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COURAGEOUS WOMEN IN GREEK AND NIGERIAN DRAMA: *ANTIGONE* AND *TÈGÒNNI*

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Abstract

This paper compares Sophocles' treatment of courage in *Antigone* and in Femi Osofisan's *Tègònni* demonstrating the power of women in contrast to the perception of women. In both the Classical era and Yoruba traditional society, it was rare for a woman to speak in public or disobey a man. They were expected to remain silent while men spoke and managed the affairs of the state. The courageous actions of women were considered acts of disobedience to the gender expectation of women in the society since women were not expected to live a public life like men; they were to obey their male relatives. *Antigone* and *Tègònni*, as portrayed by Sophocles and Osofisan respectively, acted against the laid down traditions that depict women as being physical and intellectually weak. The women stood up for themselves, facing the difficult situation like fearless warriors. This paper is a comparative analysis that examines the issue of portrayal of courage in women against the value systems of both cultures particularly in contemporary drama. It elucidates

the role of the dramatist in exposing the ills of the society through the portrayal of the agonies of women using the texts of Sophocles and Osofisan's *Antigone* and *Tẹgònni* respectively.

Introduction

Antigone was first produced in 441 B.C. at Athens while *Tẹgònni* (*An African Antigone*) was first produced by the Theatre Emory in Emory University, Atlanta USA in the autumn of 1994, as part of the Theatre Department's 'Brave New Work Project'. One of the major themes in both plays is the display of courage by women as exemplified in the heroines. The word 'courage' is regarded as one of the four cardinal virtues by the ancient Greek philosophers. Plato¹ lists the four cardinal virtues as being wise, brave, temperate and just. He further assigns bravery or fortitude or courage to the warrior class. Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric* (1366b1),² classifies forms of virtue as justice, courage, temperance... prudence and wisdom. The Latin word that is also termed courage is *fortitudo*-fortitude which can be described as the ability to confront uncertainty and intimidation. Thus, courage as one of the four cardinal virtues, can be explained as the virtue that makes man unswerving in the pursuit of his goal and ensures determination in face of danger or a difficult situation as well as overcoming fear, including fear of death. Pieper suggests that the word courage or fortitude "presupposes vulnerability."³ To him, without vulnerability there is no possibility of fortitude or courage. Hence, due to man's vulnerability there is the need for him to be brave, being brave or courageous in reference to death, and stands in the presence of death; it denotes the readiness to die.

¹ Plato, *Republic*. Trans. P. Sholey 2 vols. Loeb London. 427e; 435b.

² Stedman, J.M. (2011). "Aristotle's Cardinal Virtues: Their Application to Assessment of Psychopathology and psychotherapy." *Practical Philosophy*, 10:1 (web edition).

³ Pieper, J. (1965). *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. N/Y Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc

The word courage is used interchangeably for the virtue of fortitude by Aristotle. He further explains that a courageous man maintains a balance between cowardice and rashness. He declares:

For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b, 15 - 20).

To him, courage is holding a mean position between feelings of confidence and fear. The courageous fear, according to Aristotle, is not that of fear of evil things, such as disgrace or punishment for the law, rather, to him, courageous fear refers to "confidence and fear concerning the most fearful thing, death, and especially the most potentially beautiful form of death, death in the battle."⁴ At the same time, Aristotle maintains that sometimes not everyone feels the need to fear, even fear of terror, but endures fears and feels confidence in a rational way for the sake of what is beautiful.⁵

In ancient Greece, women were expected to be mothers and wives who stay at home all the time, taking care of the home and their children. This is a similar expectation of women in traditional African societies. Generally, ancient Greek women were expected to display natural character of weakness attributed to women, living a dependent life and not striving to achieve anything worthy of attraction or glory. The ancient Greek women lived a segregated life and tried as much as possible to keep themselves away from public places that were centre of male activities. The male dominated the society and ruled supreme, while the women were kept at home where they were protected by their men. Hence Sophocles, through Ismene, asserts:

⁴ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115a.

⁵ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115b -1117a.

You ought to realize we are only women,
 not meant in nature to fight against men,
 and that we are ruled, by those who are stronger,
 to obedience in this and even more painful matters.
 (Sophocles, *Antigone* l. 70-74).

