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Womanism and Social Change in Trinidad

Morgades Besari's *Antígona*

from Equatorial Guinea

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ery little attention has ever been paid to Equatorial Guinea's cultural works both in African and in Hispanic studies. Even less space has been dedicated to the country's women's lives and their artistic creations. This essay aims to fill part of that void by examining one of the country's most important theatre plays: *Antígona* (1991), written by Trinidad Morgades Besari.

Using an abundance of African elements such as dance rhythms and drum beats, Morgades' *Antígona* reinterprets the classical Greek drama in the context of the country's first elected president, Macias Nguema, who soon became a tyrant. This work will be analyzed through the lens of African womanism as defined by Hudson-Weems. While the term womanism was first used by Alice Walker, it now represents a philosophy that celebrates black roots and the ideals of black life, attempting to give a balanced presentation of black womanhood, without the belligerence and ethnocentrism of Western feminisms (Salo 60). Although Equatorial Guinea's women writers like Maria Nsue and Trinidad Morgades have expressed reservations with regard to feminist theories and writings, a womanist reading of Antigone will foreground the African-centered representation of GuineoEquatorian cultural beliefs, and the valuable rereading the author proposes of the classical protagonist in the context of a postcolonial Guinea that suffered terrible transformations under Macias Nguema's dictatorship. As the critic Mary E. Modupe Kolawole points out, much of African womanist literature has been concerned with change, overtly or covertly. Indeed, the very process of literary creativity as an aspect of African women's cultural production is about change. In this vein, the protagonist of Morgades' play challenges her audience and the readers to actively serve the nation by confronting Macias' power and laws and by working towards the country's liberation, in short and long terms.

Trinidad Morgades Besari's *Antígona* has a close intertextual relation with Sophocles' classic by underlining the strength and rebelliousness of the woman protagonist when she violates the law forbidding burial of the dead as ordered by the king figure, at the risk of her own life. Antigone's actions symbolize, like those of her predecessors, her resistance to oppression. The appeal of this myth is timeless, but on

its way from Greece to Equatorial Guinea it undergoes a process of transculturation that needs to be examined. The commonality of the argument and characters should not distract the reader from paying attention to how those elements are being transposed to a new cultural context, and how other themes surge directly bound to the specific locality it is addressed to. One specific element constitutes an Afro-centric and womanist contribution and stands out in the process of reinterpretation of this classical drama: the importance of drums and dance to promote dialogue among the community members--both within the play and amongst the audience. The play's emphasis in aspects that actively represent the culture of Equatorial Guinea indicates that Morgades Besari has done a conscious adaptation and transculturation of the classic drama.

Why Antigone?

The protagonist Antígona is in this play a sign of vitality, intelligence, search for fulfillment and the ability to stand up against pressures. When the first stage directions of the play indicate: “La música del baile se refiere a Antígona; ésta quiere vivir, quiere realizarse, quiere ser, se siente joven, inteligente y pletórica de vitalidad. Se regocija y se deleita en el baile” (427), she commands the spectator's attention by her will of power and by the way her actions are supported by music and dance, two important types of language in African rituals. Like previous Antigones she puts forth the question of the subject's purpose in life and our relationship with the community we inhabit. In this sense, it is appropriate to analyze the connections between the African adaptation and the Greek original, to pay attention to the reasons why this classic play is still popular, especially in cultures different from that of its origin.

