



KING'S THE STAND: DWELLING NECROPOLITICS IN PANDEMIC'S LEGACY

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Abstract: This research examines Stephen King's *The Stand* through the lens of Achille Mbembe's necropolitics and the pandemic narrative approach, analyzing how the novel portrays a pandemic as a state of siege. The research reveals that the pandemic in *The Stand* serves not only as a source of fear and societal disruption, highlighting human mortality and the fragility of social structures, but also as a catalyst for necropolitical governance, where sovereignty operates through the control of life and death, utilizing fear to maintain dominance. Utilizing a qualitative methodology focused on character interactions, control mechanisms, and depictions of death, the research demonstrates how the post-pandemic landscape in the novel reflects a slow social and political death, alongside physical demise. Additionally, this work implicates King's negotiation of humanity as an aspiration for peace, effectively neutralizing the pervasive fear of necropolitical implementation during a pandemic, as perceived at the time of the novel's release.

Keywords: *necropolitics; state; pandemic; Achille Mbembe; The Stand.*

INTRODUCTION

Pandemics have long served as critical junctures in human history, highlighting the vulnerabilities of socio-political systems and exposing deep-seated inequalities (Ceylan, 2022; Fukuyama, 2024). In the realm of literature, pandemics function not only as biological events but as transformative forces that reshape societies, revealing the complex dynamics of governance, authority, and control (Lupton, 2024). Through the lens of fiction, pandemics become a powerful tool for exploring human survival, the regulation of life, and the management of death. Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) stands as a seminal example of how a post-pandemic world can be depicted as a site for the contestation of power and authority. The novel not only portrays a global pandemic that devastates the human population but also presents a bifurcation into two competing societal models, each characterized by different forms of governance, morality, and violence. As a post-apocalyptic narrative, *The Stand* offers an intricate exploration of

governance under crisis, particularly focusing on how societies navigate the politics of exclusion, survival, and death.

While previous scholarship on *The Stand* has explored its religious themes, particularly the dichotomy between good and evil, there has been an increasing shift toward political readings. Early critiques of the novel often centered on its moral allegories, with Ghatak (2021) suggesting that the narrative mirrors Christian eschatological themes, positioning Randall Flagg as a figure of chaos and the Boulder Free Zone as a symbol of righteous order. Similarly, Ali, Pabur, and Wuntu (2023) highlight the novel's connection to broader dystopian traditions, noting its reflection of concerns over the erosion of democratic institutions and the rise of authoritarian regimes in times of crisis. These readings have led to an interpretation of *The Stand* as a critique of political and moral structures in the face of societal collapse.

Recent analyses, however, have shifted toward more complex readings informed by

political theory, particularly biopolitics (Dillon, 2015; Hardt, 2021). Scholars such as Sandset (2021) and Berg and Alm (2022) have employed Michel Foucault's biopolitical framework to examine how the novel portrays the management of life through surveillance, quarantine, and population control. The common analysis of *The Stand* focuses on government overreach during the Captain Trips crisis, emphasizing survival. However, it neglects the power dynamics surrounding death. Mbembe's necropolitics offers a vital perspective, revealing how sovereignty in catastrophes is defined by deciding who lives and who dies, rather than preserving life itself.

Incorporating Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, Jimenez (2022) argues that *The Stand* reveals how sovereign power operates through the orchestration of death, not merely the management of life. The novel's depiction of mass extermination, forced exile, and the use of fear as a tool of governance suggests a necropolitical reading, where power is defined by who has the authority to dictate mortality. While much of the scholarship has focused on the religious or dystopian elements of the novel, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding how *The Stand* can be understood through the lens of necropolitics (Deprez, 2023; Kirk, 2024; Sealey, 2024). Few studies have directly engaged with the novel's exploration of death as a mechanism of political control. Moreover, existing analyses have not sufficiently connected the fictional practices in *The Stand* with contemporary real-world strategies of crisis governance, especially in the context of recent global health emergencies and the rise of authoritarianism.

This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a sustained necropolitical analysis of *The Stand*. By applying Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, the research explores how King's post-pandemic world enacts power through the management of mortality, exile, and violence—this necropolitical reading is further complemented by a pandemic narrative approach, which contextualizes the novel within disease-driven political transformation (Kong, 2023; Trott et al., 2024), examining how the disease or individuals become "sacrificial victims" to restore social cohesion (Barraza, 2021; Esposito, 2023; Lundie, 2023), and revealing how pandemics expose inequalities and justify authoritarian measures under the guise of public safety. This study moves beyond

a simple good-versus-evil interpretation of *The Stand*, and instead analyzes how both authoritarian (Flagg's Las Vegas) and democratic (Boulder Free Zone) regimes use death to control society. By comparing these contrasting governments, it offers a more complex view of power during crises, and questions the typical black-and-white morality seen in pandemic stories.