This is Ismene speaking in her attempt to dissuade Antigone from what she has chosen to do. Antigone, however chooses to be different. She has a date with destiny and prefers to be a 'criminal' even a 'religious criminal'. So she contravenes the edict of Creon the king that no one should bury one of her brothers for fighting against his other brother for the throne of Thebes. A woman's courageous act was viewed as disobedience to the gender expectations of women in the society where women were expected to obey their male relatives. A brief overview of the two dramas would aid a better understanding of the theme of courage in *Antigone* and *Tegonni*.

General background to *Antigone*

Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus, Greek drama's most infamous figure. Oedipus was a king who married his own mother after killing his own father - unaware that either were his parents. The story of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles' most renowned work, is useful for giving us insight into Antigone's doomed lineage and should be understood prior to reading *Antigone*. Oedipus is born of King Laius and Jocasta, rulers of Thebes. After being warned in a prophecy that Oedipus will grow up to murder his father and marry his mother, Laius and Jocasta arrange for his death - instructing a herdsman to kill the child. But the herdsman pities little Oedipus, and instead of killing him, passes him on to another herdsman from a neighbouring kingdom, where Oedipus is raised by the king and queen as their own. Later in his life, Oedipus himself hears the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He flees the new kingdom, thinking he can avoid his fate. Along the way, however, he kills a stranger, who turns out to be his father Laius, and also solves the riddle of the Sphinx, saving Thebes and becoming her king (as well as Jocasta's new husband). The terms

of the prophecy are thus fulfilled. Oedipus learns this only after he has been in power in Thebes for some time. A plague begins to kill the Theban citizens, and an oracle informs the king that Thebes is being punished because Laius' murderer dwells among them. Oedipus sets out to learn the culprit's identity, and soon discovers that Laius was the stranger he killed, and worse, that Jocasta and Laius were his true parents. Jocasta is able to put the pieces of the puzzle together some time before her husbandson, and in despair she hangs herself. Oedipus, upon discovering her body, blinds himself with her broaches and leaves the city, entrusting his daughters, Antigone and Ismene, to the care of Creon (Jocasta's brother). In the days preceding the start of the action of *Antigone*, Thebes has been torn apart by war. When Oedipus fell from grace, his sons Polyneices and Eteocles were too young to ascend to rule, and so the kingdom was entrusted to Creon, the brother of Jocasta. The brothers soon reach the suitable age to take over, but they continue to entrust rule to Creon, knowing that a curse seems to follow their family. But soon enough, they begin fighting over who will rule Thebes. Polyneices, being the older brother, believes that he has the birthright, but Eteocles fights and throws him out. Polyneices looks for refuge in Argos where he raises a powerful army, which he later uses to invade Thebes. The two brothers got killed in the war. Creon ascends to the throne once more. It is at this point that the play begins.

An Overview of *Antigone*

At the beginning of the play, Antigone brings out Ismene at night in front of the city gates in order to avoid being heard. At this secret meeting, Antigone bewails their fate as daughters of a doomed mother and father and sisters of two men who have slain each other. She then tells Ismene that their uncle, Creon has declared that a full and honourable funeral be given to Eteocles, while the body of their other brother, Polyneices be left to the vultures, and declares that anyone who tries to perform the funeral rites for Polyneices will be put to death by public stoning. Antigone then requests Ismene to help her bury Polyneices, even though doing so would bring both to their deaths. And Antigone declares that Creon has no right to keep her from her own. Ismene refuses because she says that they are

women and must not fight with men, asserting that men are stronger and therefore must be obeyed and that it is not her responsibility as a woman to aim too high, too far. Antigone becomes furious with her sister and says that she would no longer welcome her help even if Ismene should offer to help. She also says that she will die willingly for her brother and ensure he is given a proper burial. Ismene is unable to dissuade Antigone. Antigone leaves to perform the burial and encourages Ismene to proclaim her flouting of Creon's action to the world for she is not afraid of death, and believes she will die with nobility. Ismene is afraid for her sister, and cannot condone her actions. But she also believes that there is something to what Antigone wants to do.

