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The politics of adaptation: contemporary African drama and Greek tragedy

van Weyenberg, A.L.B.

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CHAPTER 2

African Antigones:

“Wherever the call for freedom is heard!”

If Creon could not hear Antigone,
giving no credibility to her words, unable
to see the logic to which she appeals,
she continues to speak through the
history of political translations and
performances of Antigone, which,
even as they re-signify her, articulate
and renew the law she introduces.

—Tina Chanter

Rejoice with us
Rejoice heartily with us
The tyrant
Who gives wicked orders
We have conquered him!
Oh yes, we have beaten him!
We have seen his back!

—Femi Osofisan, *Tegonni*

In this chapter, I consider two plays that draw on Sophocles’ *Antigone* (442 BC): *The Island* (first performed in 1973, published in 1993) by South African playwright Athol Fugard and *Tegonni: an African Antigone* (first performed in 1994, published in 1999) by Nigerian playwright Femi Osofisan.¹ I examine the relevance and implications of the appropriation of *Antigone* within the contexts of South Africa and Nigeria, considering Antigone’s representative value within her new surroundings and the (meta)theatrical aesthetics that characterise her cultural translocation. Finally, I turn to the effects of Antigone’s translocation on her status as a Western canonical figure. Throughout my discussion, I am particularly interested in how Fugard’s and Osofisan’s “African Antigones” relate to Antigone’s political legacy. Let me therefore start with a brief exploration of “Antigone’s politics.”

¹ In this study I follow the commonly used English transcription of Yoruba, omitting diacritical marks in names such as “Fémi Òsófisan” and “Tègònni” and words such as “Yòrùbá” and “oríkì.”

ANTIGONE'S POLITICS

Of all heroes and heroines of Greek tragedy, Antigone is probably the most famous and certainly the most debated one. Her popularity has been discussed at length, for example by George Steiner, who in the preface to his book *Antigones: The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought* (1984) classifies the play as “one of the most enduring and canonic acts in the history of our philosophic, literary, political consciousness.” He states that:

Whenever, wherever, in the western legacy, we have found ourselves engaged in the confrontation of justice and of law, of the aura of the dead and the claims of the living, whenever, wherever the hungry dreams of the young have collided with the “realism” of the ageing, we have found ourselves turning to words, images, sinews or argument, synecdoches, tropes, metaphors, out of the grammar of Antigone and of Creon. (1984: 138)

Steiner concludes his study by foretelling Antigone's eternal life: “All I can be certain of is this: what I have tried to say is already in need of addition. New ‘Antigones’ are being imagined, lived now; and will be tomorrow” (1984: 304).²

This prophesy about Antigone seems in tension with Steiner's earlier claim in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) that the genre has died with the rise of modernity. There, he argues that the dominant “mythologies” of the twentieth century, liberalism and especially Marxism, are fundamentally anti-tragic as they do not admit of tragic despair, a “mortal sin against Marxism no less than against Christ” (1961: 342). For Steiner, tragedy is about the powerlessness and fall of the individual, reflecting a fatalist worldview. Adhering to a purity of genre, he presents tragedy as “unfit” for modern adaptations or, rather, modern adaptations as “unfit” for tragedy (by which he means Greek tragedy), whose significance they tend to destroy: “the ancient is not a glove into which the modern can slip at will” (329). Interestingly, Steiner presents *Antigone* as the exception to his rule, an “achievement apart,” a claim he substantiates by referring to Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*, which premiered in Paris in 1944: while “[e]lsewhere, variations on classic themes have yielded eccentric and often ignoble results,” within the political context of occupied France, Steiner argues, Anouilh succeeded in preserving the meaning of Sophocles' tragedy (324-331).

As I proposed in the previous chapter, suppositions such as Steiner's do not take into account that meaning is always contingent and in movement. Here, I am fascinated by how Antigone forces Steiner into a position in which he cannot but contradict himself, foretelling Antigone's eternal life in a modern world within which

² Although Steiner locates these new Antigones primarily in “the West,” he does consider Fugard's *The Island*, cryptically describing it as “a harrowing addendum to the Sophoclean font” and “the satyr play to all preceding ‘Antigones’” (1984: 143-144).

tragedy cannot survive. Towards the end of *The Death of Tragedy* it is as if Antigone, through Anouilh's refiguration, compels Steiner to reconsider his claim. She seems successful, as he concludes his book at least considering "the possibility—though I judge it remote—that the tragic theatre may have before it a new life and future" (354). To substantiate this, Steiner discusses a scene from a documentary film about a Chinese commune in which the labourers lay down their work and together form "a large chorus." They begin to chant a song of hatred against China's enemies and reciting the heroic death of a founder of the local Communist Party who was killed by the Japanese. "Is it not," Steiner wonders, "in some comparable rite of defiance and honour to the dead that tragedy began, three thousand years ago, on the plains of Argos?" (354-355). In relation to his argument that tragedy and modernity are incompatible, Steiner's reference to China is in danger of suggesting that tragedy might still be viable in contexts "yet untouched" by Western modernity. This is relevant to my discussion, because "Africa" is often similarly considered to be "pre-modern."³

In his reconsideration of tragedy in 2004, Steiner boldly reasserts the genre's death. Willing to accept that tragedy might hold relevance for certain contemporary political moments, Steiner nonetheless reduces plays such as Fugard's *The Island*, which he briefly mentions as an example, to "variations on previous themes":

At some moments of political social crisis, tragedy in its classical mask still provides a shorthand: as the *Trojan Women* did during the Vietnam war, as the *Bacchae* served during the turmoil of the drug-culture and flower children. But these are loans from the museum. (2004: 14-15)

Apparently, Antigone's eternal life is a borrowed one. But as the plays discussed in this study demonstrate, adaptations cannot be reduced to loans, just like Greek tragedies cannot be reduced to museum relics. If tragedy seems dead, it is only so in Steiner's mortifying conception of the genre.

In contrast to Steiner's idea of tragedy as dramatising the despair of the powerless individual, the adaptations I investigate offer a different view, allowing it to enjoy enduring political relevance and the potential to promote change. In the case of *Antigone*, this relevance derives from the central conflict between Antigone and Creon, which may appear straightforward at first but on closer inspection turns out to be more complex. At the start of Sophocles' tragedy, Antigone's brothers Eteocles and Polynices have died fighting over the throne of Thebes. As the rightful inheritor of the throne, their uncle Creon becomes king. He issues a decree forbidding the burial of Polynices, because he has led an army against the city and is therefore considered

³ In *Modernity at Large* Arjun Appadurai challenges this notion of Western modernity as a point of origin and reference, arguing that "different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently" to produce multiple, alternative Modernities (1996: 17).

a traitor in the eyes of the law. Antigone, appealing not to the law of the polis but to the divine law that governs the family, defies Creon's decree and sets out to bury her brother. Creon has her locked up in a cave to be executed. Although Creon ultimately changes his mind and hurries to free Antigone, his repentance comes too late. The play ends with no less than three suicides: of Antigone, her betrothed and Creon's son Haemon, and Creon's wife Eurydice.

The main question Sophocles poses—and to which he does not provide an answer—is whose claim is more “just”: that of Antigone, who stays true to the laws of the gods and her personal morality, or Creon, who insists on the superiority of the laws of the state and public morality. Classics professor Suzanne Said suggests that in fifth century BC Athens, the on-stage negotiation between conflicting interests and ideologies had an important didactic function, since it represented the dialectic of the political process held high in the young democracy, so that tragedy primarily served to instruct the art of debate to the male citizenry (Boedeker and Raaflaub 1999: 282). In contemporary settings, too, the validity of Antigone's claim remains a popular topic for debate, ensuring *Antigone's* continuing attraction as a source for philosophical and artistic inspiration.

Antigone's contemporary popularity is particularly striking on African stages, where Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Athol Fugard, Femi Osofisan and Sylvain Bemba have given the play new relevance in a variety of settings.⁴ In his study on Greek tragedy in Africa, Wetmore explains this popularity by stating that *Antigone* “can be adapted into any situation in which a group is oppressed, or in which, in the aftermath of struggle, the forces of community and social order come into conflict with the forces of personal liberty” (2002: 170-171). Many translations and adaptations depart from a similar understanding of *Antigone*, not only those by African playwrights, but also those by, for example, Bertolt Brecht and Jean Anouilh, who figure Antigone against the backdrop of the Second World War, and those by Tom Paulin, who explores the Anglo-Irish problem, and Seamus Heaney, who comments on George Bush's policy in the Iraq war.⁵

While contemporary readings of *Antigone*, whether in theatre or philosophy, seem in agreement regarding Antigone's political agency, she was not always conceived in that way. On the contrary, many of her interpreters have posited Antigone as a figure

⁴ Although Brathwaite is originally Barbadian, his *Odale's Choice* (1967) is set in Africa and was first produced in the newly independent Ghana (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 42-43). Sylvain Bemba's *Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone* (1990) was originally published in French in 1988 as *Noces Posthumes de Santigone*. For a discussion on *Antigone* in West-Africa, see Gibbs (2007).