According to Steiner, Antigone was first translated and adapted in Europe in the 1530s, and there have been thousands of adaptations since. One could cite those done by Brecht, Anouilh, Holderin, Gambaro, Zambrano, Femi Osofisan, Athol Fugard.... They spread through the world: France, Germany, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Japan, Chiana, India, Turkey, South Africa and so on. As Steiner comments “why a sequence of recapitulations of the classical?; why a hundred Antigones after Sophocles? (121). In the critic's opinion there are several reasons for the play's popularity: its themes, its structure, which has “built on [it] the tensions between organic collectivity and the aloneness of the individual” (277), the presence of various conflicts in the condition of man, and the simple fact that the story presents the audience, as do so many Greek tragedies based on myth, with a “universal” archetype true to the human condition.¹ Antigone is both a personal and political play. “ It gives voice to the voiceless: the dead [...], women, and those outside the civic law [...] Antigone demonstrates the

¹ Lane for example, examines the performance of Antigone in Peru by actress Teresa Ralli to call the attention of that country's citizenry to the killings of thousands of Indigenous Andean subjects during the “*manchay tempo*” period that lasted from 1980 to 2000.

disenfranchised speaking out against the powerful whose interest is the preservation of power, not necessarily doing what is right or just” (171). In Morgades’ *Antígona* this purpose of life is clearly stated at the beginning of the play, more specifically the second time the chorus comments on the protagonist:

Las leyes de Dios, las leyes humanas, las leyes de la conciencia, las leyes de la sociedad. ¿Cuál de ellas es la primera? ¿Cuál de ellas hemos de cumplir? Antígona ha cumplido con una de ellas, se siente liberada de sí misma, se siente liberada de dudas. Pero por esto va a morir... No se promulga la ley para el justo, sino para los desafortunados, los ingobernables, los impíos y los pecadores, los faltos de bondad amorosa, los profanos, los parricidas y matricidas, los homicidas, los fornicadores, los mentirosos, los perjuros. Antígona es honesta, es joven, es buena. Toda ella es deber y justicia, toda ella es amor. ¿Por qué tiene que morir? (427)

In the words of the chorus, the subject has to confront the binary between natural law and human law, and only by following one of them can the individual find real freedom. Antígona’s acts, not her words, have shown that she chose right, favoring justice, duty, love, even when that will cost her own life. It is important to note that in this play it is the chorus, not Antígona herself, who attributes to the woman the ability to represent GuineoEquatorians or lead them in the right path. The ample space that comments about Antígona take in the drama, provided by “voces” (or chorus), “hombres” and “soldados” build her up as a communal hero, stressing the ways in which they perceive the effects of her actions in society.

Set in Equatorial Guinea under Macias’ postcolonial rule, referring to his dictatorship (1968-1979), the play dramatizes moments of severe oppression and uses Antígona as a representative of the struggle against his abuses. Through Antígona’s experiences, Morgades acknowledges the suffering and marginalization that Macias’ government brought to the national population. While the different interpretations given to Sophocles’ *Antigone* have paid attention to juridical, political, historical and religious issues (Rodríguez 10), in this adaptation there is an emphasis on the political, coinciding with others done in various postcolonial contexts:

Thus, the appeal to African theatre artists and audiences of this text includes the inherent conflicts between the disenfranchised and the ruling elite which the text presents, the opportunity to explore the idea of what makes a “good citizen” and what is “good citizenship,” the theme of resistance to oppression, oppression in the form of the governing power represented as a single powerful individual, the theme of resistance to power and its capricious display through unjust laws, the theme of

conflict between divine law and tradition on the one hand and political policy and man-made law on the other, and lastly, the sense of community which rallies behind Antigone in her resistance, although that community might be afraid to act on its own. (Steiner 171)

In Morgades' play the importance of Antígona's position becomes especially relevant when one pays attention to her opponent. Adapted to the Equatorial Guinean setting, Creon's role is taken up by the character of "presidente," a non-subtle reference to Macías Nguema. While the first appearance of this character has positive tones when he says "Hermanos, amigos, paisanos, compañeros: Libertad, Paz, Justicia" (428), the evolution through the sixteen lines of dialogue he has in the drama efficiently summarize the cruel unfolding of Nguema's tyranny.² The second act presents in condensed form the intensity and wrongness of his government in the most economical dialogue:

Voces: Tienes que perdonar a tu pueblo que te ha elegido.

Presidente: ¡No! (*Con furor y energía*).