The novelty of this approach lies in its focus on necropolitics as a governing principle in *The Stand*. By expanding the analysis to include necropolitical structures, this research offers new insights into the novel's portrayal of death, fear, and violence as central to post-pandemic governance. This study also contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection of literature, politics, and public health, offering a timely examination of how pandemics and crises shape the political landscapes in both fictional and real worlds. In doing so, it demonstrates the relevance of *The Stand* in contemporary discussions on governance, surveillance, and the politics of life and death.

Ultimately, this research is significant not only for its reinterpretation of a classic work of literature but also for its broader implications for understanding how societies manage crises. By foregrounding the necropolitical dimensions of *The Stand*, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the role of sovereignty, state-sanctioned violence, and exclusion in times of emergency. The findings of this study are particularly relevant in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, where questions of crisis governance, surveillance, and the regulation of life and death have taken on unprecedented urgency. Through its interdisciplinary approach, this research highlights the critical role of literature in shaping our understanding of political power, particularly in moments of profound crisis.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics alongside a pandemic narrative approach to analyze King's *The Stand*. This method is particularly suited for examining how fiction represents political structures, power dynamics, and social anxieties, especially in the context of pandemics in a pandemic landscape. Qualitative research has a descriptive nature and tends to use an inductive approach analysis, so that the process and meaning based on the subject's

perspective are more highlighted in qualitative research (Priadana et al., 2021; Pugu et al., 2024).

Mbembe's in Saeidi (2024) necropolitics provides a critical lens through which the research interrogates how *The Stand* portrays sovereignty as a force that determines who may live and who must die. By applying these theoretical frameworks, the research explores how the novel reflects governance mechanisms that emerge in response to crisis, emphasizing the role of exclusion, violence, and fear in maintaining control. This framework is essential in understanding the governance of death, as seen in Flagg's Las Vegas, where rule is maintained through terror, and the Boulder Free Zone, where exile functions as an indirect death sentence. Pandemic narrative

Complementing this, the pandemic narrative approach contextualizes the novel within disease-driven political transformation (Kong, 2023; Trott et al., 2024). A pandemic narrative allows us to investigate how the disease itself, or specific individuals, become the "sacrificial victim" that temporarily restores social cohesion (Barraza, 2021; Esposito, 2023; Lundie, 2023). This analysis explores how the narrative depicts the cycle of crisis and resolution, and whether it ultimately reinforces or challenges the sacrificial logic. It highlights how pandemics expose existing inequalities and justify authoritarian measures under the guise of public safety.

To analyze the textual data, a thematic analysis was conducted. Data collection involved a close reading of Stephen King's *The Stand*, focusing on passages depicting governance actions, instances of death, and descriptions of social order or its disruption. Textual segments related to these areas were systematically coded, identifying recurring themes such as the exercise of sovereign power through death, the creation of "sacrificial victims," and the justification of authoritarian measures under the guise of public safety. Data analysis proceeded through iterative rounds of coding and theme refinement, where emerging patterns were compared and contrasted to identify key relationships within the narrative. This coding process allowed for the identification of patterns and relationships within the narrative, revealing how *The Stand* reflects and critiques real-world crisis governance strategies. The identified themes were then interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of necropolitics and pandemic narrative, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how King's novel engages with the complex

interplay between power, death, and social order in times of crisis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The portrayal of necropolitics in Stephen King's *The Stand* reveals how pandemics function as catalysts for political transformation, restructuring governance through exclusion, violence, and sovereign control over life and death. In the wake of the Captain Trips pandemic in Magistrate (2021), survivors are forced into two competing regimes—Randall Flagg's Las Vegas, where rule is maintained through terror and executions, and the Boulder Free Zone, which, despite its democratic ideals, enforces exile as a form of indirect necropower (Daher-Nashif, 2022). Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, which examines how sovereignty determines who may live and who must die, provides a critical framework for understanding how both factions utilize state-sanctioned death, surveillance, and ideological control to maintain order.

