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Glocalizing Democracy through a Reception of the Classics in Equatorial Guinean Theatre

The Case of Morgades’s Antígona

Elisa Rizo

Born in 1931, Equatorial Guinean academic and intellectual Trinidad Morgades has seen the transition of her country from a Spanish colony to an independent nation. She has witnessed the emergence of postcolonial regimes and the transformation of her country’s economy from one based on cacao and timber production under the Spanish colonial administration to one centered on a booming oil industry in postcolonial times. Her only published literary work, Antígona (1991), a drama referencing Sophocles’s famous tragedy, is concerned with a crucial national process that she has observed: the failure of the democratic efforts in her nation. In a recent interview, when asked about her reasons for turning to the classics, she replied:

Bueno, esta obra tiene que ver con la famosa “marabuntada” política que tuvimos en este país. Entonces, unos guineanos de la isla de Bioko y Annobón fueron encarcelados en Bata. Una pariente mía que vivía en Bata vio a los presos chapeando delante de su casa; les trajo agua y cigarrillos. Como resultado de su acción, mi pariente fue encarcelada inmediatamente [...]. En referencia a la obra de los dramaturgos griegos, los clásicos siempre me han dado mucho que pensar y muchas veces aplico la realidad de ellos a la realidad de la vida actual. (Rizo 1141, my italics)

(Well, this play has to do with the famous political “avalanche” that we endured in this country. It so happened that some Equatoguineans from Bioko and Annobon had been incarcerated in Bata. One of my relatives lived there and saw them working in the fields near to her house. She brought them water and cigarettes. As a result, my relative was immediately sent to prison [...]. In reference to the Greek dramatists, the Classics...
have always given me much food for thought and many times I apply their reality to the reality of today's life.)

As per her answer, Morgades saw in her relative's actions a parallelism with those of the ancient character Antigone. This response also suggests that this relative's deeds were her inspiration to turn to the classics to portray the years of Francisco Macías Nguemas's regime (1968–1979). However, this family anecdote also invites us to pay attention to Morgades's own personal experience with oppression and the ways in which she, too, had been in a situation reminiscent to that of Antigone: Trinidad's brother Manuel, a member of the senate who had participated in the writing of Equatorial Guinea's first Constitution, was murdered by Macías's forces in 1969, only a year after the independence from Spain. Like other educated people contributing in the formation of the new republic, Manuel fell victim to Macías's obsession with destroying those opposed to his politics. Trinidad herself was also a victim of Macías: after her brother's assassination, she was fired from her position as professor at the Santa Isabel Institute and pushed to exile. When Macías was overthrown she returned to Equatorial Guinea, where she dedicated her life to the field of education until her retirement as vice president of the National University of Equatorial Guinea (Universidad Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial) in 2010.

Morgades's reception of the Greek Antigone is formed by three short acts that point at key historical moments of Equatorial Guinea: the end of colonialism, the joy and hope shared by all after the first presidential elections, and the transformation of Francisco Macías Nguema, the first president, into a brutal dictator. Previous studies of Morgades's Antígona have rightfully established that this play is a commentary of the political legacy of that period. Marvin Lewis indicates that the drama reveals "the cultural intertext of the Macías regime to scrutinize the use and abuse of power and the impact of oppression upon the populace of Equatorial Guinea" (2007, 95). Dosinda García Alvite highlights how Morgades effectively positions women as a political agent in Africa (2011, 122). María Zalduondo shows how, conceptually, Morgades's political criticism exceeds the historical framework of the Macías's dictatorship to project a hopeful future, triumphant against despotism (935). Similarly, I have indicated that this play "obliquely suggests a warning to the new government [Obiang's] to obey "universal" morals." (Rizo 2011, 153). Furthermore the tyrannical pattern described through the character of the "President" in the play, can be seen as an allusion to the characteristics of the regime of Teodoro Obiang Nguema, in power since 1979.