Voces: Eres el jefe, tienes todo, eres magnánimo. Deja que la piedad te hable.

Presidente: ¡No! (*Su tono de voz ha subido con más indignación que la vez anterior*).

Voces: Porque es tu pueblo que Dios te ha dado para que cuides, enseñes y perdones cuando te ofenda.

Presidente: ¡¡¡No!!! (*Grita casi con un rugido salvaje*). (*Antígona 429-30*)

The characterization of the "president" as a figure contrary to dialogue with his subjects is clearly established through negation by the use of the single word "No" in different tones, each overpowering the previous one. In contrast with the reasoning, influencing, praising of "voces" who appeal to his forgiveness, piety, generosity and religious mandate, the president's refusal grows in intensity and irrationality. The consequences of his radicalization are felt immediately in the deaths of thousands and the eradication of any semblance of livable community. Physical destruction is followed by spiritual death, to the point that "voces" say "Este país se ha convertido en ruinas de almas perdidas" (431). The representation of Nguema's dictatorship in the play, either through his dialogue with other characters or by the wasteland of cadavers that surround him corresponds closely to the reality experienced by Guineans between 1968 and 1979.

² In this play there is however a big change in Creon's character. Originally Creon is a character with strength and authority. His motivation is his political program: civic duties, identified by his obedience to authority are above his personal feelings (Rodríguez 14).

According to Samuel Decalo Nguema's regime was so terrible that he was the only African leader ever to be tried, sentenced to death, and executed for criminal acts while in office (31). One of the most striking characteristics was his reign of unmitigated terror, in which liquidations and killings were systematic and gruesome (57-8). Some of the patterns of control and repression that Nguema used were: a ruthless use of terror, killing or forcing into exile all educated people and possible opposition members, isolating the country, absolute control of all systems of patronage, creation of a special body of security forces and the skillful manipulation and magnification of his attributed supernatural powers, which terrorized into immobility large segments of the traditional society (61). Such arbitrary purge of citizens is referred to in Antígona's criticism of him: "Has cambiado, presidente, hueles a muerte, a odio, a sangre de inocentes. El mal y tú sois uno en este momento" (432). In the reality invoked by the play, Jackson and Rosberg consider that between 1969 and 1979 Equatorial Guinea was the scene of a virtually continuous political purge, initially of politicians and political leaders, but subsequently of anyone suspected, with or without reason, of opposing Macias and his regime (247). With ever-widening circles of Guineans affected by his inhumanity, it was estimated that in 1979 "more than one-third of the entire population (i.e., over 100,000 out of a population of approximately 300,00) had fled and were living as refugees in neighboring countries" (Jackson 246-7). By daring to publicly criticize such a destructive figure as the "president," Antígona puts in line her own life, but most important of all, raises her stature as a citizen of her community and as a subject abiding by different laws. When she responds to him saying "Prefiero morir con el deber cumplido que vivir haciéndote honores, sabiendo que no los mereces. Prefiero la libertad que me dictas; prefiero la paz de los muertos que esta falsa paz que envenenas con tu aliento. Prefiero la justicia de Dios que la débil justicia que tú crees que haces" (433), the protagonist declares a credo that even in the face of self-destruction can uplift her spirit and that of her fellow citizens over the irrationality of the reality they live.

While Antigone represents a radical defiance, an absolute critique of the City, and everything Creon represents (Gyomard 71), one cannot forget that she is also a woman. As a female character she has a varied history of interpretations too. For example Hegel romantically idealized her as a suffering martyr who is heroic but ineffective, debating her focus between *oikos* (family, or private responsibilities) and *polis* (the city or political law). Similarly Dominik Smole and Luis Rafael Sánchez show her victimized and exploited by everyone. Others like Fugard and Gambaro seem to present her as the embodiment of pain to undercut the idealization of the victim (Carlson 383-4). One element that shows some consistency is that Antigone incarnates the Woman as sister, not as an erotic object of attention, therefore transcending objecthood and becoming a subject (Steiner 12-19). In Besari's play Antigone's declared purpose is to advance stands opposite to that of her country's president. This antagonism is established through her presence and influence throughout acts one and

two, and only through words in act three, when she talks for the first time, to model her refusal of current civil laws:

(Antígona aparece rodeada de tres guardianes)

Soldado 1o: Ha enterrado a los muertos.