These dynamics in these three results of necropolitics portrayal: (1) the exercise of necropolitical power in crisis response, (2) the geography of necropolitics in *The Stand*, and (3) the weaponization of fear and surveillance as tools of governance. Through a close reading of the novel, this discussion highlights how both authoritarian and democratic societies engage in necropolitical governance, exposing the ways pandemics justify extreme measures of control and exclusion.

Necropolitical governance in crisis response

The novel illustrates how pandemics serve as catalysts for necropolitical control, where sovereignty is exercised through decisions about life and death (Randolph, 2021; Smith et al., 2022). The U.S. government, in its initial response to the Captain Trips virus, imposes strict quarantines, suppresses dissent through military force, and ultimately abandons its citizens, demonstrating the transformation of the state into an arbiter of mass death. This mirrors real-world crises where governments have historically used pandemics to justify extreme measures, reinforcing the role of fear in political dominance.

Stephen King's *The Stand* presents a striking vision of how pandemics function as catalysts for necropolitical governance (Adami et al., 2021; Bajec et al., 2021; Hansen, 2022; Stavro, 2023). The initial governmental response to the Captain Trips virus demonstrates state mechanisms of control that extend beyond public health concerns

into military-enforced governance. These tactics are emblematic of Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, where the state determines who may live and who must die (Basile, 2023; Berg et al., 2022; Burke, 2023; Debrix, 2023a; Esposito, 2023; Jiménez, 2022; Mbembe, 2019; Paramana, 2023b; Sandset, 2021; The et al., 2024; Zhao, 2024).

In *The Stand*, the U.S. government's reaction to the pandemic includes media suppression, military-enforced quarantines, and mass executions of dissenters. In one pivotal scene, the media is forcibly shut down to prevent the public from understanding the full extent of the outbreak.

"For the last seven days, this broadcast facility has been under guard by men purporting to be National Guardsmen." (King, 1978:232).

Analyzing this quotation through pandemic narrative reveals critical insights into how narratives of crisis are manipulated for political control. The enforced shutdown of media, as depicted in *The Stand*, exemplifies a common trope within pandemic narratives: the suppression of information to manage public fear and maintain state authority. This act of silencing the press is not merely a tactical move but a strategic narrative intervention. By seizing control of broadcast facilities, the government effectively rewrites the pandemic's story, shaping public perception and limiting the dissemination of potentially destabilizing truths (Fominaya, 2024; Giordani et al., 2021; Jungherr et al., 2021; McKay et al., 2021).

This control over information aligns with the necropolitical framework by illustrating how the state extends its power beyond physical violence to encompass the governance of knowledge (Romeo, 2021). The presence of "men purporting to be National Guardsmen" underscores the militarization of information control, where the narrative itself becomes a weapon. This militarization of narrative reflects a broader pattern observed in pandemic narratives, where the state's response often involves the imposition of a singular, official story, thus marginalizing dissenting voices and alternative interpretations.

The presence of military personnel in newsrooms highlights state-controlled narratives during crises, reinforcing Mbembe's argument that sovereignty often operates not only through direct violence but also through the control of knowledge and perception (Mbembe, 2019 in Jimenez, 2022). By managing public access to

information, the government dictates the reality of the pandemic, reducing civilians to passive subjects within a necropolitical structure (Esposito, 2023).

Beyond information suppression, state violence escalates. Military forces are given orders to shoot civilians attempting to escape quarantine zones (Breslawski, 2022), reinforcing the idea that containment takes precedence over human life:

"My orders are to contain those present on campus to the campus... If they intend to try breaking out of quarantine, they are not. Over." (King, 1978:243).

This quotation, delivered by a figure of authority during the early stages of the pandemic in *The Stand*, exemplifies a key element of the pandemic narrative: the immediate imposition of control measures in the face of an unknown threat. The phrase "My orders are to contain those present on campus to the campus" highlights the swift transition from a state of normalcy to one of confinement (Cabral, 2023; Yuan et al., 2024). This reflects a common narrative trope where the initial response to a pandemic is characterized by isolation and quarantine, often implemented with little regard for individual liberties. The following statement underscores the severity of the situation and the willingness of those in power to use lethal force to maintain order. This immediate escalation to threats of violence serves to emphasize the breakdown of societal norms and the rapid shift towards authoritarian control, a recurring theme in pandemic narratives.