The title of my essay, Glocalizing Democracy through a Reception of the Classics in Equatorial Guinean Theatre: The Case of Morgades's Antígona, re-
fers to this play’s effective transfer of the globally known Sophoclean plot to the local conversation of politics in Equatorial Guinea. It focuses on the way in which Morgades’s adaptation of the ancient drama identifies local practices that convey democratic values such as liberty and justice. Local knowledge, as conveyed in the play through drums, dance, and chants, is removed from colonial-based prejudices to show that homegrown ways of knowing are suitable to engage in a discussion about democracy and resistance to oppression. Morgades masterfully delivers this proposal through a very short drama (less than 3,000 words) that integrates references to African oral traditions, ancient Greek tragedy, biblical plots, and political models such as tyranny and democracy. This amalgamation has several effects. First, by referencing the classics, Morgades positions her play within a worldwide forum of classical receptions that allows a comparative outlook about the manner in which democracy may be subjected to deceptive political agendas, not only in Africa, but also in other regions of the world. Second, through the use of local dance, song, and music, this Antigone acknowledges the multiple world-views converging in Equatorial Guinea’s society, underscoring that these have been shaped by many factors, including the collective experience of local and colonial (Christian) spirituality, as well as by the advent of nationalist politics and propaganda. Third, thanks to the above-mentioned elements, and in spite of the local context of censorship and surveillance, the play effectively conveys a criticism of the (still ongoing) second dictatorial regime in Equatorial Guinea. This reading becomes clearer in a performance of Morgades’s Antigona by the theatre company Bocamandja at the Spanish Cultural Center of Malabo.

POSITIONING A NATIONAL PROBLEM THROUGH THE CLASSICS

Ever since Antigona was published in 1991, Morgades has indicated that she finds in the classics a critical model to think about societal problems beyond the local sphere. In an essay published a year after the first publication of the play, she explained: “Vi que la situación que planteaba Sófocles en su época encajaba con las realidades sociopolíticas en África […]” (1985, 23) (“I saw that the situation described by Sophocles in his era matched the sociopolitical reality in Africa […]”). As per this comment, the reference to the classics was a strategy to facilitate a political dialogue about immediate problems within a larger geopolitical context. In this, Morgades forms part of a global and well-studied tendency.

As scholarly bridges are built across classical receptions in different languages it is fundamental to look at the ways in which authors from different locations reposition issues of their concern through the classics.
In the case of Morgades’s *Antígona*, her use of the classics could be read as a strategic move to connect Equatorial Guinean issues to a wider discussion in Africa about the transition from colonialism to an independent national life. Her reception of Sophocles can also be seen as a political gesture that claims Equatorial Guinea’s rightful place in a worldwide forum of political discussion (Rizo 2012, 149), and as a strategy to make the local problematic of this little-known country more accessible to all of those acquainted with Sophocles’s drama (Zalduondo 2011, 935–36). At the same time, this reception of the *Antígona* by Morgades should not be taken as an epistemic dependence on the West, but as sign of awareness of the historical patterns that have resulted in Equatorial Guinea’s anonymity in world history.

Within European historiography, written records about this territory begin with the recount of sightings by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. Forgotten for many years, in 1778 this land in the coast of the Gulf of Biafra emerges again in treaty of El Pardo, by which it became part of the Spanish empire and it was branded an appendage of the Viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata, in South America. In the early nineteenth century, the island of Fernando Poo (today Bioko) was rented by the British during their abolitionist enterprises, and was actively settled by Spanish colonialists from the late-nineteenth century to 1968.13 While imperial interventions are long gone, the presence of foreign economic powers continues to be a poignant characteristic of the economic and political landscape. To this day, the result of this historical narrative is that Equatorial Guinea remains a place that goes largely unnoticed within the international scene. Today, with a booming oil industry that began in the 1990s, this intrinsically multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-cultural country is a space where interests of transnational companies congregate, where authoritarian regimes prevail, and where local inhabitants are effectively disenfranchised. Within the context of this national history and the constrictions of a long-standing censorship, Morgades adapts the plot of *Antígona* to bring attention to the fact that the majority of the population has been excluded from the worldwide conversation of civic participation. Her play depicts the local context in which the democratic opportunity was lost at the end of colonization and ignites the hope for democracy in Equatorial Guinea.

