challenge the cultural value of separation and isolation.

Moreover, *Iqhiya Emnyama* questions specifically the use of the black cloth. In current debates, the black cloth has been contested as a patriarchal construct of womanhood (Ngubane, 2015) along with the restriction of the women to the domestic sphere. In the middle of *Iqhiya Emnyama* the widows rip off their black clothes and confidently perform the ‘toyi toyi’, a marching dance often performed in political protests. In this context, Mkaza-Siboto (2015) refers to the ground-breaking act of Graça Machel who spoke in public during her mourning period: “Machel was convinced that people needed her voice. So she spoke up. This is exactly what happens in *Iqhiya Emnyama*. These women navigate in the situation in which they are present”.

The mattresses are easily interpreted by the spectator as a readable denotation of the mourning’s domestic field. The performance starts with static sitting poses of the performers on the mattresses. Despite this obvious feature of the mattresses, the spectator’s construction of the meaning of this object and its suggested cultural custom is destabilized as the spectator witnesses the emotionless facial expressions and robotized shifts of the performers’ poses on the mattresses. The mattresses continue to represent performative objects that playfully shift meaning throughout the performance: The mattresses function as the walls of a house, as personifications of the lovers the widows dance with and make love to. But they also represent the government whose passive stance causes the widows to rebel. The latter is visualized by running and jumping on the mattresses. As these mourning protocols are staged in multiple ways, *Iqhiya Emnyama* challenges the cultural elements that identify the mourning widow. Therefore, during the performance the constructed identity of the widows is revised. As the image of the widow is dislocated and consequently defamiliarized, it can invoke “uncomfortable parallels or fresh interpretations” (Flockeman, 2013: 415).



Figure 3: *Iqhiya Emnyama – The Black Cloth* by Cindy Mkaza-Siboto at *Infecting The City* 2015, produced by the Africa Centre © Oscar O’Ryan.

Both performances, *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* show revised traditional mourning customs and play with cultural and spectators' expectations. Hence, they both enact alternative identities in a public space and facilitate a "politics of recognition" in "which the audience can recognize the humanity of the performers", more than the social construct of their widowhood (Sutherland, 2015: 73). This recognition not only produces a potential effect on the personal and social identity of the performers as widows, but it also has political repercussions. Under Butler's assertion, "for politics to take place, the body must appear" (Butler, 2011: 3), these performances provide opportunities for intrinsic mutual processes of recognition between the spectator and the performer and for this space to become political.

Acknowledgements

This publication is part of a research project supported by a joint research between the National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa, and the Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (FWO) of Flanders, Belgium, and by the Special Research Fund (BOF) of Ghent University. A previous edition was published in the framework of the special issue "Leveraging Justice" under editorship of Janelle Reinelt and María Estrada-Fuentes as: de Smet, S., & Breyne, M. (2016). A day for us to mourn: Unsettling performative encounters in remembrance of Marikana. *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association*, 5.2 <http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-2/day-us-mourn-unsettling-performances-marikana-de-smet-breyne/>

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