Furthermore, this quotation reveals the inherent tension between public health imperatives and individual rights. The "containment" strategy, while ostensibly aimed at preventing the spread of the virus, also serves as a means of asserting sovereign power. The use of the phrase "My orders" emphasizes the hierarchical nature of the response, positioning the speaker as an agent of the state with the authority to dictate life and death. The implicit threat of violence reinforces the idea that the state's primary concern is maintaining control, even at the expense of human life.

This reflects a broader narrative pattern where pandemics are portrayed as catalysts for the expansion of state power, often leading to the erosion of civil liberties and the normalization of authoritarian practices. It concludes by reflecting on the governance of public health emergencies in

informal settlements in light of the state's necropolitics and the practice and politics of life inherent in *The Stand* (Basile, 2023). In a pandemic narrative, this quotation serves as a microcosm of the larger societal shift towards a state of siege, where fear and control become the dominant forces shaping human interaction.

This weaponization of quarantine measures echoes real-world examples of states using crises as justifications for militarization and expanded governmental authority. The sovereign authority operates to "immunize" the societal body against its inherent excesses. This function is predicated upon the fundamental principle that the state, and its legal framework, exclusively possesses the legitimate right to employ violence, thereby safeguarding the lives of its citizenry (Esposito, 2023).

Mbembe (2019) in Zhao (2024) argues that necropolitics operates when the state normalizes indirect forms of death, where individuals are not actively killed but are instead placed into zones of abandonment, left to die from structural neglect. The government's mass burial of infected bodies further supports this, as the state does not simply execute people—it treats them as disposable waste. This quotation, "*Two soldiers...jumped up inside, and bodies began to cascade out onto the barge*" (King, 1978:233), within the context of a pandemic narrative, serves as a stark depiction of the overwhelming scale of mortality and the dehumanizing effects of mass death.

The image of soldiers mechanically ejecting bodies onto a barge underscores the breakdown of social order and the shift from individual lives to mere biological waste. This scene highlights how pandemics, particularly those of catastrophic proportions, transform human beings into anonymous entities, stripping them of their identities and reducing them to objects of disposal. The act of "cascading" implies a lack of control and a sheer volume that overwhelms any sense of dignity or respect for the deceased, reinforcing the narrative's portrayal of a world consumed by death.

Furthermore, this passage exemplifies the pandemic narrative's tendency to focus on the logistical and infrastructural challenges of

managing mass death. The soldiers' actions, devoid of emotional resonance, reflect the necessary but brutal pragmatism that arises in the face of overwhelming mortality. This scene is not merely about the loss of life but also about the systemic collapse that accompanies it. The barge, a vessel typically associated with transportation and commerce, becomes a symbol of death's industrialization, highlighting how the pandemic transforms familiar objects and spaces into instruments of mortality. By emphasizing the physical act of disposal, King underscores the profound disruption of social norms and the emergence of a post-pandemic reality where survival necessitates a chilling detachment from the human cost.

This mirrors historical state violence, particularly in colonial contexts where indigenous populations were left to perish due to forced displacement, lack of medical aid, and government neglect (Basile, 2023).

The geography of necropolitics: Boulder vs Las Vegas

King presents two competing models of post-pandemic governance: Las Vegas, ruled by Randall Flagg through direct necropower, and the Boulder Free Zone, which maintains order through indirect necropolitical control. In Las Vegas, executions, forced labor, and terror tactics sustain Flagg's rule, whereas Boulder enforces social stability by exiling dissidents—a decision that effectively serves as a death sentence. This division reflects how both authoritarian and democratic regimes engage in necropolitical governance, differing only in their methods of exclusion and control.

King constructs two contrasting models of post-pandemic governance in *The Stand*: 1) Las Vegas (Authoritarian Necropolitics): Randall Flagg rules through direct necropower—public executions, forced labor, and psychological terror. 2) Boulder (Democratic Necropolitics): The Free Zone, despite its democratic ideals, still enforces indirect necropolitics through exile, where dissenters are cast out into a lawless wasteland to die.