**ANTIGONE AS “SCENARIO” OF RESISTANCE AND THE “THEATRICALITY OF THE STATE” IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA**

Sophocles’s *Antigone* is perhaps the most widely circulated of Greek tragedies (Mee and Foley 2011, 1). According to South-African actor, director, and playwright John Kani, *Antigone’s* appeal across borders is
due to the fact that Sophocles's drama "[...] addresses itself to any corner of the world where the human spirit is being oppressed, where people sit in jail because of their fight for human dignity, for freedom." (qtd in Meer and Foley 2011, 6). This adaptability of the Antigone plot has made it a common reference in the fight for dignity and freedom across the world. Within this frame, Antigone can be understood as a scenario, a term used by performance theorist Diana Taylor to describe the reenactment of a well-known plot in a specific context with the possibility of reshaping its significance (2003, 29). Each time a scenario such as the Antigone plot is adopted, it undergoes changes according to the time, culture, and purpose of the enactment. Within Africa, many authors have referenced Sophocles’s drama to convey social commentary in a wide array of approaches. Yet, what these adaptations of classical tragedies have in common is that they also carry a political dimension. Even if there is no mention of the word "democracy" in Morgades’s play, the concept is silently present as it has become part of classical tragedy’s conceptual baggage.

Arguably the most valued and worldwide disseminated concept of Greco-Roman classical thought within the West, democracy invokes morals and ethics when discussing national and international contemporary deliberations about the defense of “the power of the people.” The term also enjoys global renown and is commonly summoned in discussions about the safeguarding of individual freedoms and opportunities. As a concept, it has probably been the most challenged and transformed by political agendas throughout history. In other words, while the term has been a recurrent topic in the processes of nation building and modernization during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, its meaning has been adopted by different groups with disparate agendas. According to David Beetham:

Since 1945, if not earlier, the terms ‘democracy’ and ‘democratic’ have become among the most positive words of approval in the political lexicon. As a result they have tended to be emptied of any specific referent, and equated with whatever political arrangements the user happens to approve. [...] Dispute about how much democracy is desirable or practicable, in other words, become transposed into disputes about its definition. (1998, 2)

In Africa, after the independence of many nations in the twentieth century, democracy became a key word in political speeches emitted by demagogues and oligarchic groups who sought to remain in control of their societies. At the same time, “democracy” has also been a concept cherished by grassroots movements that fight to open up spaces for participation of all people, including women and ethnic minorities.

Morgades's Antígona takes Sophocles's plot and engages with the discussion of democracy by portraying ways that the majority of the population has been excluded from the political life throughout the post-colonial
history of her country, but also by showcasing the palimpsest of societal values that might kindle civic consciousness. Here, it is important to note that Morgades is not the only Equatorial Guinean intellectual who points to the continuity of nondemocratic governmental style throughout the two regimes in power after independence. For example, essayist, novelist, dramatist, and activist Juan Tomas Avila Laurel writes:

Pero notará también el lector que no solo planea la sombra macista sobre nuestras reflexiones sino que muchos de los que ayudaron a Macías a labrar su historia siguen gozando hoy de las ventajas del poder. (2005, 72)

(The reader might notice that it is not only Macias' shadow that triggers our reflections, but also the fact that many of those who helped him, continue enjoying the advantages that power provides today.)

To be sure, democracy was a difficult undertaking in Equatorial Guinea from the beginning. Under the colonial control of Spain (which was governed by fascist Francisco Franco from 1936 to 1975), the inhabitants of this territory had no model of civic participation to follow. In spite of this, during the 1960s a series of nationalist movements emerged. This led Spain to form a Constitutional Conference in 1967, which eventually resulted in the consent of independence in October 12, 1968 (Liniger-Goumaz 1979, 46). Macías, a former colonial officer, rose to power with presidential campaign support from a former colonial administration member. Once in power, he suspended the constitutional guarantees in 1969 and used terror to impose his will (Liniger-Goumaz 1979, 92). This trend augmented to the point that by 1978 he had changed the national motto of the country to "There is no other God than Macías Nguema."

The second chapter of Equatorial Guinea's postcolonial history opens when former colonial army officer and member of the armed forces under Macías, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, organized a coup d'etat to defeat the president (also his uncle) in 1979. After the execution of the dictator, Obiang called for "A Better Guinea" ("Una Guinea Mejor") and began a reconstruction era. This re-ignited the dream of democracy lost during Macías's regime. However, by the 1980s, Obiang's government showed clear signs that his program of democratization for Equatorial Guinea was only nominal. In a 2002 political autobiography still circulating in the country, Obiang wrote:

Mi proyecto de sociedad continua denominándose "Ensayo Democrático," en tanto que un proceso para llegar a un sistema de democracia adaptada. Dicho "Ensayo" no cubre un período de tiempo limitado, es una gestión continua que nos permitiría llegar a una democracia realista. Ensayar es una
manera de aprender; significa además que no se ha llegado todavía al des­tino. (Mi vida por mi pueblo 105)

(My societal project is still called “Democratic Rehearsal” because it is a process with the goal to achieve a system of adapted democracy. Such a “Rehearsal” is not set to any specific time-frame; it is part of a continuous supervision that would allow us to achieve a realistic democracy. Rehearsing is a way of learning; it also means that we have not yet reached to a destiny.)