⁵ Bertolt Brecht, *Antigone* (1947); Jean Anouilh, *Antigone* (1943); Tom Paulin, *The Riot Act: A Version of Sophocles' Antigone* (1985); Seamus Heaney, *The Burial at Thebes* (2004). For discussions of Heaney's play, see Chanter (2010) and Wilmer (2010). For discussions of Irish versions of Greek tragedy, see McDonald and Walton (2002).

before, against or outside politics. In that respect, two further strands of interpretation can be roughly identified. In the first, Antigone is viewed as the representative of the domestic sphere preceding politics. The most influential example of this strand is the interpretation of the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, who in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807) romanticises Antigone's act of defiance as led by divine inspiration and female intuition. In his reading, the conflict between Antigone and Creon is one between two equally justified ethical claims, with Antigone privileging the divine law (*dike*) that governs the family (*oikos*) and Creon privileging the human law (*nomos*) that governs the city (*polis*). This implies that "Creon is not a tyrant, but an ethical power just as much as Antigone"; indeed, both "realize only one of the ethical powers ... both do wrong because they are one-sided, and thus both do right" (1977: 17.133). Antigone's death becomes the event where both ethical positions reconcile tragically.⁶

In the second, psychoanalytical strand of interpretation, Antigone is theorised as a- or even anti-political, cast in the role of the inhuman or dangerous thing that needs to be expelled to preserve the social order. Chanter points out, for example, how Lacanian readings reduce Antigone to a monstrous figure, and how Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek goes as far as to describe her as "proto-totalitarian" (2010: 21). If Antigone is given a political place in history at all, it is as the disruptive force that needs to be sacrificed.⁷

Feminist philosophers Judith Butler and Gillian Rose take issue with interpretations that present Antigone as enabling while never actually entering the political sphere. In *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (2000), Butler turns to *Antigone* to critique the heteronormativity of kinship as structured by the state. In her analysis, Antigone opens up the possibility of social transformation because she "represents not kinship in its ideal form, but its deformation and displacement," thus putting "the reigning epistemes of representation into crisis" and raising the question of "what the conditions of intelligibility could have been that would have made her life possible" (2000: 24). For Rose, too, Antigone embodies the possibility of change. In *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (1996), she discusses how Antigone, by critiquing the law through her mourning of her brother, presents the possibility of a new or changed law: "in these delegitimate acts of tending the dead, these acts of justice, against the current will of the city, women reinvent the political life of the

⁶ For Derrida, this reading presents the problem that while Antigone's death should escape the system and resist closure, it ends up being contained within Hegelian dialectics (Leonard, 2005: 143). Derrida not only discusses Antigone in *Glas* (1974), but also in *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (2000), where he considers the story of Oedipus and Antigone's arrival in Athens in *Oedipus at Colonus* in relation to the ethics and politics of hospitality.

⁷ See Jacques Lacan (1992); Slavoj Žižek (1992, 2000).

community” (1996: 35-36).⁸ Butler’s and Rose’s analyses are relevant to the adaptations I discuss insofar as these similarly explore Antigone’s potential to critique and change dominant cultural and political epistemes.⁹

This brief and partial account of Antigone’s extensive interpretative history demonstrates, as Chanter observes, that Antigone’s function in relation to the political is not only complicated by how she positions herself in relation to the polis within the play, but also by the reception of the play, which has been “overdetermined by the numerous critical attempts to come to terms with the divergent authoritative, interpretive legacies issuing from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Hegel’s dialectical manoeuvres, and Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory” (2010: 23). The texts I discuss in what follows form part of Antigone’s reception history and further influence her political legacy.

THE CHOICE OF ANTIGONE

Fugard’s *The Island* and Osofisan’s *Tegonni: an African Antigone* extend Antigone’s political potential. *The Island* presents the story of two prisoners of apartheid who are locked away on Robben Island, off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa, and together, with all the power they have left, try to maintain their humanity in the face of continuous physical and mental cruelty. *Tegonni* is set in Nigeria under British colonial rule, but also refers to the military dictatorships that have held Nigeria in their grip almost incessantly ever since its independence from Britain in 1960.¹⁰ Both plays dramatise moments of oppression and employ *Antigone* as a representative of the struggle against this oppression. Written within contexts that forbid the kind of debate Athenian tragedy sought to instruct, when there is no ethical equilibrium between two equally justified claims, the confrontation between Antigone and Creon comes to represent the opposition between oppressor and oppressed. Within this larger field of injustice, the complexity of the conflict, a complexity on which many dramatic and philosophical interpretations centre, is reduced, and the question of justification is rendered unambiguous. There is no doubt about the validity of Antigone’s claim; her defiance is legitimate because it is necessary.

⁸ Jacques Derrida theorises Antigone’s relation to the law differently. As Amy Swiffen explains, in *Glas* he views Antigone as a reminder of the irreconcilability between conditional written law and unconditional justice, thus as the embodiment of the aporia of law itself (2010: 42).

⁹ See Cecilia Sjöholm (2004) for a discussion of feminist philosophical texts that use Antigone as their model.

¹⁰ Nigeria became a Republic in 1963 but, with the exception of the short-lived second republic between 1979 and 1983, the country was ruled by military dictators until 1999, when Olusegun Obasanjo (who had been a military dictator from 1976-1979 himself) was declared the new democratically elected president.

The Island premiered on 2 July 1973, in a small Cape Town club, under the title of *Die Hodoshe Span*. It was the result of a collaborative project by playwright Athol Fugard (of white English and Afrikaner descent) and two young black actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, undertaken at a time when apartheid's segregation laws forbade the collaboration between whites and blacks. As precautions against government intervention, the performance lacked a script and was presented under an alternative title. In an interview John Kani explains that a written text would have been a document, which "would have meant that the police would have evidence that could be presented to a District Attorney who might lay charges against us" (Philips 2000). The title *Die Hodoshe Span* was chosen because the intended *The Island* would have referred to Robben Island too explicitly. Those familiar with its connotation nonetheless recognised the implicit reference to Robben Island contained in the alternative title, as "Hodoshe" (Xhosa for "carrion fly") was the nickname of an infamous prison warden there.

With the above in mind, it is surprising that the South African authorities allowed Fugard, Kani and Ntshona to take the production to London only five months later, which suggests that neither the powerful anti-apartheid message it promoted, nor the impact it could have on international opinion was fully recognised. The contrast between the two performances is considerable: the Cape Town performance was closely supervised by the police, concealed its criticism of apartheid and reached only a limited audience, whereas the London performance was accompanied by playbills with details about apartheid and loudly called for the release of South Africa's political prisoners. The use of Afrikaans and Xhosa was replaced by a predominantly English dialogue to adapt to an international audience. Only after this production abroad did it become possible to perform the play more publicly in South Africa and to have it transformed into a written text under the name of *The Island* (Blumberg and Walder 1999: 105-106).

The Island is one of five so-called Township Plays, produced between 1958 and 1973, whose common label derives from the fact that they were all inspired by the everyday life of the people in the townships and produced in collaboration with black amateur casts.¹¹ As Dennis Walder, a specialist in South African theatre, states, the plays reveal a "uniquely fruitful and influential instance of creative interaction between urban black modes of expression and 'outside' or Western cultural modes; an interaction which took place despite the divisive pressures of the apartheid state" (Fugard 1993: xi).¹²

¹¹ The other township plays are *No-Good Friday* (1958), *Nongogo* (1959), *The Coat* (1967) and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972). See Walder's introduction to the collected *Township Plays* (Fugard 1993).

¹² As I argued in the previous chapter, "Western" modes cannot be considered as "outside" of or "alien" to African cultures, because (and *The Island* exemplifies this) they form an integral part of these cultures.

The Island demonstrates Fugard's commitment to acknowledge the existence and suffering of those who were excluded from the dominant discourses. However, the political dramatist Robert Kavanagh Mshengu finds fault with him for not using traditional African forms, which he considers not a mere "tragic result" of the South African situation, but evidence of a conscious lack of involvement with the struggle of the oppressed majority. In his opinion, "Kani and Ntshona's real knowledge and masterful depiction of the life of black people in the Eastern Cape is weakened by their acceptance of Fugard's interpretation of it" (1982: 176). The necessity of mediation by a white established playwright for public expression painfully shows the power relations at play during apartheid. Fugard has never concealed his uncomfortable position as a member of the dominant white settler minority, writing about a silenced majority, and his description of himself as "a classic example of the guilt-ridden impotent white liberal" well illustrates this.¹³ Walder is right to stress the extent to which Fugard's township encounters have taken him beyond his own position (Fugard 1993: xvi). It is important, also, to consider that these workshop collaborations grew out of improvised acting exercises based on personal experiences of the actors and their township communities. Fugard, then, did not write a script for the black actors to act out but, conscious of the fact that their acting provided him with a knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible to him, he let their improvisational acting determine the eventual script instead.¹⁴

Nevertheless, Mshengu's observation that "while [Fugard] makes no mention of Fanon, Cabral, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Achebe or Ngugi, he repeatedly refers to Camus, Sartre, Beckett, Brecht and Grotowski as having influenced him" is accurate, for European modes and concepts indeed dominate in Fugard's work (1982: 175). In *The Island*, too, they are the primary formal means through which the black experience of the two prisoners is conveyed on stage.¹⁵ A discussion of the various Western traditions that influenced *The Island* is best pursued elsewhere, but to gain a better understanding of the Antigone performance embedding in it, it is helpful to consider Fugard's admiration for Albert Camus. Fugard's *Notebooks 1960-1977* (1993) reveal a particular admiration for Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." In Greek mythology, king Sisyphus was punished for his hubris by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill. Because the boulder immediately rolled back down, his punishment

¹³ Interview with Colin Smith for the *Observer* in January 1974, "White Man on a Tightrope," quoted by Walder in the introduction to *The Township Plays* (Fugard 1993: xvi).

¹⁴ After *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo* Fugard was banned from entering the townships himself (Wertheim 2002: 79). Because the improvisational acting of Kani and Ntshona determined the script, it has become common among scholars to acknowledge them as co-authors to the published text. Where in this chapter I refer to Fugard as "the" playwright, this is for brevity's sake only.