Soldado 2o: Todo el pueblo siguió su ejemplo.

Soldado 3o: Ella es la culpable, por eso la hemos traído.

Presidente *(conteniendo su indignación)*: ¡Antígona! Has desobedecido. Cuando hay una ley, cuando se dicta una ley *(grita)* todos los de este pueblo tienen que llevarla escrita en sus corazones, en sus mentes, en su conciencia! ¡Tienen que obedecer!

Antígona *(muy serena, decidida)*: Sólo es justo obedecer las leyes que son dictadas para educar al pueblo, para el bien del pueblo. *(Antígona 431)*

Antigone's mission to bury the dead signals the wrack of atrocity, the costs of destruction of civil rights, and the work that survivors, many times women, have to do to recall human dignity by burying the dead and attempting to re-elaborate the sources of their community's strength. In this sense, the protagonist stands as a woman liberator, a freedom fighter and a nurturer of community. These ideals coincide with those outlined by Africana Womanists, who according to Hudson-Weems are "family-centered in concert with the men in the liberation struggle, strong, genuine in sisterhood, whole, authentic, respected, recognized, male-compatible, flexible, role-player, adaptable, respectful of elders, spiritual, ambitious, mothering, and nurturing" (18). In this sense, the duel the subject establishes in Equatorial Guinea under Macías' dictatorship between civil law, or abiding by his personal rule, and natural law, searching for a different interpretation of government, is embodied by Antígona acting both as a citizen and as a woman.

One of the ways in which Antígona shows the importance of being a woman in her conception of citizenry is through her dancing. The play makes references to her African dances to express the emotional and spiritual status of her community. The reader and the audience will see her dancing in a happy, melancholic and painful mood in the first act, and in a celebratory ceremony at the conclusion. In the play her role as a woman dancer is to promote togetherness and well-being. As Sundiata points out talking about dances in Equatorial Guinea, they have spiritual meaning and, frequently performed by women, they are used "to conjure up or exorcise spirits" (120-1). Morgades Besari's play, like the author's *ouvre* itself, underscores the role women can play in the liberation of their African communities. Being women's dance a central element of the life of African society it appears then that Besari's drama can be considered Afrocentric and womanist. While the values of Antigone as a subject questioning and fighting oppression are maintained from the Hellenistic tragic paradigm, it seems that African myths and practices that illuminate human situations

and communities are integrated too, sometimes subverting the original models. The emancipatory dances and words of Antígona have cultural references centered in Africa.³ In that vein, Nah Dove emphasizes the concept of culture as a weapon of resistance and as a basis for defining a new world order (516). She indicates that, “Any future and continuing African liberationist theory and activism begins with the effort to recover, *herstorically* and culturally, the complementary relationship of the woman and the man as the basis for “ourstory” and self-determination. In this light, therefore, African womanism as Afrocentric theory takes on a central and critical role in that effort” (535). This coincides with Hudson-Weems call for Black women to define themselves and their critical perspectives and agenda in ways that reflect their particular experiences and African culture (34). Morgades’ selection of Antígona as the exemplar citizen and her performance as an African dancer and rebel underscore the importance of African women in the liberation of their societies.