Not surprisingly, democracy is still a farfetched goal in Equatorial Guinea. Having begun his presidency in 1979, Teodoro Obiang is the longest-governing leader in Africa. His regime has been deemed one of the least democratic in the continent and human rights organizations have reported that his administration has been responsible for torture, censorship, and other human rights abuses.19

Clearly, the way in which Obiang’s authoritarian regime has set the political stage20 in Equatorial Guinea makes it difficult to express discontent with the government. Trinidad Morgades’s adaptation of Antigone was first published in a moment in which Obiang had consolidated his political strength through the official party: Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial. By that point (1991) every sphere of life, including cultural expressions and communications, were under surveillance. In the 1980s, the official cultural policy called for a process of africanization as a pathway to progress. As Obiang declared:

A partir de los fundamentos africanos, podíamos vislumbrar el porvenir de la reconstrucción política; porque manteniendo el auténtico espíritu tradici­onal de organización familiar y social, en su justa valoración, lo demás consistiría en adaptar tal idiosincrasia tradicional a las estructuras jurídicas y esquemas administrativos de nuestro tiempo; de hecho ha podido com­probarse que en la asociación de lo tradicional con lo moderno se mueve la conducta del pueblo de Guinea Ecuatorial. Planteadas así las cosas, ¿por qué importar servilmente fórmulas constituyentes extranjeras? (Obiang 1985, 98)

(Based on the African foundations, we could foresee the destiny of political reconstruction; because in maintaining a well-balanced appreciation of the authentic traditional spirit of family and social organization, the rest would consist of adapting such traditional forms to the legal and administrative structures of our times. As a matter of fact, it has been proven that the behavior of the Equatorial Guinean people operates in association with the traditional and the modern. If we think about it, why should we comply with the importation of foreign formulas?)21

This policy formed part of the network of ideas that has populated the means of communication within the country, which are in control of
Obiang and his family and the national oil industry. This has resulted in a successful nationwide imposition of the official narrative, which promotes the idea that Obiang is building a democratic society based on African values. Within this narrative, Westerners, especially Europeans, are portrayed as perpetrators who maleficiently introduce twisted notions about democracy in the territory in order to undermine African governments.

Significantly, Morgades published her play after Obiang had made a public request to all the intellectuals in the country to support his policies: “. . . sacrificando sus aspiraciones personales, familiares y materiales” (“. . . sacrificing their personal, familial and material aspirations”).

Within the national scene described above, Morgades’s Antígona can be seen as a surreptitious act of resistance. On the surface, the stress on local traditions, such as drums and dance, is in alignment with the president’s cultural policy of africanization. However, Antígona invokes grassroots elements not to pledge obedience to “the president” (Creon) but to discern, as a community, the faults of the leader. Morgades’s Antígona fights a different battle than her ancient counterpart. While the latter confronted Creon over disagreement with his policies, the Equatorial Guinean Antígone confronts the president in defense of communal values being attacked by the president’s obsession with power. In order to appreciate this difference, it is worth considering what Bonnie Honing, who studied Sophocles’s tragedy within the context of fifth-century Athens, points to in regard to the views presented by Antigone and Creon in the original:

In her laments for her brother but also, as we shall see, in her dirge for herself and elsewhere, Antigone memorializes the family’s dead in Homeric terms (in terms of the dead’s individuality, the loss to the surviving family, and the need to avenge it), exhibiting fidelity to natal over marital family, clan over polis. She gives expression to the concern that democracy, especially in its imperial capacity, sends soldiers to die in war while offering only a pretense of the memorialization and honor they deserve, a pathetic substitute for the real (Homeric) thing that only their families or clan, but not the democratic polis, can deliver. (2009, 7)