¹⁵ For discussions on the influence of Brecht's epic theatre, Beckett's absurd theatre and Grotowski's poor theatre see, for instance, Durbach (1984) and Worthen (1996).

continued throughout eternity. Camus views Sisyphus as the absurd hero who in his torment is superior to his fate, because he “knows the whole extent of his wretched condition.” This “lucidity that was to constitute his torment,” Camus argues, “at the same time crowns his victory.”¹⁶

In *The Island* the Sisyphian theme finds a clear echo in the prisoners’ struggle to preserve their identity and, more directly, in the opening mime which, the stage description instructs, is an “image of back-breaking and grotesquely futile labour” (195). Lasting for no less than ten silent minutes—which on stage is excruciatingly long—the audience witnesses how the prisoners repetitively fill a wheelbarrow with sand, push it across stage and empty it again. Their hardship is conveyed most powerfully not so much in their dialogues, but rather when speech remains unarticulated, like in this opening mime. The suffering of the prisoners is beyond what can be narrated. It can only be shown. It can only be performed. But, as I will demonstrate below, performance offers more than a way of expression, as it is through performance—a performance of a scene from *Antigone*—that the prisoners are led to a lucidity similar to that of Camus’ Sisyphus, yet exceeding the existential to become powerfully political. This is how performance achieves performativity.

Fugard’s decision to turn to *Antigone* was based on personal experience. In 1965, he had been preparing the performance of Sophocles’ *Antigone* with his Serpent Players, an acting company consisting of black actors from the township New Brighton, near Port Elizabeth. The police had been harassing them throughout the rehearsal period by taking down names, confiscating scripts and intimidating the actors involved, culminating in the arrest of Norman Ntshinga, who was to play the character of Antigone’s betrothed and Creon’s son Haemon. This performance, which went on without Ntshinga, is explicitly mentioned in *The Island*:

JOHN. ...Jesus, Winston! June 1965.

WINSTON. What?

JOHN. This, man. *Antigone*. In New Brighton. St. Stephen’s Hall. (202)

Ntshinga was not the first Serpent Player to be sentenced to Robben Island. As Fugard states in his contribution to Marianne McDonald and Walton’s book on Irish versions of Greek tragedy, “our young theatre group had in fact become the Antigone of New Brighton. It was speaking out against and defying the edicts of apartheid Creon” (2002: 133). When Fugard later heard about a short two-man version of *Antigone*, performed from memory at a prison concert, this provided him with the plot of *The Island*, in which a prison performance of a scene from *Antigone* is included as a play-within-a-play. Fugard’s choice to draw on *Antigone*, then, developed from two performances

¹⁶ The original essay was published as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). The English translation cited from here was found online <<http://stripe.colorado.edu/~morrsto/sisypus.html>>, accessed 4 February 2006.

that had charged the text with political relevance within the context of apartheid and, in turn, made it the perfect text to critique apartheid.

Like Fugard, Femi Osofisan adapts *Antigone* against a background of political oppression. His *Tegonni: an African Antigone* was first produced in 1994 at Emory University in Atlanta (Georgia, US), which Osofisan visited during one of the most chaotic periods in Nigerian history, following the military junta's violent intervention in and annulment of the presidential elections of 1993. When the presumed winner Abiola proclaimed himself president in 1994, a new junta immediately arrested and detained him, after which political tension mounted (Raji 2005: 143). In the production notes, Osofisan explains that *Tegonni* is intended to “look at the problem of political freedom against the background of the present turmoil in Nigeria—my country—where various military governments have continued for decades now to thwart the people's desire for democracy, happiness, and good government” (11). As this comment shows, although he sets the play during colonialism, Osofisan's emphasis is on Nigeria's contemporary political situation. I return to this aspect below.¹⁷

The final form of *Tegonni* and the idea to adapt *Antigone* shaped itself in Osofisan's mind when he approached Lagos airport to fly to Atlanta, driving past “burning houses, mounted placards, and screaming police and military vehicles”:

I remembered the story of the British colonisation of Nigeria and the defeat of my ancestors. And I remembered the valiant story of Antigone. The two events—one from history, the other from myth—would help me add my voice to the millions of other small voices in Africa, all shouting unheard and pleading to be set free—voices that are waiting desperately for help from friends in the free world. (10)

Osofisan not only appeals for help from “the free world,” but also holds Britain, France and Germany responsible for supporting the military dictatorship to safeguard their economic interests (10). Yet, he does not absolve Nigerians from responsibility for their country's crisis; on the contrary, at the heart of the Nigerian predicament he diagnoses a distorted consciousness that shows itself in “collective amnesia and inertia, in cowardice, and in inordinate horror of insurrection” (1998: 15-16). This distorted consciousness, largely a distorted *historical* consciousness whose anaesthetic force disables change, Osofisan sets out to heal from within. Accordingly, his theatrical practice is characterised by a critical re-evaluation of the past as a prerequisite for socio-political change in the present. Within a context of oppression, the critical re-evaluation of the past calls for a special strategy, which Osofisan describes as

¹⁷ The first performance of *Tegonni* in Nigeria was at the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan in November 1998, directed by Osofisan himself. Since then, the play has been performed in Nigeria a number of times (Osofisan, May 2006, personal correspondence).

“surreptitious insurrection”: a way for the “dissenting artist” to “triumph through the gift of metaphor and magic, parody and parable, masking and mimicry”; a “covert and metaphoric system of manoeuvring” with which the terror of the state can be confronted and demystified (1998: 11).

In line with his project, Osofisan does not set *Tegonni* in contemporary Nigeria but, turning to the root of Nigeria’s predicament, towards the end of the nineteenth century, at the height of Britain’s colonial expansion. Through the enactment of a moment of socio-political change set within this past, performance becomes a way to transform history into an active site, at which a renewed (historical) consciousness may start to take shape. Performance, to draw on Wendy Brown’s words, thus literally “opens the stage for battling with the past over possibilities for the future” (2001: 151). The juxtaposition of history (the colonisation of Nigeria) with myth (the story of Antigone) in the above quotation is intended to serve a similar function, which Osofisan clarifies as follows:

by continuously juxtaposing scenes from myth and history; from the present and the past; and from the play’s present, and the real present, ... the audience is made aware all the time of the options available, and those chosen. ... The intention is to turn the stage into a problematic space of ideological conflict, through which the audience can see itself mirrored and, possibly, energized in its struggle with history. (1999b: 9)

Another way in which Osofisan explores different ideological positions and socio-political problems is borrowing from, while challenging antecedent texts. His dramaturgy is characterised by the recourse to existing plays: he engages with Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in his *Oriki the Grasshopper* (1981), with Wole Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed* in his *No More the Wasted Breed* (1982), with J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s *The Raft* in his *Another Raft* (1988), with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in his *Wèsòò Hamlet!* (2003), and with Euripides’ *Trojan Women* in his *Women of Owu*, which I discuss in Chapter Five (2004). Osofisan gives his re-workings both local and political relevance. The first is achieved by drawing heavily on myths, rituals, songs, proverbs and parables taken from the Yoruba tradition in which he was brought up; the latter by subjecting these traditional elements to constant re-evaluation, releasing them from their possible repressive weight and granting them contemporary socio-political relevance.¹⁸ An example in *Tegonni* is the inclusion of the Yoruba parable of the Tiger and the Frog, teaching a moral that in the context of contemporary Nigeria acquires political bearing: “the one who was swallowed gained a throne, while the one who usurped power fell to disgrace” (100). Tradition is not idealised, nor treated as

¹⁸ The Yoruba are a West-African people living chiefly in southwest Nigeria. In Chapter Three I discuss a “Yoruba tragedy” by Soyinka and expand on the Yoruba worldview and mythological system.

something before or outside of history or without political viability. Instead, tradition has a place within the (political) present; a place, however, in need of continuous reconsideration. Not only Greek tragedy, but also tradition has to be “adapted” to be politically relevant.

ANTIGONE’S REPRESENTATION

In employing Sophocles’ tragedy, both Osofisan and Fugard emphasise not Antigone’s historical distance as a character from Greek tragedy, but her relevance to their contemporary African contexts. It is therefore more constructive to think of Antigone as a concept, a concept that has travelled widely through philosophy, art and literature and, while travelling, has taken on different forms, shapes and meanings.¹⁹ In both Fugard and Osofisan, she has travelled to Africa where she becomes the representative of the struggle against oppression. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to consider the political implications of Antigone’s cultural translocation, focussing first on her representational value, then on her performative potential and, finally, on her canonical status.

In Fugard, the character John explains to his fellow prisoner Winston that “[t]his *Antigone* is just right for us.” Using courtroom rhetoric, John describes Antigone as “the accused” who “buried Polynices.” She is “[t]he traitor! The one who I said was on *our* side. Right?,” the one who “in the play pleads Guilty” though “between me and you, in this cell, we know she’s Not Guilty” (199-201). As becomes clear in the play, Antigone’s act of defying Creon by burying her brother is compared to Winston’s act of defying apartheid authority by burning his pass book in front of a police station. Like Antigone, Winston has committed his act openly, and like Antigone he knew that it would commit him to a “living death.”²⁰

Fugard’s Creon represents apartheid authority. When the prisoner John plays Creon in the play-within-the-play, he speaks lines that unmistakably refer to those prisoners of apartheid who were sentenced without trial. He proclaims it is “needless now to call the state witnesses who would testify beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is guilty,” and orders to take Antigone “straight to the Island! There wall her up in a cell for life, with enough food to acquit ourselves of the taint of her blood” (226-227). Antigone, in turn, becomes the symbol of the struggle against the ideology that this apartheid-Creon embodies. That interpretation is shared by Nelson Mandela, who played the part of Creon in an *Antigone* production during his time on Robben Island

¹⁹ See Bal’s study on travelling concepts (2002).