Table 1. Comparison of necropolitical governance in Las Vegas and Boulder in *The Stand*

Category	Las Vegas (Flagg's Regime)	Boulder (Free Zone)	Necropolitical Concept
Nature of Control	Authoritarian necropower: Rule through terror, violence, and executions	Democratic necropolitics: Rule through exile and surveillance	Sovereignty and control over life/death (Mbembe)
Main Techniques of Governance	Public executions, forced labor, psychological terror	Exile of dissidents, surveillance, ideological	Use of death to maintain social order

		policing	
Form of Exclusion	Direct violence: executions, public punishments	Indirect violence: exile into lawless wastelands	Exclusion as a form of death (Mbembe)
Weaponization of Fear	Fear-based rule through visible terror (executions, labor camps)	Fear sustained through surveillance and moral authority	Fear as a tool of control (Mbembe)
Sovereign Control over Life/Death	The state decides who lives or dies through violence	The state decides who lives or dies through exclusion	Control of life and death by sovereign (Mbembe)
Public Response to Crisis	Population is terrorized into compliance	Population subjected to ideological conformity and surveillance	Fear and the breakdown of social norms (Mbembe)
Role of Surveillance	Military-enforced surveillance, fear of Flagg's power	Surveillance of dissent, spies sent to infiltrate Las Vegas	Surveillance as a form of social control (Esposito, 2023)
Public Health vs. State Power	Health becomes secondary to maintaining state power through violence	Health and safety become tools of exclusion and isolation	The state uses public health as a form of control (Basile, 2023)
Relation to Historical Examples	Reminiscent of totalitarian regimes using state violence for control	Mirrors democratic societies employing covert violence for order	Parallels to colonial state violence and exclusion (Basile, 2023)
Impact of Pandemic on Governance	Pandemic accelerates totalitarian rule through control of information and death	Pandemic enables covert necropolitics through exile and ideological manipulation	Pandemics as a vehicle for expanding state power (Berg & Alm, 2022)

Las Vegas: Rule of death

Randall Flagg's totalitarian rule in Las Vegas exemplifies necropower, where public executions and brutal punishments ensure absolute submission. Flagg's dominance is not based on governance but on fear, where obedience is enforced through public displays of violence:

“By the order of Randall Flagg...Hector Alonzo Drogan by name, is ordered executed by an act of crucifixion, this penalty so ordered for the crime of drug use” (King, 1978:650).

This quotation reveals the establishment of a draconian, post-pandemic order. The public execution, specifically by crucifixion, serves as a potent symbol of Flagg's absolute power and the brutal enforcement of his new societal norms.

The "crime" of drug use, a relatively minor offense in pre-pandemic society, is transformed into a capital transgression, highlighting how pandemics can be exploited to justify extreme measures of control (Sarel, 2022). This act of public violence operates as a spectacle, designed to instill fear and obedience within the surviving population, demonstrating the shift from a focus on public health to a focus on absolute power and social control. The specific choice of crucifixion, a historically loaded method of execution, further emphasizes the authoritarian regime's attempt to establish a new, distorted form of "sacred" order (Kelly, 2022).

Furthermore, this passage exemplifies how pandemic narratives often depict the erosion of individual freedoms and the rise of

authoritarianism. In the chaos of a post-pandemic world, Flagg seizes the opportunity to consolidate power (Sheng, 2022), using the crisis as a pretext for imposing his will. The public execution of Drogan is not merely a punishment but a demonstration of Flagg's ability to redefine morality and enforce his own laws. The act highlights the way in which a pandemic's disruption of established social structures can create a vacuum of authority (Boin et al., 2021; Leach et al., 2021), which is then filled by figures who exploit fear and vulnerability to establish totalitarian rule. The quotation underscores the potential for pandemics to serve as catalysts for social regression, where basic human rights are sacrificed in the name of order and security, and the sovereign power dictates even the most personal of choices.

Crucifixions, beheadings, and public torture serve as ritualized forms of necropower, ensuring that the state's authority is etched onto the bodies of its victims. This reflects Mbembe's (2019 in Debrix, (2023b) notion of death-worlds, where sovereignty is maintained through highly visible performances of power. Mbembe's concept of necropower is criticized for its perceived oversimplification and lack of nuance. Critics argue that it primarily emphasizes the sovereign's direct use of force and violence, as well as their authority over death, thereby neglecting more subtle forms of power. This approach is further seen as favoring analyses of large-scale, highly visible acts of death, potentially overlooking the more insidious and pervasive mechanisms of control (Debrix, 2023b).