Next, the watchman arrives and nervously tells Creon that Polyneices' body has been properly buried. He explains that there is no sign of wild animals and no dogs sniffing or tugging at the corpse. The Chorus of Elders wonders aloud whether the gods are behind the burial. Creon is outraged, suggesting that the Elders are as stupid as they are old. He says that the gods would never care about Polyneices, knowing that he is a traitor, and criminals are never honoured by the gods. Creon says that money must be involved as a motivation for the burial and tells the watchman that unless he and his fellow sentries find the person who buried Polyneices, he will hang them all. The watchman insists that it is unjust to hold him responsible for the burial and soon leaves, declaring that he will flee, never to return. The Chorus extols the nature of humans - their ability to master all beasts, to conquer land, sea, and air, to take advantage of language and mind, and to live in cities under law. The Chorus believes that man has the means to handle every need and never take steps towards the future without having the means to do so. The only thing man cannot master is death. The watchman enters, leading Antigone. The Chorus is aghast at the possibility that Antigone completed the burial of Polyneices, but the sentry confirms it. Creon returns and the watchman informs him of Antigone's guilt. Creon demands details, and the watchman says that the guards uncovered the previously buried body and left it in the sun. Soon enough, they caught Antigone by her brother's side, renewing the burial. The guards caught her, and she did not even put up a fight. Creon asks Antigone if

she did the deed, and Antigone says she will never deny her guilt. Creon dismisses the watchman and then asks Antigone, in a move that would likely spare her life, if she is aware that burying the body was forbidden. Antigone says that she is aware, but she does not believe it was a viable law. She says that she answers to Zeus, not to Creon. She further states that the gods do not lay down these laws for human use and manipulation, and that she will endure the gods' judgment of the burial, not Creon's, no matter how dire his punishment may be. Antigone adds that people who live in misery like her are better off dead. The Chorus declares that Antigone is as unhinged as her father, but Creon says she is merely stubborn, arrogant, and boastful. If he does not punish her, then he is not a man and Antigone would be seen as more manly. He says that he does not care if Antigone is his sister's child - she and Ismene must pay for the burial. The Chorus is surprised that Creon would indict Ismene, but Creon says that they are both guilty, as they connived together over the act. Antigone tells Creon that she acted alone, absolving her sister of guilt. Ismene, on the other hand, pleads for her sister's life, reminding Creon that Antigone is his niece and also betrothed to his son, Haemon. Despite this, Creon refuses to reverse his judgment. As the sisters are led away, Haemon appears and appeals to his father to let Antigone go free in order to show the people that he is a kind and forgiving king. Creon briefly considers the advice of his son, he however, rejects the proposal stating that he will not allow his laws to be questioned by a woman and vows to execute Antigone in the presence of Haemon. Creon's son leaves vowing that his father will never see him again. Creon decides to bury Antigone alive with enough food and water so that the city will not be held responsible for her death. As Antigone is led away the chorus mourns for her.

After Antigone has been led away, Teiresias, a blind seer, is brought before Creon. The prophet cautions Creon that he is responsible for a sickness that has descended on Thebes. He tells him that Polyneices's unburied body has polluted the city and the gods will no more hear prayers. The body is also polluting the cities close to Thebes, causing ill will toward Creon's city-state. Creon accuses the old man of trickery, stating that some enemy must have paid the seer to come and upset him. Teiresias accuses Creon of tyranny and selfishness, warning the king that

he will lose his son and great grief will befall his house. After Teiresias exits, Creon becomes fearful and decides to heed the advice of the elders, allow Polyneices to be buried, and set Antigone free. As he exits the elders pray to Bacchus for the safe-keeping of the city. However, the change of heart comes too late, a messenger enters and reports that Haemon has taken his own life. Eurydice, Creon's wife, comes from the palace and learns how Creon and his men first gave Polyneices an honourable burial, and how, when they came to Antigone's crypt, they found that she had hanged herself. Haemon, in grief, tried to stab his father but impales himself. Eurydice bears this news in silence and returns to the palace. Creon returns to the palace bearing the body of his son. He is grief-stricken over the results of his own stubbornness. He then learns that Eurydice has also taken her own life. Creon begins to rave, calling himself a rash, foolish man whose life has been overwhelmed by death.