²⁰ The *Pass Laws Act* of 1952 required black South Africans over the age of 16 to carry a pass book at all times.

and, in his memoirs, writes that “[i]t was Antigone who symbolised our struggle; she was, in her own way, a freedom fighter, for she defied the law on the grounds that it was unjust” (1994: 441-442).

Writing about *The Island*, Fugard draws a parallel between the prison performance of *Antigone* that had formed the main inspiration for his play, and Jean Anouilh’s *Antigone*, staged in Paris during the Nazi occupation. “[T]he front row of German army officers had thought they were enjoying French culture,” he writes, while “behind them Parisians received a political message of hope and defiance. So too on Robben Island the South African warders sat in front of the audience of prisoners” (McDonald and Walton 2002: 134). In the context of apartheid South Africa, it is likely that those supporting apartheid ideology identified most with the figure of Creon. Although a black man in the role of Creon would probably be considered controversial in this perspective, that aspect could be overcome since, as Wetmore explains, the production of Greek tragedies by blacks was taken to indicate the acceptance of European colonial hegemony (2003: 42). The sight of a cross-dressed black man in the role of Antigone could easily be interpreted as a sign of humiliation and demasculation. Most important would be the play’s final message: defiance of authority will have its fatal consequences. Oppressed South Africans, on the other hand, would probably share John Kani’s feeling that the story of Antigone who “chose to break the law of the state rather than the law of humanity and ‘was arrested’ sounded familiar to their situation” and take home a very different message (Philips 2000). In this performance of *Antigone*, then, the Sophoclean ambiguity was put to strategic political use: to allow the play to be performed and still get a particular political message across to those receptive to it.

In *The Island*, Antigone’s political potential relies not on such ambiguity about the legitimacy of Antigone’s act. Presenting the prison-performance of *Antigone* as a play-within-a-play, Fugard leaves no doubt about with whom the audience should sympathise. In their assigned roles of fellow-prisoners and spectators of the trial scene, the members of the audience are also directed to identify with Antigone in their other roles: as members of the audience and as members of South African society. Below I expand on this use of metatheatre to enhance audience involvement. Here, suffice it to say that, like a Chinese box, the Antigone-Creon opposition presented in the play-within-the-play acquires significance at other levels as well: it becomes representative of the opposition between the prisoners and their prison warden Hodoshe on the level of the play proper, and of that between oppressed South Africans and apartheid authority on the level of South African reality.

Different from Fugard, in his *Tegonni: an African Antigone* Femi Osofisan structures his entire play along the lines of *Antigone*. The “valiant story of Antigone” is transformed into that of Tegonni, a princess of the imaginary Yoruba town of Oke-Osun (10). Creon becomes the British colonial Governor Carter Ross, who rules

the town with an iron hand. Similar to Fugard, Osofisan departs from Sophocles' ambiguous character presentation and presents his Governor as the undisguised representative of brutal colonial oppression; a man who longs for the time when "you knew you were right, because you believed in the Cross and in the Empire" and "You hammered the Union Jack down their throats, and made them sing 'God Save the Queen!' For if you didn't do that, they would quickly resort to barbarism, to cannibalism, to living apes" (131). Like Fugard's Creon, who wants to defend the borders from "those despicable rats who gnaw away at our fatness and happiness" (224), Osofisan's Governor does not conceive of the people he tyrannises as human. Sensing the dawn of a new "enfeebled" age, he obsessively clings to the historicist view that, as Chakrabarty discusses, enabled European colonialism in the first place. The Governor loudly proclaims that civilisation acquires its destiny because of people like him, while shamelessly stating that "we're just here to give the orders, it's the niggers who do the fighting" (131-132, 60).²¹

Unlike Sophocles' Creon, who only comes to power after Antigone's brothers have died, Osofisan's Governor is actively engaged in the civil war and eagerly applies the colonial strategy of divide-and-rule, supporting one of Tegonni's brothers with his army and treating the other as his enemy and forbidding his burial. Tegonni, like Antigone, disregards his decree and sets out to bury her brother's body. The Governor not only represents brutal colonial force, but also refers to the military dictatorships that have held Nigeria in their grip for so many decades. Thus, as Goff states, Osofisan's play exceeds a critique of the colonial and also offers a postcolonial critique (2007: 49). I would add, and Goff makes a similar point, that by showing how the past haunts the present, Osofisan in fact demonstrates that the "colonial" and the "post-colonial" cannot be disentangled.

Engaging with socio-political problems that will be painfully familiar to Nigerian audience members, Osofisan calls for their active engagement. Accordingly, Tegonni is more than the unambiguous symbol of resistance against colonial oppression, as she also becomes the agent of social and emancipatory change in a repressive traditional society. Like Sophocles' heroine, she refuses to play according to the rules of the patriarchal society in which she is located so that, as in many feminist interpretations of *Antigone*, Osofisan presents Antigone as a possible model of emancipation. Tegonni is the founder of the first Guild of Women Casters and practices a trade formerly unknown and not allowed to women. Rather than propagating a return to an idealised pre-colonial past, Osofisan paints an unromantic picture of a society that not only needs to break free from colonial oppression, but also from the repressive

²¹ Chakrabarty explains that because historicism "posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West," it was essential to the construction of colonial otherness, while it also legitimised the idea of civilisation in the colonies (2000: 7). He includes a helpful note on the term "historicism" (22-23).

forces of tradition. Tradition, like history, becomes something to be battled with, and Tegonni and her sisters and friends take on this battle. With regard to his larger oeuvre, Osofisan's feminist stance is not surprising because, as fellow playwright Tess Akaeke Onwueme explains, in contrast to the tendency in Nigerian theatre to portray women as underdogs, almost all of Osofisan's plays portray women as agents of social reconstruction. In his view, the empowerment of women is crucial for the prospective programme of liberation and modernisation; accordingly, many of his female characters are determined to struggle collectively to transform their society (1988: 25).

In Sophocles, there is no definite answer to the question whether Antigone's act of defying Creon is motivated by the desire for social change or whether it primarily stems from individual knowledge and interest. Her political reproach of Creon's "one-man rule" causing the citizens of Thebes to "lock up their tongues" would suggest the former (2003: 556). However, it is equally significant that Antigone ultimately acts alone, without the support of her fellow citizens, without the support even of her sister Ismene. Sophocles makes it impossible to draw clear lines between private and public, and family and state, so that it remains impossible to place Antigone on either side. Osofisan's play leaves no such ambiguity: his "African Antigone" Tegonni succeeds in unifying a group of women. Her act of defiance acquires collective relevance as it turns into a struggle for freedom from oppression and for societal change.

The stark contrast between Tegonni and the Governor could be seen to permit an escape into a simplistic opposition of coloniser versus colonised. This, in turn, would reinforce rather than heal the distorted consciousness Osofisan wishes to correct. However, Osofisan simultaneously challenges this opposition through the romantic relationship between Tegonni and colonial officer Allan Jones, more prominent and more developed than the one between Antigone and Haemon in Sophocles. Different from the Governor, Jones is sympathetic, kind-hearted and generous. Importantly, he protected Tegonni when she set up her bronze casting workshop and was taken for a witch by her people. This means that, to a great extent, Jones (the coloniser) facilitated Tegonni's (the colonised) emancipation in Oke-Osun's male-dominated society. However, Jones is also presented as essentially powerless, too weak to stand up to the Governor, too careful to avoid confrontation and too eager to settle for compromise.

Although the love between Tegonni and Jones suggests the possibility of bridging racial, political and cultural boundaries, their marriage is doomed from the start. Their idea that it could remain outside of the political sphere seems naïve, especially within the colonial context. Both Sophocles and Osofisan show how marriage is inscribed within certain political structures. In Sophocles, Antigone chooses loyalty to her brother (and, ultimately, death) over a life as Haemon's wife. In Butler's reading, Antigone thus unsettles dominant ideas about kinship and heteronormativity (2000). In Osofisan, Tegonni performs politics not through a rejection of marriage but

through a choice of whom to marry: the white colonial officer Jones. She too rejects what is expected of her and challenges the role to which she is supposed to conform. The Governor, of course, realises the marriage's political implications. His fatherly affection for Jones, echoing the relationship between Haimon and Creon in Sophocles, soon changes into a loathing for his impotence as an imperial officer: "You thought you were being a fucking hero, didn't you!" he shouts at Jones, "You'll marry a nigger woman, and show us all! Teach us a lesson perhaps on the equality of races! Rebuild the world with your penis!" (120-121).

The union between coloniser and colonised, between white and black, symbolises a transgressive moment in history that the Governor, the representative of Empire, cannot condone. But nor can most people of Oke-Osun. Although Tegonni's sisters do wholeheartedly encourage it, Osofisan invites his audience to contemplate for what reasons they do so. After all, the support of one of Tegonni's most committed sisters, Kunbi, seems to depend largely on the political usefulness of the marriage: "Just think of what the town as a whole will gain by having a whiteman as our in-law, rather than our antagonist! We will be feared and respected by all our neighbours" (22). Osofisan here points to the harmful effects of the colonial divide-and-rule strategy and demonstrates that resistance, no matter how committed it may be, is always to some extent informed by complicity.²²

Because their different political contexts require different questions to be posed, Fugard and Osofisan remove the ambiguity of the Sophoclean conflict. This does not make their adaptations simplistic or reductive. It means, rather, that complexity is to be found elsewhere, for example in the ways in which Osofisan complicates the opposition oppressor-oppressed and extends it to Nigeria's contemporary situation, or invites his audience to critically re-evaluate the past. In Fugard, the opposition oppressor-oppressed retains its Manichean character—it is, after all, a protest play set in the present of apartheid—and the play's complexity derives mainly from transforming Sophocles' *discourse on* into a *performance of* the political and the ethical. As such, performance becomes more than a method for representation, but also a way to elicit audience involvement and change. To this performing of Antigone I now turn.²³

²² The complicity of resistance with the workings of power is considered by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "More on Power/Knowledge" (1993). Reviewing Michel Foucault's analysis of "pouvoir/savoir," Spivak proposes a reading of power and resistance as not merely repressive and liberating, but as mutually dependent mechanisms. For discussions of the intertwining of commitment with forms of complicity, see *Commitment and Complicity in Cultural Theory and Practice*, eds. Firat, De Mul and Van Wichelen (2009). On Spivak's essay, see Aroch Fugellie (2010: 154-206).