In contrast to this ancient Athenian context, Morgades’s Antígona buries her brother to begin a movement of resistance to the tyrant on behalf of the rest of the community. Her action, imitated by the rest of the community, praises the tyrant’s victims. In this sense, Sophocles’s plot is borrowed by Morgades only to open a neutral space, alien to the highly censored context of Equatorial Guinea, to begin her criticism of despotism. Morgades’s adaptation achieves the transferring of this scenario of defiance to authority of the ancient tragedy to the local context through the introduction of indigenous oral repertoire. Drum beats and other performative elements, such as dance, and the presence of the chorus
(the "voces" in the play) constantly highlight both "[... ] the mood that dominates each scene [... ]" (García Alvite 2011, 124) and the principles (spiritual, ethical, oral) held by the community to confront the tyrant. In this sense, Morgades uses tragedy as an instrument of collective reflection and action. The chorus in Sophocles's version disappears to be substituted by several units of oral expression (Voices) and musical language (Drums). The Voices interpret the messages sent by the drums, which in turn mark the rhythm interpreted by Antígona's dance. In this way, the character of Antígona is visually linked to the collective will: she does not perform her actions as an individual but as part of social actions. She moves and speaks in clear connection with the spiritual realm (symbolized by the drums), the ethical realm (represented by the voices) and her own deeds (embodied by her dance). This is shown all through the play in the script's directions:

Mientras cantan las voces, Antígona sigue moviéndose al ritmo de los tambores, pero parada, en actitud de escucha. Las voces cantan siguiendo el ritmo marcado por los tambores [... ] (2004, 239)

(While the voices sing, Antigone follows the rhythm of the drums with her movements, but standing, as if she is listening to something. The voices also sing following the rhythm of the drums [... ])

The collective actions in the play are in alignment with Reiss's observations about the community-based ways of knowing that Nigerian writers employ in their creations. For him, this collective epistemology is closer to the one shared by the Greeks of the Dionysian period and sets African receptions apart from classical receptions informed by Western epistemologies, which show a propensity to stress subjectivity of the individual:

Such ideas have been possible only since the late European seventeenth century, when this sense of an individual agent self-became the dominant Western experience of a person, of how people knew their "who-ness. [... ] So, "rethinking tragedy" means rethinking this thinking no less than tragedy. [... ] We must see the locality of thinking, and doing, before hoping to change it." (2008, 263)

Similarly, Morgades presents a call for a meaningful negotiation of democracy (deemed as a dangerous concept if conveyed by European models according to the Equatorial Guinean state narrative) within the values and practices already in place within the local culture. But, while Obiang's project requires the institutionalization of a "Democratic Rehearsal," Morgades's proposal encourages the dynamism of the community's exchange of ideas.
A Glocalized Antigone: Enacting Civic Participation Through Drama and Performance

Morgades’s adaptation of Antigone celebrates traditional practices to stress the importance of unity and cooperation in a national context where civic participation is discouraged. The character, Antígona, as indicated above, acts in close relationship with the Voices and the Drums to show that Equatorial Guinean society shares values akin to democracy, such as participation and inclusion.29 The Bocamandja theatre company emphasizes this aspect through the introduction of several changes to the drama. In a March 2010 performance, the character of Antígona, interpreted by Encarnación Eyang Ndong, did not dance alone but was joined by a group of unidentified characters that represented the ordinary people of the country. Together with Antígona, these characters sang a series of folk chants from different ethnic groups of Equatorial Guinea, many of which featured a call and response exchange.30 They included songs in different native languages (Fang, Bubi, Fa d’ambo, Pidgin English, and others) which strengthen idea of inclusion and resonated with the public. At different points, members of the audience sang along with the actors or even replied to them during improvised dialogues. Bocamandja’s director and actor Recaredo Silebo Boturu also inserted other community-based practices, such as a cleansing ritual for Antígona. The ceremony was presided by the ethereal character of Justice (Justicia), interpreted by Boturu himself. Even though there is not a character named Justice in Morgades’s drama, this insertion stands in lieu of other ethereal characters that are mentioned in the stage directions. According to the “Voces” these unearthly figures appear in front of Antígona at the beginning of the play: “Divine Law, Human Law, Power, Love, Society, Duty, her consciousness, and Liberty” (Morgades 2004, 239). Bocamandja’s decision to introduce Justice as a healer in a traditional ceremony materializes the idea of solidarity: Antígona is being prepared by the spiritual strength of the community to confront the President. In sum, these changes seem to be designed to stress to the audience that Antígona’s actions are not individual actions: her words are an extension of those of the community. This was welcomed by the young audience at this show at the Spanish Cultural Center in Malabo.31