An overview of *Tẹgọnni*

Osofisan's *Tẹgọnni* (An African Antigone) is an adaption of Sophocles' *Antigone*. *Tẹgọnni* is the story of a princess of Oke-Osun, Tẹgọnni, who like Antigone defies laws and custom and goes into bronze casting, thereby incurring the wrath of the people. She loses her fiancée and is unable to get suitor from among her people but later falls in love with Allan Jones, the white British District Officer, who rescues her from what would have been the consequences of committing a taboo by venturing into a career that is exclusively preserved for men. Tẹgọnni is set metaphorically in the northern Yoruba town of Oke Osun in the late 19th century when British imperial power was at its peak in Nigeria. Princess Tẹgọnni is about to get married to Captain Allan Jones, the white District Officer for the area. The wedding procession moving from the palace to the market square is halted when it encounters the corpse of the bride's elder brother, Prince Oyekunle. The stern soldiers standing guard have orders not to allow the body to be buried. This is to serve as punishment for waging war against colonial rulers instead of collaborating with them like his younger brother, Adeloro. In a moment of defiance, Tẹgọnni symbolically buries her brother, an action that enrages the colonial governor, Lieutenant General Carter Ross, and earns her a death sentence.

The governor offers to grant her a reprieve if she openly apologises, in the presence of the whole town. The governor also orders Jones to cancel the wedding; he reiterates the political sentiment behind the colonisation of the various spaces of the empire, which was to conquer and rule, and equates the bringing of the Christianity across to the 'savages' as a civilising and a cleansing act. The women stage a protest to rescue Tègònni, which further enrages the governor. He threatens to sell her into slavery, like her ancestors. In the final confrontation, he suffers a heart attack while Tègònni is killed by gunshots.

Antigone and Tègònni as Women of Courage

Antigone may be seen by modern readers as a heroine who suffers martyrdom for loyalty to her dead brother and as one who craves death. She says:

It will be good to die (l. 82/3)
... but my life died long ago
to serve the dead (l. 614/5)

That she speaks in terms portraying her as enamoured of death should come as no surprise having gone through a harrowing existence. She asks Ismene her sister:

... can (you) think of any of all evils
that stem from Oedipus that Zeus does not
bring to pass for us while we yet live?
No pain, no ruin, no shame and dishonour.

We can understand Antigone's love for her brother and her desire to fulfil the demands of piety. She gives her brother token burial by strewing dust on his corpse, which is all piety requires. The mere repetition of the ritual form portrays her as a woman obsessed and in love with martyrdom. Even to Ismene, Antigone is 'headstrong' and in love with the impossible. Martyrdom, however, is not necessarily a virtue among the Greeks.⁶ Therefore, the original Greek audience would have thought that Creon stood on a more solid ground than Antigone. A ruler would

⁶ Moses Hadas (ed.), *The Complete Plays of Sophocles* P. xii.

not be expected to give the same honour to a traitor who had come to destroy the city and a patriot who saved it.⁷

Ironically it is in Antigone's singleness of mind and display of stubbornness that her courage is made apparent. And her courage is antithetical to Creon's fear, Creon has taken a decision and enacted a decree which is disobeyed by one of his subjects whose role as a rebel, she misconstrues as he does his own role as a sovereign. Creon is overcome with fear that his authority is being undermined and more so that the origin of the threat is a woman:

I swear I am no man and she the man
If she can win this and not pay for it (l. 528/9)

And Antigone is not just concerned with performing the last rites for Polyneices, she is bent on open confrontation with Creon and urges Ismene not to conceal the disobedience but to openly declare it. In Creon's presence, Antigone does not falter, for she who is loyal to divine law, cannot tremble before a mortal who contravenes it. But when Creon is gone, Antigone exhibits weakness of mind and she becomes a pathetic and tragic figure who yearns for some word of pity as her end draws near.

Sophocles' Antigone has been seen as a woman whose mind is capable of heroism in her tenacious pursuit of piety. She is not a fanatic who can only comprehend a single act and cannot the consequences.⁸ In comparison, Alfieri's Antigone is someone whose show of courage is simply as a result of the desire to attain martyrdom. His Antigone shows no touch of human weakness and she impatiently and eagerly approaches death. This unflinching stoicism of Antigone in Alfieri would have appealed to an 18th century Italian audience. The Antigone of Sophocles on the other hand cuts a more humane picture. This Antigone is moved by the love she feels for her dead brother and she burns with indignation at what she considers a sacrilege done to him.⁹ Sophocles presents an admirable person whose courage is not merely a quality to back up her rebellion against the tyranny of the man (symbolised by Creon) but as a source of strength upon

⁷ Moses Hadas, *Opus Citare*, P. xiii.

⁸ Kitto, H.D.F., *Greek Tragedy*, P. 129.