²³ I do not suggest that performative elements are absent from Sophocles' *Antigone*, rather that Fugard and Osofisan depart from an understanding of the text as primarily a discourse about right and wrong.

PERFORMING ANTIGONE

Although my focus in this study is on dramatic texts and not on theatrical performances, I do wish to give attention to some aspects of performance (and have done so already), insofar as these are referred to or implied by the texts.²⁴ I do so most elaborately in this chapter, because of all the adaptations I examine, Fugard's and Osofisan's texts draw attention to performance most explicitly. Through metatheatrical devices both playwrights not only suggest performance, but also include performance within their texts. In this section of my chapter I therefore wish to focus on the ways in which their political understanding of Antigone is intensified by her metatheatrical appearance on stage. Fugard and Osofisan go about this differently. Fugard, rather than offering a re-written version of Antigone, focuses on the play's trial scene, which he freely adapts and incorporates as a play-within-a-play. Osofisan structures his entire play along the lines of Antigone, telling the story of, as the title suggest, an African Antigone, literally bringing Antigone on stage to interact with her African twin-sister.

Let me first expand on what "metatheatre" implies. In its most basic explanation, the term encompasses all forms of theatrical self-reference, the ways in which plays call attention to their theatricality, such as story-telling, the play-within-the-play and role-play. Of course, these elements come into their full potential on stage, in the interaction between actors and audience members. On the level of the dramatic text, metatheatrical references can be read as signs of that "live" potential, but also hold relevance within the text as instances of literary self-referentiality evoking possible relations with performances of the text.

Gilbert and Tompkins explain that for postcolonial playwrights metatheatre holds political potential, because it presents ways to not merely re-play, but also re-negotiate and re-work past and present:

Metatheatre reminds us that any performance stages the necessary provisionality of representation. ... By developing multiple self-reflexive discourses through role playing, role doubling/splitting, plays within plays, interventionary frameworks, and other metatheatrical devices, post-colonial works interrogate received models of theatre at the same time as they illustrate, quite self-consciously, that they are acting out their own histories/identities in a complex replay that can never be finished or final. (1996: 23)

Metatheatre, then, is not only a constructive method to engage with the politics of (self-) representation, but also offers ways to reconstruct past and present. It is

²⁴ In the introduction I stated my conviction that it is legitimate and worthwhile to study dramatic texts as literary texts and cultural objects in their own right. My focus on text inevitably means that other aspects of performance are excluded from my analyses.

therefore not surprising that metatheatre not only features in Fugard's and Osofisan's re-workings of *Antigone*, but that it is characteristic of their entire oeuvres.²⁵

In addition, theatre scholar Brian Crow suggests that many African dramatists make use of metatheatrical devices to “anatomise oppression and injustice and to celebrate the capacity of theatre and the theatrical to function as modes of survival, resistance, and even, in their more optimistic moments, change in contemporary African societies” (2002: 134). *The Island*, with its main focus on performance as the primary means of survival and resistance, is a case in point. Through performance—by acting out a film scene, composing fictitious news broadcasts and making imaginary phone calls—the prisoners retain their sanity and humanity. But though these instances of play-acting offer ways to hold on to normality and provide momentary distraction and even joy, Winston and John can ultimately not prevent harsh reality to kick back in and confront them with their situation. A good example is a scene in which, in an imaginary phone call, John asks their old friend Sky to visit his wife to ask her why she never writes and inform how their children and his parents are doing. What starts as distraction from reality ends with the painful realisation of what John has been forced to leave behind.

Only through their most significant performance, the rehearsal and staging of the scene “The Trial and Punishment of Antigone,” which Fugard includes as a play-within-a-play, the prisoners ultimately succeed in retrieving a sense of agency, transforming act into action. Through the use of metatheatre, Fugard underlines the power of performance. Creating an intentional slippage between the three-level division of reality, stage and stage-on-stage, he suggests that the action in the play-within-the-play and in the play proper can seep through to and affect reality. Not only is the border between reality and stage explicit, it is also explicitly crossed because the actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona use their own first names in their roles and because the play includes various addresses to imprisoned fellow Serpent Players from real life. The actors are not merely acting out, but they are also experiencing prison-life on Robben Island: they are, as Wetmore argues, “playing themselves, both in a cell on the island, but also in the larger prison of the nation in which their identities are just as constructed as those of the characters they are playing” (2002: 197).²⁶

²⁵ Although some critics analyse this in Brechtian terms, and despite Brecht's significant influence on both Fugard's and Osofisan's dramaturgies, metatheatrical techniques are equally characteristic of indigenous African performance practices (Richards 1996: 72).

²⁶ In the first performance of *Die Hodoshe Span* the characters did have different first names, Bonisile Kani and Zola Ntshona; perhaps, in line with the other precautions taken to avoid government intervention, the situation at that time called for a less explicit relation between what was presented on stage and reality. Worthy of note are two comments by reviewers of the 2002 London performance by Kani and Ntshona. Hilary Burns wrote that their “identification with the characters and situation is mesmerising”; Philip Fisher that “the movements and lines are deeply ingrained in the psyches of the actors, who have been playing these parts since 1973” (Burns 2002; Fisher 2002).

As the dissolution of the boundary between actor and character inevitably affects the boundary between stage and the world outside, the audience is subjected to a similar experience. They are no longer solely the audience to *The Island*, but also become witnesses to the play-within-the-play. Indeed, the character John introduces the performance of *Antigone* by including the audience in his address: “Captain Prinsloo, Hodoshe, Warders....and Gentlemen!” (223).²⁷ In this way, the viewers’ authoritarian gaze, surveilling the stage in ways analogous to Hodoshe’s gaze of the prison, is subverted. Placed in the position of fellow prisoners, viewers becomes participants in the performance. To draw on Bal, this makes a viewer a performer, “play[ing] the part scripted by the work to the extent that he or she responds to the perlocutionary address of the work, which reaches out, over time, from the past of the work’s making into the present of viewing” (2002: 186). Rather than observing an account of suffering, the audience is performatively involved in an experience of suffering instead.

In line with this identification across the reality-fiction divide, Haike Frank points out in her study on role-play in South African theatre that using role-play to present the conflicts of the apartheid era on stage is especially effective for initiating the audience’s self-reflexivity, because apartheid’s ideology was itself based on a racial role definition of whites as masters and blacks as servants (2004: 50-52). That in order to be allowed to work with Kani and Ntshona, Fugard had to present them as his driver and gardener—in other words, assign them a role that would fit the role definition of apartheid—illustrates this. Another telling example comes from a performance of Fugard’s play *No Good Friday* before an all-white audience in 1958. Fugard was supposed to perform the role of the white priest, but he was not allowed on the same stage with the black actors. Presented with this dilemma, he decided not to cancel the performance, but to give his part to a black actor, resulting in a strange reversal of the more familiar image of the “black minstrel” (the white performer in black make-up), presenting a black performer with his face painted white (Walder 1993: 416).

According to Frank, the effectiveness of role-play on stage pertains to its power to confront audiences with their variegated knowledges and experiences of role-play off stage, knowledges and experiences that make them especially susceptible to recognise the performative potential of role-play to bring about change. Frank’s study reflects on any society negatively based on role definition, where people are forced to perform and conform to imposed roles. Its relevance to Nigeria is demonstrated by a scene from *Tegonni* in which the character Antigone orders her retinue to change roles and play members of the Hausa constabulary, the army that the British raised to colonise West Africa. Antigone tells them that “[i]t’s just history about to repeat itself again” and that

²⁷ The name Prinsloo refers to the infamous Captain Hendrik Prinsloo, commander of the Northern Transvaal Security Branch, a branch of the South African police during apartheid.

the script “is the story we rehearsed, as it’s happened at other times, in other places” (28-29). Antigone’s comment suggests a pessimistic and cyclical view of history, but her insistence that there is only one way this story can be acted out is met by her actors’ resistance. They ask for other roles:

2nd SOL: You’ve got to find us another role. This one’s no fun at all!

ANTIGONE: You’re tired of being soldiers?

4th SOL: Demoralised. All we do is carry corpses.

2nd SOL: Or build execution platforms—

1st SOL: Or terrorize people—

2nd SOL: Burn and plunder houses—

4th SOL: Collect bribes!

3rd SOL: We’re so ashamed! Is this all that soldiers do in this country? (74)

In response, Antigone promises them a scene in which they can change roles again (28-30). In the role of theatre director she imposes roles on her attendants, roles that they do not want to perform. Roles, moreover, that not only refer to the military forces in colonial times, but that will also be familiar to Nigerian and other viewers who experience military control in their daily lives.