Returning to Morgades’s written drama, there is another aspect of her reception that deserves attention: the treatment of the Creon figure through the character of the president. In Sophocles’s plot, patrician Creon follows the downfall of the hero (within Aristotle’s definition of tragedy), for he was an authoritarian leader who acted in the belief that he was doing well to reestablish order after a war. Sophocles’s Creon had forbidden the burial of Polynices to signal his support of a polis burial,
to praise those who had died for the city; opposing these commands, Antigone buries her brother to signal her conviction that individual, clan-oriented Homeric democratic traditions attended to higher morals (Honig 2009, 7). Yet, in the Equatorial Guinean version, the president prohibits the burial of people to protect his almighty power. Those against him are deemed traitors to the polis. The stage directions convey the president’s transformation from a leader to a monster during the scene of the celebration of his election:

**Tocan los tambores: todos bailan, danza de triunfo, de entusiasmo, de grandezas, de esperanza. Los bailadores van desapareciendo en un baile frenético. El PRESIDENTE baila una danza energética de poder y de fuerza, de dominio, de soberbia, de orgullo, de satisfacción. Exhausto y ebrio de poder, se sienta y medita.** (240)

(The drums play: everybody dance the dance of triumph, of enthusiasm, of greatness, of hope. The dancers disappear in the midst of a frenetic dance. The President dances, energetically, the dance of power and strength, of domination, of arrogance, of petulance, of satisfaction. Exhausted and inebriated by power, he sits down and meditates.)

In contrast to the character of Antígona, the president is portrayed as a man acting alone, in disconnection with the others. But his self-centered attitude produces a vacuum; there is no organizational model to follow. Confusion begins to reign:

**HOMBRE PRIMERO: Gobierno, gobernantes y gobernados, autoridad y poder, ¿palabras vacías sin sentido? ¿Sabemos qué significan? ¿Han sido temas de nuestras reflexiones alguna vez?** (240)

**(FIRST MAN: Government, rulers, and the governed, authority and power. Aren’t these empty words without any meaning to us? Do we even know what they mean? Have these ever been issues we have thought about?)**

Rapidly, the people begin questioning his ability to guide them. As the tension grows, Morgades’s script increasingly moves away from Sophocles’s plot. The fury of the tyrant reaches its peak when he learns that Antígona’s disobedience is imitated by the rest of the people. Everyone begins to bury their dead and Antígona is arrested by the president’s guards. During the performance by Bocamandja, in this moment of heightened tension, the company inserts, perhaps by improvisation, a bit of humor that also reveals a critical comment about the present of the country, not only its past. The actor who interprets the president follows the script for the most part. When trying to intimidate Antígona, he shows her a letter from a powerful ally who is promising to send him
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weapons. However, the actor deviates from the script when he inserts a follow up comment: "Antígona, do you know what this letter says? ... Of course you don’t! I have not made it possible for you to learn how to read." (Performance March 21, 2010). The audience’s response was that of laughter. It is possible that they identified in these words a sarcastic reference to their present situation: schools in Equatorial Guinea are not well-equipped. Moreover, what may have also resonated with this audience was the similarity between the arrogance of the character of the president and the self-proclaimed greatness of the current one, not to mention the cult of personality that overwhelms the social landscape through the state owned media in Equatorial Guinea. In any case, Antígona’s actions and words convey the current longings of the Equatorial Guinean people, and of the people in all oppressed societies, for that matter.