⁹ *Ibid.*

which she draws when as a woman she fights for what she believes in. Sophocles creates this effect by making Antigone speak lightly of her punishment. "Face to face with Creon's legality she indeed answers legally, and nobly, inspired to her highest eloquence."¹⁰ But this transitory elation is made to pass off before end, leaving the permanent strength of character to sustain her to the last.

And thus, Sophocles makes Antigone no fanatic seeking martyrdom, but a woman whom we can sympathize with, loyal, courageous and steadfast in enforcing divine law. Sophocles shows that courage in a woman is not to be seen as an attempt to assert the woman liberation but that courage tailored towards a justified cause should be admired whether in a man or a woman.

Femi Osofisan in *Tẹ̀gònni (An Africa Antigone)* skilfully transplants the theme of Sophocles' *Antigone* through drama to African soil. And he highlights the courage of the Greek princess in *Tẹ̀gònni*, the African/Yoruba princess. Osofisan has a fine blend of Sophocles', Aeschylus' and Euripides' Antigones in his *Tẹ̀gònni*. He also flavours the character with rich traits from a background of a Yoruba palace. Like the Antigone of Aeschylus, the *Tẹ̀gònni* of Osofisan does not lack sympathy for her action. Both are escorted by a band of maidens who publicly avow their sympathy and support. *Tẹ̀gònni* is even arrested together with this band of maiden friends and sisters who refuse to abandon her to her fate even when she urges them to do so. The love motif in Euripides in view of Haemon's role is identifiable in Osofisan wherein, similarly Allan Jones the British District Officer loves *Tẹ̀gònni* to the extent of going against the wishes of Lt. Gen. Carter-Ross the British Governor of the colony of Nigeria and the man who has enacted the decree that one of *Tẹ̀gònni*'s brothers should not be buried. Like the Antigone of Sophocles, *Tẹ̀gònni* possesses an unyielding and passionate enthusiasm for what she believes to be right, and an intense commitment to the family she loves above all.¹¹ *Tẹ̀gònni* on her way to the palace, accompanied by her train, on her wedding day (a day she has eagerly awaited), discovers the corpse of Oyekunle her brother.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

She sets aside her marriage ceremony to bury her brother, in defiance of the edict of the colonial governor.

Tẹ̀gònni also elects to be different in her choice of career. She decides to be a carver and a sculptor and this is hitherto a forbidden profession for women. Despite the opposition she faces in establishing herself in her chosen profession and not minding the fact that Asipa breaks off his engagement to her because of this, she pursues her career to a success. Someone comments on her:

Tẹ̀gònni has always been different. You alone, remember, stood by her when she returned from the palace in Ife, and announced she wanted to be a bronze caster and a sculptor. The whole town said *Ewo!* No woman has ever joined that profession, least of all a princess! (p. 21)

Tẹ̀gònni is also unmoved by the stiff opposition she faces in her choice of husband. She chooses to marry a whiteman - Allan, the British District Officer who protects her from the wrath of her people, who sets up a factory for her and finds a market for her carvings in the city of Lagos. Of the impending marriage, Isokun, a chief of the land comments:

It will be a tragic error, I tell you, this marriage with the District Officer. No one here accepts it, except you her friends, of course. Even her father's spirit in heaven will not approve it. (p. 22)

In matter of courage, Tẹ̀gònni matches the Sophoclean Antigone wit for wit, even more so as Osofisan cleverly brings the Greeks Antigone on stage to act as a source of supernatural encouragement for her. Antigone can best understand the sufferings of Tẹ̀gònni having herself, being an offspring of Oedipus, suffered greatly. Tẹ̀gònni too suffers not only as a member of a community which has been colonised and whose values are trampled upon by the colonial master, she also suffers as a woman who tenaciously holds to her beliefs and desires in a patriarchal society.

So much for the corresponding resemblance in the persons of Antigone and Tẹ̀gònni, what about the issue of their display of

courage which contravenes decrees and thereby overstepping the normal bounds of female behaviour? Creon feels that his male ego is threatened by the assertion of Antigone and the Colonial Governor Lt. Gen. Carter-Ross sees the act of Tègònni as undermining the authority of the British Empire which he represents.