This scene does more than show the audience how different ideological positions are projected by individuals; it also presents them with the possibility of changing reality and, like in *The Island*, of changing their own roles within this reality (Dunton 1992: 69-74). That they are not only passive receivers but actors within this reality becomes clear when one of the soldiers says, in pidgin English as Antigone has instructed: “As for me, I no care one bit to know de reason for de war! White man dey pay good money for soldier, so me, I join army to fight for white man, dat’s all!” (32). Osofisan points to the complicity of Africans in the exploitation of other Africans, but through the use of role-play he also shows that “if Africans are part of the problem then, by definition, they can be part of the solution” (Goff 2007: 49).²⁸

That some roles, when chosen rather than imposed, can offer political potential is also demonstrated by Winston’s performance of Antigone in *The Island*. In his role of Antigone, a female character who in Western tradition is usually considered white, Winston performs a double act of cultural travesty, crossing boundaries of not only gender but also race. Spectators who are familiar with Antigone are made conscious of and invited to rethink their conventional ideas about her physical and representational status. To spectators lacking any prior knowledge of Antigone she is primarily presented, through John’s introduction to Winston, as a relevant symbol, although the sight of a blond wig on a black man will nonetheless make them aware of Antigone’s

²⁸ Elsewhere in the play Chief Isokun refers to the involvement of Africans in the slave trade and asks “what cruelties have we not inflicted on ourselves, we black people, as agents in the service of others!” (108).

Western origin. Despite these significations pertaining to femininity and cultural background, Fugard's main concern is with Antigone's symbolical power, which makes it unlikely that the audience is to understand Winston's cross-dressing act as a hidden claim for Antigone's African origins, or as an illustration of contemporary theories that examine the possibility that Greek culture developed out of African culture.²⁹ Instead, it serves to underscore the constructed and possibly also constructive nature of racial role-definition on stage and, as the boundary between stage and reality is metatheatrically crossed, off-stage as well.³⁰

In *The Island*, the protagonists bring Antigone on stage in the play-within-the-play. Rather than resorting to the safety of putting on a show that cannot cause offence to the guards, John and Winston make the conscious choice to perform *Antigone*, and to perform her on their conditions. They do so because they realise the political potential it offers them, a potential best illustrated by opposing two passages from the play. The first is from the beginning, when John appeals to Winston not to be "Hard-Arsed! You! When Hodoshe [the prison warden] opens that door tomorrow say 'Ja, Baas' the right way. I don't want to be back on that bloody beach tomorrow just because your feel like being difficult" (204). In the second passage, towards the end of the play, Winston, in the role of Antigone, addresses apartheid-Creon: "[y]ou are only a man, Creon," adding that "your threat is nothing to me" (226). In his role as a prisoner, Winston must remain silent, but in his role of Antigone he is at least able to talk back and declare his defiance.

Still, the character Winston does not immediately recognise this potential power of performance, as he initially refuses to play Antigone. His rejection of the part is mostly based on his fear that his appearance on stage as a woman, with fake breasts and a wig, will merely evoke laughter from his fellow prisoners. And his fear seems justified, for according to the stage directions John "*circles 'her' admiringly, he fondles her breasts, he walks arm in arm with her down Main Street...* He climaxes everything by dropping his trousers," exclaiming "Speedy Gonzales! here I come!" (207). Winston then angrily tears off his costume, shouting "I'm a man, not a bloody woman" and "I am not doing your Antigone! I would rather run the whole day for Hodoshe. At least I know where I stand with him. All *he* wants is to make me a 'boy'...not a bloody woman" (208, emphasis in text). Apparently, suffering humiliation and dehumanisation at the hands

²⁹ See my discussion of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* theory in Chapter One.

³⁰ A similar message is conveyed in the prologue to *Tegonni*, where the director complains that he needs white actors for the roles of the British colonial officers. One of his black actors responds that this only requires make-up and some imagination, because "all is illusion here, and everyone in the audience has come to play his or her own part in a dream." Significantly, this prologue is suggested "only when the cast is mono-ethnic and composition" and "written here with an all-Black cast in mind" although "the appropriate equivalents can be easily supplied for White actors" and "ideally ... the Cast should be racially mixed, and when that happens, the Prologue should be omitted" (13).

of the prison warder seems less mortifying to Winston than being embarrassed and demasculinised in front of his equals. As Rush Rehm argues, this scene reveals that within the hierarchical racial divisions introduced by apartheid between Whites, Indians, Coloureds and Blacks another hierarchy between male and female is implicit (2007: 223).³¹

John tries to persuade Winston that the fellow prisoners may laugh at him but that he should remember that “nobody laughs forever! There’ll come a time when they’ll stop laughing, and that will be the time when Antigone hits them with her words” (209). Since Winston is still not convinced of the potential of role-play, John resorts to role-play himself. He puts on the wig and false breasts and confronts Winston: “Look at me. Now laugh.” As the stage directions state, “*Winston tries, but the laugh is forced and soon dies away*” (209). John tells him “You think those bastards out there won’t know it is you? Yes, they’ll laugh. But who cares about that as long as they laugh in the beginning and listen at the end. That’s all we want them to do...listen at the end” (210). But Winston still protests:

...this Antigone is a bloody...what you call it...legend! A Greek one at that. Bloody thing never happened. Not even history! Look, brother, I got no time for bullshit. Fuck legends. Me?...I live my life here! I know why I’m here, and it’s history, not legends. I had my chat with a magistrate at Cradock and now I’m here. Your Antigone is child’s plan, man. (209-210)

For Winston, myth and history are two opposed principles. He does not yet realise what inspired Osofisan to appropriate *Antigone*: that the combination of myth and history can hold political potential. He cannot yet believe what he will experience later: that the distinction between both can dissolve. Confronted with the hopelessness of his situation, Winston cannot view history as something that can be battled with, as Osofisan’s theatre instructs. Rather, it weighs him down, a weight from under which he cannot struggle free.

When John is called off stage to be told of the reduction of his sentence, Winston puts the wig back on, looks at his reflection in the water bucket and laughs, but again this laugh is abruptly cut off, suggesting that indeed “nobody laughs forever,” that ultimately the meaning of his act will triumph. When he hears of John’s approaching freedom, he starts to shout in despair: “You stink, John. You stink of beer, of company, of *poes*, of freedom. Your freedom stinks, John,” then to admit “I’m jealous of your freedom, John” (220-221). For a few seconds, Winston “*almost seems to bend under the weight*

³¹ With this gender hierarchy in mind, it is interesting to consider that in ancient Greece the role of Antigone—and of other female characters that figure in tragedy—would have been played by men. Classicist Froma Zeitlin suggests that tragedy was a place where the male could freely investigate the female (1996: 347). I expand on this in Chapter Five.

of the life stretching ahead of him on the Island,” but then, with the voice of a man who “has come to terms with his fate,” he speaks: “Nyana we Sizwe!” (221, emphases in text). This phrase, which translates into “Son of the Land,” is a Xhosa praise-term for heroes and a rallying cry that became an important slogan in the black South African struggle (Fugard 1993: 235; Raji 2005: 141). Winston collects the props for Antigone, suggesting that his struggle of rejection and identification with her part has come to its end and that he is led to a political awareness of the power of the performance he will put on.

Winston’s acquired voice and sense of agency would be of relative consequence if it remained limited to the play-within-the-play. However, in the moments that follow, Winston’s prison-reality merges with Antigone’s story when Antigone/Winston explicitly refers to Hodoshe in her declaration to Creon: “If I had let my mother’s son, a Son of the Land, lie there as food for the carrion fly, Hodoshe, my soul would never have known peace” (226). By incorporating the translation of the Xhosa phrase “Nyana we Sizwe” in Antigone’s declaration to Creon, Fugard merges aesthetically and culturally divided terrains and reinforces the bearing that Greek mythology/tragedy and South African reality can have on one another. After “tearing off his wig and confronting the audience as Winston, not Antigone,” Winston delivers his final words. His declaration is an abridged version of Antigone’s final speech in Sophocles: “Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs” (227). The play-within-the-play now coincides with the play proper, as well as with reality outside. Winston breaks role with Antigone and moves beyond his performance, not to distance himself from her, but because his experience is identical to hers, because as a symbol she has become his. Through his act he has acquired a lucidity similar to that of Camus’ Sisyphus: with a renewed understanding of the “whole extent of his wretched condition,” he has become “superior to his fate.”

Although this experience may be liberating on the existential level, it is not in the literal sense of the word. John and Winston’s performance does not offer them a way out of prison. Even if John were to be released from Robben Island, as Hodoshe has promised him, it would only be to return to the prison of apartheid South Africa. Perhaps it is for this reason that the South African novelist André Brink questions whether “the disguise of the political statement through play-acting may not be seen as a withdrawal into the comparative safety of aesthetics,” doubting whether one can “ever act oneself out of a given situation, or only ever more and more deeply and fatally into it?” (1993: 444). However, Brink concludes that the ending of *The Island* is ultimately not defeatist, for the act of performing not only provides sheer entertainment or distraction, but also prevents the prisoners from “turning into stone” like their fellow prisoner old Harry, who has forgotten who he is and why he is imprisoned (220). Most importantly it leads them to a renewed affirmation of their defiance of and struggle against apartheid.

John and Winston not only engage in an act of performance, but of performativity as well. Judith Butler describes performativity as a model for social processes in which set norms are reiterated for the purpose of resisting and possibly subverting them (1993: 2). Performativity, then, is a possible strategy not only to contend with but also to take advantage of the complicity of resistance with power. In her later study on *Antigone*, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Butler explains that it is only possible for Antigone to perform her defiance of Creon by simultaneously refusing and assimilating his authority. Her claim can only be made within the language of the power she opposes. This does not make her defiance futile, because as Butler explains, rhetorically confounding the distinction between two opposing principles means “bringing into crisis the stability of the conceptual distinction between them.” That, in turn, facilitates resistance (2000: 6-12).