Transcultural Antígona

The incorporation of African cultural elements to the play brings up the question of transculturation and the levels of fidelity of Morgades’ Antígona with the classical play. When asked about the genesis of her play, Morgades explained that “No por plagio ni por atrevimiento, sino por el asombro en pensar que la naturaleza humana no cambia y después de 2422 años, se puede traer a Sófocles y su época al Africa de nuestros tiempos revueltos” (Lewis 91), indicating how she has adapted classical Antigone to her culture of origin. By doing so she participates in a trend started by African theatre artists in the early 1960s that made popular Sophocles’ Theban cycle. According to critics there are several reasons for this popular movement. Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson explain that first, to adapt or transpose these plays is to reflect on the theme of identity, one of the most charged themes within anti-colonialist or postcolonial literature and theatre; second, they are appropriate to represent the postcolonial moment because these Greek dramas oscillate around the threshold of civilization; and finally, the re-readings the authors propose put at the center the issue of transmitting culture: “To change one of these icons is therefore to change, or at least challenge, the established notion of how these works, and all others, are ever presented to historical experience; it is also to propose alternatives to this dominant model of cultural transmission through time and of migration through space” (3). That is, they engage with the European canon, even as they also ultimate more indigenous traditions” (1-8). Kevin J. Wetmore highlights the fact that as with Greek tragedy, African theatre is community-based with a strong connection to ritual origins. The similarity of function

³ It is interesting that the same argument is used by Macias, but Morgades challenges his readings of what is “authentic African culture.”

and form between the theaters of Africa and Athens becomes more apparent when one considers the political, social, and religious aspects and contexts of those theaters. Greek tragedy is also a less stigmatized model, as it is both ancient and, although imported with colonialism, not originally part of the imperial cultures that colonized Africa (2).

The commonalities of Antígona's Greek tragedy with Morgades' play are well established in the spirit of the protagonist, that of the antagonist, and the presence of themes such as individual versus state, personal conscience versus law, and divine law versus human law. The perceived cultural similarities between ancient Athens and contemporary Africa facilitate a process of transculturation that illuminates and critiques both cultures, and at the same time it allows for the introduction of cultural differences that sometimes exceed the surface similarities. While it is true that Morgades' Antígona works as a cross-cultural, cross-temporal play because it uses material over two millennia old to address the contemporary political and social situation of Equatorial Guinea, referring to a source culture very different from the African one, it can be argued that the cultural specificities it exposes are as interesting to the current reader as its similarities. It is easy to agree that Antigone traditionally has been interpreted as a play about competing and equal laws or about a universal act of civil disobedience and see it at work in the GuineoEquatorian version (Wannamaker 73), but it is most compelling to examine how Morgades has rewritten the Antigone myth within the context of her country's recent history and culture. Two local, specific references should be noted as advancing the principles of the protagonist within the African cultural realm: the use of drums (connected with the importance of chorus or "voces"), and the space the play provides for forces of nature to overpower human actions.

The rhythm of the drums is frequently mentioned in stage directions indicating the mood that dominates each scene. For example, act one begins with focusing in the figure of Antígona whom, aware of the gravity of her role, seems to be reflecting, "Mientras cantan las voces, Antígona sigue moviéndose al ritmo de los tambores, pero parada, en actitud de escucha" (427). As a contrast, in the second act, happiness, hope and enthusiasm are expressed to announce the triumph of the president, "Tocan los tambores. Todos bailan, danza de triunfo, de entusiasmo, de grandeza, de esperanza [...] El presidente baila una danza energética de poder y de fuerza, de dominio, de soberbia, de orgullo, de satisfacción" (428). Later on, this atmosphere is radically transformed after the corruption of the president has been manifested in the deaths of many citizens, which the drums mirror with somber sounds, "Los tambores suenan invitando al sacrificio. El sonido es agudo, tético, cargado de misterio y de presagios" (429). And more profound still is the sound of the drums when it is intertwined with the accusations that the chorus brings forth to the president, deepening the complaints of the people "Se oye un concierto de tambores; el sonido es triste, melancólico, nostálgico, entrañable: es el lamento de la lucha de la voluntad y la inteligencia frente a las dificultades de la vida" (430). These stage directions, with multiple references to the

various sounds of the drums point at the power of communication these have in the play and the African culture represented. Beyond their value as part of an ensemble of musical instruments, typically provided to them in Western cultures, drums can have a language that is closely related to an oral economy of thought and expression. The drums in the play work clearly like talking drums, which according to Walter Ong, imitate words by imitating their tones (414). Following this specialist,