Modern critics have said that the portrayal of women exhibiting courage in Greek drama must be viewed within 'the broader context of their construction of gender relations.'¹² The exhibition of courage by women in Greek drama is said to constitute a clash between the sexes and this clash is equated with a wider conflict between the public (*polis*) and the private (*oikos*) spheres.¹³ According to this analysis, this clash, which is a crossing of the boundary between male and female realms is a result of the desire of the woman to defend the interests of the household, which are being threatened by actions performed by men in the public arena.¹⁴ Vickers¹⁵ argues that:

Antigone is presented as an admirable, committed character who is never criticized by Sophocles while our national loyalties to the polis in the shape of Creon are defeated by the way in which Creon uses his power.

In the process of demonstrating that 'civic virtues', which men have cultivated in their political operations have limitations which allow for female intrusions, the dramatist unwittingly portrays unusual courage in women.

All these interpretations are acceptable canons for interpreting the role of women in Greek drama. But some critics tend to be patronising in acknowledging the role of dramatists in the portrayal of women's courage, power and problem. Blundell says that "it is unlikely however, that the dramatists themselves were unconsciously addressing the problem of women."¹⁶ Since we do not have the apparatus for the exact re-construction of the minds of Classical writers we cannot accept this as a rigid canon for judging Greek dramatists. In this wise, Classical drama

¹² Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*. p.177.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Vickers Brian, *Toward Greek Tragedy*. p.52

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

suffers a disadvantage vis-à-vis contemporary Nigerian drama whose exponents are still very much around.

Whether the Greek dramatists meant to address the problem of women or not, they do (even if unconsciously) expose the oppression suffered by women in their society. For example one of the most expressive tirades against oppression suffered by women in Greek society is that which Euripides has put into the mouth Medea:

Surely, of all the creatures that have life and will
We women are the most wretched...¹⁷

The *Antigone* too provides the most obvious example of a woman who suffers victimisation and oppressive male behaviour. So also Osofisan's *Tẹ̀gònni* even further demonstrates the rejection of the female who is considered an intruder in a predominantly male sphere. Because Tẹ̀gònni has chosen to be a bronze caster and a sculptor, the man who has been engaged to her breaks off the engagement and all other men refuse to marry her:

You know how Asipa broke off his engagement with her, when she insisted on joining the guild of carvers. And now no man since then would propose to her. (p. 20).

Obviously, the men in Tẹ̀gònni's society intend to punish her for her intrusion which undermines the hegemony they had hitherto enjoyed in this trade.

And in sanctioning her choice of husband, they further exemplify the oppressive male behaviour of the African/Yoruba society towards women who are considered 'female intruders'. No man in the land wants to marry her and when she decides to put her destiny in her own hand and to marry the District Officer who is a white man and who appreciates her talents, they say:

She's making a grave error...
Why can't she find someone among us,
Among her own people? (p. 21).

¹⁷ Euripides, 'Medea' (l. 230-58).

The rules governing courtship and relationships in African/Yoruba culture do not permit the woman the prerogative to propose marriage to a man. The initiative in such relationships must always come from the men. So how can Tẹgõnni in this situation find a man among her own people?

Tẹgõnni's courage in the face of the stiff oppositions that greet her choices in life - her choice of career, of husband, in burying her brother - is condescendingly acknowledged and is not praised as a virtue by the men. Even her intelligence and purpose of mind is attributed to a supernatural influence:

Right from childhood, she's always been like that, a problem child. She's a gift from our mother, Yemoja, and such children are never bound by the normal rules the rest of us live by. It's the goddess inside them, they can't be controlled. It's what drove her for instance to choose a white man, of all available suitors, for husband - your son, Gominal (p. 85).

Moreover each of the two plays is situated in a period of social oppression. 441 B.C. in which the *Antigone* is situated is the period when Athenian imperialism is at its height. Osofisan situates his *Tẹgõnni* in the British colonial era in Nigeria. Is it not possible therefore that both Sophocles and Osofisan are taking a swipe at imperialism? And by extension an unconscious swipe at the cultural dictates which serve as means of oppressing the women in their societies?

Conclusion

Osofisan, like Sophocles, addresses the problem of women against the background of his own immediate society. The fact that he successfully adapts a Greek play in a contemporary African/Yoruba context despite the so many centuries apart shows that:

- (i) The male attitude to women is a universal issue bound by neither time nor space.
- (ii) There should be a more favourable review of the role of the dramatist in exposing the problem of women in both the Classical and African cultures.

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