Flagg's control over his subjects extends beyond physical violence—he engages in psychological terror, making his rule seem inescapable. His supernatural ability to “see into minds” reinforces a culture of self-surveillance, where citizens police themselves to avoid suspicion. “*His punishment would be swift and sure and heavy.*” (King, 1978:690). A pandemic narrative encapsulates the shift towards authoritarian control and the breakdown of established legal and ethical norms. In a post-pandemic world, where societal structures have fractured, the promise of “swift and sure and heavy” punishment suggests a regime that prioritizes immediate and brutal retribution over due process or justice. This phrase, devoid of any mention of trial or investigation, underscores the arbitrary nature of power in a crisis. The pandemic, by creating a state of emergency, justifies the suspension of traditional legal frameworks, allowing for the imposition of draconian measures. This approach to punishment becomes a tool for maintaining order through fear, reflecting the pandemic narrative's tendency to depict the erosion of individual rights in the face of societal collapse.

Furthermore, the emphasis on “heavy” punishment within a pandemic narrative resonates with the psychological impact of widespread trauma and fear. In a world marked by mass death and uncertainty, the need for a sense of control becomes paramount. This phrase, therefore, speaks to a desire for immediate and visible displays of power, intended to reassure a traumatized population that order is being restored. However, this focus on punitive measures also reveals the potential for abuse, as those in authority exploit the crisis to consolidate their power and suppress dissent. The quotation thus serves as a stark reminder of how pandemics can create conditions ripe for authoritarianism, where the promise of security comes at the cost of individual liberties and ethical considerations. This mirrors historical totalitarian regimes that used mass surveillance and public executions as a means of controlling populations (Paramana, 2023a). Flagg's rule demonstrates that necropolitics is not just about who dies, but how death is used as a mechanism of control.

Boulder: Nocturnal democracy

While the Boulder Free Zone is presented as a democratic alternative to Flagg's Las Vegas, it engages in its own form of necropolitics through exile and exclusion. Criminals, dissenters, and

suspected Flagg supporters are forcibly removed from the community and left to die in the wasteland.

“Exile...might be the best solution” (King, 1978:913)

Unlike Flagg's direct executions, Boulder maintains its authority by outsourcing death to the environment. Mbembe (2019 in Zhao, 2024) describes this as zones of abandonment, where the state does not kill individuals outright but ensures their demise by denying them access to resources.

That quotation above within a pandemic narrative context signifies a critical shift in societal responses to crisis, moving beyond the immediate threat of the disease to the long-term management of a disrupted population. In a world ravaged by a pandemic, exile emerges not merely as a punitive measure, but as a strategic tool for managing perceived threats and maintaining a fragile sense of order. This phrase highlights the anxieties surrounding contagion and the impulse to create physical and social boundaries to protect the remaining community. It suggests a move away from traditional notions of justice and rehabilitation, towards a pragmatic, albeit harsh, approach to survival. The ambiguity of “best solution” underscores the moral dilemmas faced by post-pandemic societies, where the preservation of the collective may necessitate the sacrifice of individual rights.

Furthermore, this quotation illuminates the pandemic narrative's exploration of exclusion and othering. In a context of scarcity and fear, the “exiled” become symbolic carriers of danger, representing not just physical contagion but also social and ideological threats. This act of banishment serves to reinforce the boundaries of the “safe” community, creating a stark division between those deemed worthy of inclusion and those condemned to isolation. The phrase “might be” suggests a degree of hesitation or moral uncertainty, hinting at the potential for internal conflict within the community regarding the ethics of such a drastic measure. This highlights the psychological toll of a pandemic, where even seemingly rational decisions are fraught with moral ambiguity, demonstrating how social cohesion is tested and redefined through the drastic measures of exclusion. This mirrors historical instances of forced displacement, such as indigenous removals and the deportation of political prisoners (Basile, 2023).

Boulder also engages in covert necropolitics through surveillance and espionage. Spies are sent into Las Vegas to assassinate or sabotage Flagg's regime, demonstrating that even democratic societies engage in preemptive political violence: "We've all agreed that we're sending our people into a dangerous situation" (King, 1978:812). It highlights the difficult choices and ethical dilemmas faced by leadership in a post-apocalyptic world. It underscores the collective decision-making process, albeit one fraught with risk, that becomes necessary when survival is paramount. The phrase "dangerous situation" is a stark understatement, reflecting the normalization of extreme peril in a world ravaged by disease. This statement also reveals the tension between individual lives and the perceived needs of the community, where the "we" implies a shared responsibility for potentially sacrificing individuals for the greater good, a common theme in narratives exploring the social and political consequences of widespread catastrophe.