The drums are oral or oral-aural not merely in their sensory field of operation but even more basically in their idiom. Talking drums belong to the lifeworld of primary oral cultures, though not all primary oral cultures have used them. By primary oral cultures, as noted above, I mean cultures to which writing and print are unknown as opposed to secondary oral cultures, that is, to cultures rendered highly oral by electronic technology (as that of radio and television), which itself has been developed by means of writing and print. (Ong 416)

The use of talking drums in Morgades' *Antígona* is an example of how oral communication throughout Africa is employed to further the message represented by the text and the performance of the play. Drum language has three immediate and distinctively African effects: first, it accentuates the emotional tone of the play, second, it emphasizes the message and thirdly, it connects audiences with orally transmitted culture, still widespread in Africa. In the quotes from *Antígona* mentioned earlier, it is noticeable how the use of drums intensifies and exaggerates the words of praise and vituperation pronounced by the characters. In this sense, the performance of the play becomes highly productive when the written word, made alive by the actors embodying the characters and ideas presented, is emphasized by the drums. Drums add to the message, and by their close proximity to the nature of oral language traditions, they become especially relevant in this play that examines African themes. According to Walter Ong, communication in an oral culture, of which drum talk is a part, is usually less concerned with "information," in the sense of knowledge new to the recipient (typically relevant in writing and print culture) than with stressing what the audience already knows: "The typical oral narrative, for example, poetic or prose, normally recounts in familiar formulas what the audience has heard before, so that communication here is in fact an invitation to participation, not simply a transfer of knowledge from a place where it was to a place where it wasn't. Other messages in primary oral culture share, more or less, this involvement with the familiar. Drum language certainly conveys new knowledge or "information," but it likewise imbeds this in an extensive network of the already known" (427). By reasserting shared knowledge and accentuating that commonality, the sound of drums foment a participatory spirit among the audience, demanding an agency that Westernized versions of *Antigone* may lack of, even in the most inviting performances. Additionally, when the drums play in

parallel with human speech, it has been traditional in African cultures that they dialogue with that speech. As Dearling indicates, “African languages operate on two levels: rhythmic speech and tonal inflexion. Combined, these may be interpreted by differently-pitched drums or single log drums capable of producing more than one pitch, any ambiguities becoming clear by intelligent appreciation of the context” (215). In the case being analyzed, although Morgades’ *Antígona* is written and probably performed in Spanish, a language with characteristics different from her native one, the similarities of the coordination between human speech and drum language recall the African-centeredness of the play, even if the resulting effects might not reach the same complementariness as it could be expected were Spanish to be substituted by the Fang or Bubi languages, spoken in Equatorial Guinea. Finally, in primarily oral societies, African peoples make and listen to music that is intimately bound to the visual and dramatic arts as well as the larger fabric of life (Martin and O’Meara 257). Messages are usually enhanced by the use of song, dance, drama, drums and horns, and the use of these is a learned skill, just as are the literacy skills of writing or web communication (Mushengyezi 111). The use of talking drums in the play impress upon the audience the importance of this style of transmitting information, still popular in an African context. Indeed, the fact that drums talk while the play is being performed probably expedites the effectiveness with which the central message is communicated for an African audience who, used to this traditional way of using drums in rituals and celebrations of importance, will focus their attention in them and their dialogue with the performance.