In Fugard’s *The Island* something similar happens, though here the distinction between two opposing principles is confounded metatheatrically, rather than rhetorically. The norms at stake, imposed by apartheid ideology, are reiterated through John and Winston’s performance of the trial scene of *Antigone*. This ostensible reiteration of apartheid ideology on the level of the play-within-the-play is probably why the authorities allowed the play to be performed. However, by crossing the boundaries between the play-within-the-play, the play itself and reality, most importantly through the use of role-play, Fugard subverts the norms that the trial scene might be seen to convey. In this way, apartheid ideology is rejected through its on-stage transformation into the ideology that opposes it. The effect is a powerful message of resistance against apartheid.

Similar to Fugard, Osofisan uses Antigone’s story as inspiration for the story of his “African Antigone” Tegonni. But Antigone’s presence does not remain hidden behind the mask of Tegonni, as Osofisan metatheatrically brings her on stage as another character. In contrast to *The Island*, she arrives on stage uninvited. Her introduction of herself is telling and, therefore, worth quoting at length:

ANTIGONE: I heard you were acting my story. And I was so excited I decided to come and participate.

YEMISI: Your story! Sorry, you’re mistaken. This is the story of Tegonni, our sister. Funny, the names sound almost the same, but—

ANTIGONE: Tegonni! Where’s she?

YEMISI: Back in the compound there. Preparing for her wedding.

ANTIGONE: And for her death?

FADERERA: What kind of thought is that, stranger—?

ANTIGONE: Antigone

YEMISI: Yes, Antigone, whatever your name is! Have you come to curse our sister?

ANTIGONE: No, oh ho. Please don't misunderstand me. I know what I'm saying. I've travelled the same route before.

...

KUNBI: Hey, did you say, you're—Antigone?

ANTIGONE: Yes.

KUNBI: The same Antigone we've heard about?

ANTIGONE: There's only one Antigone.

KUNBI: But that's impossible. She's from Greek mythology.

ANTIGONE: And so am I. From the Greek and other mythologies.

FADERERA: An impostor! Let's go.

ANTIGONE: Antigone belongs to several incarnations.

KUNBI: But you...you're black!

ANTIGONE: (*laughs*). And so? What colour is mythology?

ANTIGONE'S CREW: We're metaphors. We always come in the colour and shape of your imagination. (25-27)

This passage demonstrates that it is not Antigone the heroine from Greek tragedy who comes on stage, but Antigone the mythological figure, from “the Greek and other mythologies.” And since mythology knows no temporal or racial boundaries, Antigone is willing and able to travel to any society in need of change.

Interestingly, though the script suggests a black Antigone, the prologue is more ambiguous. Here, the director gives a wig to the black actor who will play the part of the British District Officer Allan Jones. The costumes manager asks whether this actor is the only one who is “going to be white,” prompting the director to remember that there is also the part of Governor Carter-Ross: “Who'll play the General for us? ... Yes, you then. Go get a wig too ... Who else? Ah yes, the Governor's ADC ... You: that should fit you. And Antigone? Yes you. Go take a wig, you can pick your guards later” (15). Through this ambiguity about Antigone's colour, Osofisan further underscores the constructed nature of racial role definition.

Before Antigone links hands with her African sister, she urges her to give up and apologise to the Governor. Sadly, her argument sounds quite convincing: “I've learned from history! Go and look down the ages, my dear. Human beings throw off their yokes, only for themselves to turn into oppressors. They struggle valiantly for freedom, and in the process acquire the terrible knowledge of how to deny it to others” (126). Antigone's words suggest a pessimistic and cyclical understanding of history, an understanding which Nigeria's history of successive military dictatorships could be seen to validate. But it soon becomes clear that these words were only intended to put Tegonni's commitment to the test, a test which Tegonni passes gloriously when she immediately distances herself from Antigone's defeatist words, urging her to “Leave my story, you and I, we have nothing to share” (126). Antigone congratulates Tegonni and promises her support, proclaiming that:

Many tyrants will still arise, furious to inscribe their nightmares and their horrors on the patient face of history. But again and again, as many times as such abortions creep up, as many times will others come up who will challenge them and chase them away into oblivion. Ozymandias will rise again! But so will Antigone! Wherever the call for freedom is heard! (127-128)

Ozymandias is the name the Greeks gave to Ramses II, the Egyptian pharaoh from whom Moses and the Israelites fled during the Exodus.

“Ozymandias” is also the title of a poem by the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. As Theo D’haen explains, this poem was written after a visit to the British Museum where Shelley saw a statue of the pharaoh (2007: 112). In this poem, which Antigone and Tegonni together recite, the narrator meets “a traveller from an antique land,” who tells him about the sunken and decayed statue of Ozymandias in the desert. In ironic contrast to the pompous message on the pedestal—“My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings/ Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!”—nothing else remains and “[t]he lone and level sands stretch far away” (128-129). As D’haen argues, the poem is not a mere romantic meditation upon a remote past, but a topical reflection on early nineteenth-century British imperialism (2007: 113). It is fitting, then, that Antigone and Tegonni together recite this poem. Analogous to Shelley, Osofisan presents Antigone as “a traveller from an antique land,” arriving with a similar anti-imperial message. The image of Antigone and Tegonni linking hands like true revolutionary twin-sisters as they restate this message demonstrates that mythological relevance transgresses temporal and spatial barriers. It also emphasises that Tegonni does not exist by virtue of Antigone. As in *The Island*, the historicist view of “first in the West, and then elsewhere” is rejected (Chakrabarty 2000: 6). But does this also imply that Fugard’s and Osofisan’s engagement with Antigone should be considered as a way of writing back to the Western canon? I examine this question in the next section.

BEYOND *ANTIGONE*?

Both Fugard and Osofisan place Antigone in an African context, transforming her to their political needs. Their metatheatrical referencing of *Antigone* could be seen as a performative strategy, to repeat Gilbert and Tompkins’ words, of interrogating “received models of theatre at the same time as they illustrate, quite self-consciously, that they are acting out their own histories/identities in a complex replay that can never be finished or final” (1996: 23). The question remains whether, in addition to intertextual works, their plays are also examples of “canonical counter-discourse,”

which Gilbert and Tompkins define as the process in which writers develop a counter-text with the intention to destabilise the power structures of the pre-text (1996: 16).³²

In their discussion, *Antigone* is presented as a text that has “received considerable counter-discursive attention because it disputes the state’s definition of justice and champions a figure who is imprisoned for maintaining her sense of moral and legal principle” and because “[t]he differences between two systems of justice and the triumph of the stronger power of the weaker can easily be articulated in a colonial context” (1996: 41). Gilbert and Tompkins seem to suggest that rearticulating the power relations of Sophocles’ original in a colonial context equals giving this text counter-discursive attention, whereas, according to their own definition, a counter-discursive text not only articulates, but also purposefully destabilises such power structures. In their discussion of *The Island* as an example of counter-discursive attention to Sophocles’ *Antigone*, they again only demonstrate how this play articulates and reworks, but not how it destabilises or counters the power structures of its pre-text.

Indeed, though Fugard as well as Osofisan do change *Antigone’s* power structures by taking away their ambiguity and adapting their representative value, they do not set out to counter them.³³ After all, their sympathy lies with Antigone. Even if we were to interpret Sophocles’ original to unequivocally stand for European hegemony, a notion I challenged in the previous chapter, within this text the character of Antigone, in her defiance of authority, is herself the personification of counter-hegemonic action against Creon’s rule. In *The Island*, when John encourages Winston to identify with Antigone, he does not claim that she should be theirs, not even that she is theirs as well, but simply that she *is* theirs. In *Tegonni*, Antigone is presented as a metaphor that belongs to several incarnations, a source of inspiration for the struggle against oppression that can be conjured up “whenever the call for freedom is heard” (128). Both Fugard and Osofisan engage with Sophocles’ classic not to counter it, but to adopt the figure of Antigone as a political symbol. Neither seem particularly interested in Antigone’s cultural origin or her status as a Western canonical figure. Their main concern is with her political potential in the present.³⁴

The adaptations suggest that in attempting to classify them as “canonical counter-discourse” it is important to further specify “the power structures of the originary text” Gilbert and Tompkins talk about. If these refer to the power structures that enclose the tragic script, the structures produced by the Eurocentric tradition that has claimed

³² In the previous chapter I discuss my hesitation about using the term “canonical counter-discourse” to describe African adaptations of Greek tragedy.

³³ Published after Gilbert and Tompkin’s book, Osofisan’s *Tegonni* is not included in their study.

³⁴ I have been referring to Antigone’s appearance in Fugard in terms of a “symbol,” whereas in Osofisan *Tegonni* introduces herself as a “metaphor.” I find that in the case of *The Island* the word “symbol” more accurately describes Antigone’s appearance as a role to perform on stage, as it puts stronger emphasis on her function as a concrete face to an abstract notion.

Greek tragedy as the foundation of Western civilisation, then *Tegonni* and *The Island* could indeed be defined as examples of canonical counter-discourse. If, however, they refer to the power structures contained *within* the tragic script, dramatised through the conflict between Antigone and Creon, this generates a different answer. Although Osofisan and Fugard reduce the ambiguity and change the representative value of *Antigone's* power structures, they do not set out to counter them. As I have attempted to demonstrate, not Antigone's foreignness but, on the contrary, her at-homeness is stressed. The myth and tragedy of Antigone have a familiarising effect and it is this familiarity on which Fugard's and Osofisan's engagement with *Antigone* is built, and on which the political potential of their plays depends.