This reflects Mbembe's (2019 in Pietryka, (2024)) theory of nocturnal democracy, where states use hidden mechanisms of violence to maintain social order. He challenges the idea that democracy is inherently peaceful or just, arguing instead that its formation has always involved the dissimulation or occultation of the violence of [its] origins. While democracy presents itself as an open, egalitarian system governed by public participation and the rule of law, it simultaneously obscures the mechanisms of force and coercion that sustain it (Pietryka, 2024). Although Boulder frames itself as a democratic utopia, it engages in exclusionary violence similar to Flagg's regime, albeit in a more covert manner.

Fear and surveillance as tools of social order

This research reveals that both factions in *The Stand* use fear as a mechanism of control. Flagg's dictatorship relies on visible spectacles of power, such as public executions, while Boulder sustains itself through subtler forms of surveillance and ideological conformity. This suggests that post-pandemic governance—whether democratic or totalitarian—relies on controlling populations through psychological coercion, reinforcing the enduring legacy of necropolitical power in times of crisis.

Both societies in *The Stand* rely on fear as a mechanism of control. In Las Vegas, fear is maintained through ritualized executions, constant surveillance, and the public display of Flagg's power. "if there was a common denominator, it

was fear" (King, 1978:651). Fear becomes the unifying force, transcending individual differences and shaping collective behavior. This fear is not merely a reaction to the physical threat of the virus but also a response to the breakdown of social order, the uncertainty of survival, and the erosion of familiar structures. The commonality of fear highlights how pandemics can level societal hierarchies, creating a shared experience of vulnerability. This fear fuels both individual actions, such as hoarding or isolation, and collective behaviors, such as scapegoating or the acceptance of authoritarian rule, demonstrating how pandemics can fundamentally reshape the human experience through the lens of shared dread.

In Boulder, fear is sustained through moral authority, religious legitimacy, and ideological policing. Mother Abigail's theocratic rule in Boulder mirrors Flagg's totalitarian leadership, as both societies rely on centralized figures of power:

"This is going to be very popular. The item would read: 'Resolved: Mother Abigail is to be given absolute veto power over any action proposed by the Board'" (King, 1978:674). The proposal to grant Mother Abigail absolute veto power reflects a willingness to relinquish democratic principles in favor of a perceived source of moral authority and stability. In a post-pandemic context, where fear and uncertainty prevail, the desire for a strong, singular leader, even one who operates outside established governance structures, becomes paramount.

This narrative moment highlights how pandemics can create conditions ripe for the emergence of charismatic figures who offer a sense of security and direction, even at the expense of established democratic processes, showcasing the potential for crisis to reshape power dynamics and societal expectations. In the line with her statement "It's me they've come to see." (King, 1978:682) This reinforces Mbembe's argument that sovereignty often merges with religious ideology, producing a system where the state wields divine justification for exclusionary governance (Berg & Alm, 2022).

Flagg's dictatorship employs open terror, while Boulder sustains itself through ideological policing and subtle surveillance. This demonstrates how necropolitics extends beyond direct violence to systemic control over populations. The novel critiques the normalization of fear-based governance in times of crisis, revealing how pandemics enable the expansion of

state power under the guise of public safety. This is evident in both fictional and real-world responses to pandemics, where emergency measures often become permanent.

CONCLUSION

Stephen King's *The Stand* serves as a critical exploration of necropolitical governance in a post-pandemic world, illustrating how crises justify state control through exclusion, violence, and the administration of death. Through the contrasting societies of Randall Flagg's Las Vegas and the Boulder Free Zone, the novel reveals how both authoritarian and democratic structures engage in sovereign death-making, whether through public executions, forced labor, or exile. This analysis, grounded in Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, demonstrates that pandemics not only reshape social order but also reinforce power structures that determine who is allowed to live and who must die.

However, this research has certain shortcomings. While it provides a literary analysis of necropolitical themes in *The Stand*, it does not extensively compare the novel's portrayal with real-world pandemic responses, such as those during the COVID-19 pandemic or historical outbreaks like the Spanish Flu of 1918. Additionally, the research primarily focuses on Mbembe's necropolitics without engaging with alternative political or philosophical perspectives on biopower, disaster governance, or resistance strategies within pandemic narratives. Future research could address these gaps by exploring how *The Stand* aligns with or diverges from historical and contemporary crisis governance models, as well as examining how survivor agency and resistance function within necropolitical states. This study, while limited, enhances the understanding of post-apocalyptic literature's political critique, offering educators practical tools and pedagogical insights into the dynamics of power, violence, and governance during crises.

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