The importance of orality is also stressed in Morgades’s *Antígona* by the high proportion of lines the chorus has in relation to other characters. Certainly, although the idea of the chorus might not be very familiar to a contemporary audience, according to Bacon “it is a natural human phenomenon that occurs in some form in many societies, including our own, as well as in that of ancient Greece,” and its function is to indicate the wide significance of the enacted event, in order to involve the audience in the meaning and sometimes the consequences (8). The alternation between “I” and “we” which is characteristic of choral song is seen in the play in the dialogue between “voces” (chorus) and *Antígona*, between “voces” and president, and more frequently between the chorus and the purported audience of the play. It is in this communal spirit that the drama ends:

Voces: Y ví un Nuevo cielo y una nueva tierra; porque el cielo anterior y la tierra anterior han pasado, y el mar de sangre ya no existe. Vi también una limpia y sana ciudad. Oí una voz que decía al pueblo: mientras vivas bajo Mi Ley no serás destruido... (*Antígona* 433)

This final paragraph presents a hopeful view of the future and an idealistic perception of human’s existence and spirituality. Because the “voces” or choir declare *Antígona*’s mission and dreams as their own, it seems that the ideals she fought for can

triumph. The chant of “voces” also supports Antígona’s argument to follow Natural law. In this way, Antígona’s plight and goals, although very personal, are taken up by the whole community and become fundamental for its definition. Besari’s tragedy as those of Greek theatre is never simply about the fate of individuals. The presence of a chorus is a sign of the wider significance of the enacted event, of the involvement of other human beings in constructing social and individual meanings that facilitate the interplay of both realms. Furthering the emphasis on representation of social issues, it should also be pointed out that other characters in this play are unnamed. “Hombre primero, hombre segundo and tercero” similarly to “Soldado uno, dos and tres” expand the possibilities of representation of citizenry, accentuating a general spirit of collective striving. In this sense, the play stresses the importance of the social, the community rather than the individual. And Antígona becomes relevant as a mirror for her own society and the role women can play in it.

By focusing on the social through the rewriting of the classic Antigona, Morgades Besari’s play advances some lines of analysis for the definition of Equatorial Guinea after Macías Nguema’s regime. Her own writing can contribute to building a new postcolonial period. As her compatriot Donato Ndongo affirms about the labor of writing about that country:

El escribir supone también la posibilidad de anticipar, por medio de la palabra, las estructuras que puedan llevar al bienestar social, puesto que si la palabra es el eslabón entre el pensamiento y la acción, el escritor es el intermediario por excelencia. La literatura se justifica, sobre todo, porque contiene las ideas básicas de una sociedad, las expresas y las ocultas, las concretas y las abstractas, las realizadas y las frustradas. (39)

By incorporating African dances, drum talking and by increasing the role of the chorus in the play, Morgades Besari reinforces the dialogue her play can establish with the audience of her country, expanding the cultural references beyond the theme of the dictatorship towards a rich communal corpus of knowledge. Intertwining both, the topic of democracy and law and the culture where that topic is debated, Morgades increases the power of her play and the capability of transforming her society. As Osofisan (the author of *Tegonni: An African Antigone*, 1999) says, there are two urgent problems for African writers: “first, the dilemma of creating a national identity of our disparate ethnic communities; and secondly, that of creating committed, responsible, patriotic, and compassionate individuals of our civil populations”(6). In this sense, she participates of a conception of art practiced by the ancient African storytellers, in which the narrative is never gratuitous, but serves an ethical and edifying purpose.

Morgades’ *Antígona* establishes a clear communication with the classical Antigone and its long history of being read as a symbol of reflection on citizenship. Criticizing Macías Nguema’s dictatorship, Morgades transposes the settings from

classical Greece to Equatorial Guinea in contemporary times. And beyond this type of changes, her transculturation also reveals itself as Afrocentrist and womanist. Her *Antígona* uses dance to create community and facilitate its healing, as in traditional African dances performed by women. Furthermore, the use of drums creates a proper African setting, and drum language supports and emphasizes the message of liberation of the play and becomes highly relevant to communicate to an orally educated audience. It is clear then, that for Trinidad Morgades Besari literature is produced on the belief that human condition can change, and her *Antígona* can work as a tool to transform the specific conditions of Equatorial Guinea.

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