Let me turn once more to the texts to elaborate. While in *The Island* Antigone comes on stage only because the prisoners choose to perform her, in *Tegonni* her appearance seems more ambiguous. If *Tegonni* indeed does not exist by virtue of Antigone, then how to understand the fact that Antigone insists on the necessity for her story to play out exactly as it did before, for instance by hinting at *Tegonni's* tragic end in the first of the two passages I have quoted above? Antigone's question whether *Tegonni* is preparing for her death is clearly rhetorical. And what to make of the fact that, as I described, Antigone not only comes on stage uninvited but, taking on the role of theatre director, also gets involved with the execution of *Tegonni's* story? A story, moreover, which she possessively refers to as hers: "I heard you were acting *my* story" (25, emphasis added). *Tegonni* might be seen to reclaim ownership/authorship when she later implores Antigone to leave her story, but her story nonetheless ends similarly to that of the Sophocles' heroine. At the climax of the play, *Tegonni* and her sisters rebelliously chant a curse at the soldiers: "Rejoice heartily with us/ The tyrant/ Who gives wicked orders/ We have conquered him!/ Oh yes, we have beaten him/ We have seen his back!" (139-140).³⁵ In response, however, they get shot, and *Tegonni* follows the fate of her lover Jones. Like Antigone in Sophocles, *Tegonni* dies so that, as Goff observes, "the story is saved instead of the woman," prompting the question whether all of this could still point to the "coercive dimension of the colonialism that makes [this] story available to the Nigerian author in the first place" (2007: 51, 46).

In Osofisan and Fugard, the very emphasis on Antigone as theirs, representing their struggle, embeds the dominance of Antigone's status as a white Western woman and, by extension, of *Antigone's* status as a Western canonical text. The plays themselves support that argument. As I discussed, in *The Island* Winston puts on a blond wig as he performs his role of Antigone. In *Tegonni*, Kunbi expresses great surprise at seeing a black Antigone. Simultaneously, however, the plays undermine the dominant regime of racial and cultural representation. In *The Island*, Winston throws off his wig in his

³⁵ In a note Osofisan explains that the women chant in the Ijebu dialect, "to enhance the oral power of the curse" (139). The published text contains the diacritical rendition of the Ijebu and an English translation.

final embrace of Antigone, as if he no longer has need for it. And *Tegonni* includes a prologue that “confuses” Antigone’s racial signification and turns her into a site where representation can be played with. On the one hand, Antigone’s origin seems unavoidable, while on the other hand, through the process of adaptation and through the use of metatheatres, that origin is constantly being questioned.

By bringing Antigone on stage, Fugard and Osofisan present the illusion that Antigone is “really” there, while simultaneously stressing the distance between Sophocles’ original and their African reworkings. In the previous chapter, I discussed how adaptation by definition comprises both these familiarising and foreignising gestures. In *Tegonni* this is made literal when Antigone joins hands with Tegonni, “an African Antigone.” It is as if Antigone could not migrate without doubling herself. This doubling should not be understood as the tragic and inescapable consequence of cultural migration from the dominant Western canon to a (post)colonial context. In fact, as a strategy it offers great political potential, because it makes it possible to simultaneously claim cultural specificity as well as universality. Presenting their Antigones as particular variations on a universal concept, Fugard and Osofisan effectively demand shared ownership: Antigone no longer belongs to Europe exclusively. By doubling Antigone, they push the limits of the universal, thus destabilising the Eurocentrism that has defined it. Considering these African adaptations of *Antigone* in terms of counter-discursivity, it is important to emphasise that it is ultimately this Eurocentrism, rather than the canonical text itself, at which the counter-discursive attention is directed.

In the final scene of *Tegonni*, Antigone comes on stage on the boat of the Yoruba river Goddess Yemoja and takes Tegonni on board. Together, they kneel before the Goddess. This final image not only suggests the power of mythological relevance to cross cultural boundaries, but also implies that these Antigones, and the promise of change that they symbolise, live beyond a singular historical moment; that, indeed, Antigone will rise again “[w]herever the call for freedom is heard!” (128). As Goff suggests, this final image also obscures Antigone’s origins and destination:

we are not encouraged to imagine her as arriving from ancient Greece, or via Britain ... Instead, her arrival by boat allows her to bypass this [colonial] inheritance completely [and] invites us instead to think of her as African. At some level it is clear indeed that she does not *arrive* at all; in the boat of an African deity, she is already part of Africa (2007: 53, emphasis in text).

The emphasis on Antigone as “already part of Africa” holds two implications: on the one hand, it resists analyses that reduce African adaptations of Greek tragedy to anti-colonial strategies; on the other, it presents Greek tragedy and myth as an integral part of African

cultures.³⁶ That is also the suggestion of Osofisan's title: Tegonni is "an African Antigone," with the article "an" reminding us, as Goff explains, "that this drama can acknowledge the plural parentage of Brathwaite and Fugard, as well as of Sophocles and Anouilh" (2007: 53). The suggestion of different possible Antigones who come from a plurality of traditions undermines the notion of a singular and authoritative point of origin.

ANTIGONE'S FUTURES

In this chapter I focused on the political implications of appropriating *Antigone* within the contexts of South Africa and Nigeria. After a short consideration of Antigone's legacy, I discussed how Fugard and Osofisan extend her political potential, primarily through changes in representation and through use of metatheatricality. I then turned to the effects of Antigone's cultural migration on her status as a Western canonical figure, demonstrating that Antigone's politics not only operates on various levels but also stretches beyond the African continent. In drawing this chapter to a close, I want to emphasise that for both Fugard and Osofisan, Antigone's supposed cultural and historical origin is not the main concern: it is not *her* past they are primarily interested in, but the political potential she has to offer for *their* future.

It is tempting to view these adaptations as successfully recapturing a quality of Sophocles' text which other interpretations have, perhaps, ignored. This is what Forsyth suggests when she considers adaptations such as Brecht's *Antigone* and Fugard's *The Island* as attempts to "liberate the source text from what was increasingly deemed to be centuries of interpretive distortion, containment and status in the service of the ideological and moral beliefs at the centre of the Western liberal humanist tradition" (2006: 127-128). As I discussed in Chapter One, for Forsyth these adaptations signal that Antigone once again becomes as belligerent, subversive and radical "as the day she defined Creon's unyielding edict" (134-135). But of course this day only exists in the present of its reading, and there is no original Antigone to which we can (or should wish to) return. Adaptations are never free from their pre-texts, nor from other readings of these pre-texts that precede or supersede them, and any pre-text is per definition connected to its many re-readings. Chanter states it well:

There is no returning to a Greek text somehow outside the political genealogy of its multiple translators. There is no pre-political text named *Antigone*. There are only the multiple resonances ... ad infinitum. Neither these translations nor the history of their multiple resonances are innocent of

³⁶ In the previous chapter I discussed Osofisan's objection to readings that presuppose that "all our work continues to privilege the 'Centre'—by which is meant a former colonial country in Europe, and that we still take this 'Centre' as the focal point of all our activities of resistance in Africa" (1999b: 3).

the philosophers, psychoanalysts, historians, political theorists, and literary theorists that have provided us with multiple and conflicting interpretations of *Antigone*. (2010: 46-47)

No matter how unsympathetic or unfair some interpretations of *Antigone* might strike us, they should not be considered as interruptions of an otherwise unbroken relationship between “us” and Sophocles but, rather, as constitutive parts of this relationship.

Tegonni and *The Island* add and respond to a tradition of how *Antigone*/*Antigone* is read, which means that they inevitably influence the discourse of which they are part. Different from interpretations that push Antigone outside politics, for Fugard and Osofisan she “anticipates a future political order” (Chanter 2010: 26). This future exceeds beyond Sophocles’ text, and comes to entail numerous political contexts to which Antigone has migrated and will migrate in times to come:

Transposed into new political contexts, Antigone’s act comes to represent the burial of various aberrations, and a corollary re-birth of various political ideals, a demand to recognize a range of rights for those historically excluded by various states—including those states that deny rights based on racist premises. Through the multiple political transliterations of *Antigone*—translations, adaptations, interpretations, and performances that together constitute the political history of the play—a political history of the tragic work of *Antigone* emerges, breathing new life into an activist tradition of political revolt. (Chanter 2010: 26)

Interpretations such as Fugard’s and Osofisan’s bring this political potential to the fore. Their Creon-figures may remain deaf to what their African Antigones have to say, but the message of defiance and resistance echoes loud and clear.

It remains distressing that the futures these Antigones help to construct hold no place for them: they seem unable to escape their legacy as a sacrificed woman. This tragic side to political resistance is reflected powerfully in *The Island*, where Winston tries to come to terms with the “living death” to which his defiance has sentenced him. Although retrospectively the (official) end of apartheid in 1994 evidences the ultimate success of his resistance, Winston stands for all those who were not able to experience the freedom they fought for, a freedom, moreover, which in the reality of contemporary South Africa still knows many limits. In Osofisan, the image of Antigone and Tegonni joining hands as revolutionary twin sisters suggests a celebration of political resistance, but the play concludes with its heroine’s death. The (living) death of these African Antigones does not diminish the political relevance of their acts, but its apparent unavoidability is tragic and lamentable. The change they instigate comes at the cost of their lives. In Fugard and Osofisan this is especially distressing

because, by continuously crossing the division between stage and reality to suggest that performance can transform act into action, they explicitly evoke the lives of real people.³⁷ Within the concrete historical contexts of South Africa, Nigeria and other places in the world where people suffer from and struggle against oppression, the greatest challenge remains to imagine Antigones who hold a place within the futures they anticipate.

³⁷ If we read Greek tragedy's protagonists as dramatising a philosophical and political debate rather than characters who evoke real people, Antigone's death could be said to function differently in Sophocles. Still, in ancient Athens too, the debate *Antigone* dramatises functioned within a particular socio-historical context, reflecting how ancient Greek society was organised.