THE POWER OF THE ANCESTORS

Throughout Morgades’s reception of Antígone there is a continuous concern for the unburied dead who had been killed by the president. As in Sophocles’s drama, Antígona’s disobedience is centered on the issue of proper burial and respect for the dead, which is an extension of respecting community values. In this African version, this is a burden that not only pertains to Antígona, but to the whole community. Antígona disobeys by burying the dead (not her brother) and is followed by the rest of the people, who do the same. That the president is so upset by this underlines his level of disconnect from his own people: in many African cultures, the dead enter a new realm of existence, one that is still attached to the living; they have an influence on the living because they become ancestors and are invoked and remembered often. Given the importance of burial and mourning in the African context, it is not insignificant that Morgades resolves this generalized offense (endured by many people in the community, according to her play) by invoking the Bible. After having emphasized local culture throughout the drama, this fluctuation is a clever way to remind the reader about the multiplicity of the cultural threads present in Equatorial Guinean society, which, after all, was a colony until 1968. After the final confrontation between Antígona and the president, the Voices announce the fury of a volcano, which erupts and kills the tyrant (2004, 244–245). Voces: [ ... ] Oí una voz que decía al pueblo: Mientras vivas bajo Mi Ley no serás destruido ... ) (Tambores, jubilo, alegría, Victoria, (2004, 245) (VOICES: [ ... ] I heard a voice that told my people: While you live under My Law, you will not be destroyed ... ) Soon, the reader learns that the eruption of the volcano is signaling the end of the world and the emergence of a new
city, allusive to the New Jerusalem. Everyone assembles after the final judgement: “Un nuevo pueblo compuesto de gente joven baila de júbilo, todos vestidos de blanco. Los tambores cantan la victoria con alegría y esperanza. Entre ellos está Antígona y su compañero” (Morgades 2004, 245) [“A new people, formed by young individuals, dance with joy, dressed in white. The drums chant victory with happiness and hope. Antígona and her partner are among them”]. This ending reinforces the idea that the community’s resistance to tyranny was in fact an act of obedience to the divine law, from the Christian perspective.  

To be sure, this seemingly “happy ending,” along with the other changes introduced by Morgades to Sophocles’s plot, pose a challenge to classify this reception as a tragedy. Albeit not a hero but a tyrant, the president still meets a tragic end. Like her Sophoclean counterpart, Antígona also follows the divine laws, but different from her, she defies death through resurrection. In their performance, Bocamandja portrays the emergence of this new polis with significant adjustments. While in the written drama the president attempts to kill Antígona with his own hands only to be stopped by the erupting volcano; in the production by Bocamandja, the president orders his guards to take Antígona away to be tortured and raped before her execution. Additionally, the reference to a volcano is substituted by the return of the dead: several actors enter the scene with their faces and bodies covered with white dust. They circle the president and kill him with their bare hands as he begs for compassion and cries: “¡Soy el Jefe! ¡Soy el Jefe!” (Bocamandja, March 23, 2010) [“I am the Chief! I am the Chief!”]. The spectators, mostly youth and young adults, found this scene mind-blowing and even amusing; some screamed, others laughed nervously. After the killing of the president by the living dead, Antígona joins the rest of the characters on stage. Her face is also covered in white dust, signaling that she has also been killed. In the performance, it is Antígona who closes the play, describing the arrival of the new city (which in the drama is delivered by the Voices) as the others raise her in their arms, while the dead body of the tyrant is nearby. The curtains come down. The audience cheers.  

With this ending, Bocamandja shows a preference for their own oral and local culture rather than Christianity. On the other hand, their decision to use the image of the living dead delivers a criticism not only of injustice at the local level, but at the global level as well. Images of the living dead used as slaves by the rich have been appearing in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially after the entry of this region into the global economy, which has resulted in the exacerbation of poverty. The image of the zombies can be found in artistic expressions of a younger generation of Equatorial Guineans in poetry, like that of Recaredo Silebó Boturu and in the plastic arts, such as the comics of Ramón Esono. In any case, the
introduction of this image denotes the adaptability of the text to appeal to younger audiences as well as Bocamandja’s awareness of metaphors circulating in the continent to transmit social criticism.

Overall, Morgades’s *Antígona* outlines a critical view about the conditions that obstruct democratic efforts in Equatorial Guinea today: oppression, censorship, cult of the leader’s personality; in brief, the systematic suppression of human dignity that results in what Wole Soyinka calls a “climate of fear.”40 Importantly, her drama invites readers and audiences alike to recognize how these elements occur within the complexity of Equatorial Guinean postcolonial reality. By congregating elements of the classical canon (tragedy), political models (democracy vs tyranny), and local culture (rituals, beliefs, drums, songs, and collective action of the voices), and Christianity (Apocalypse), the play sheds light on the different epistemologies that have intervened in the shaping of this young nation.

The resolution of the conflict in the realm of the afterlife in this African *Antígona* functions as a strategy of empowerment. The triumphant return of Antígona at the end of the drama (as well as in the performance) proposes the defiant idea of commemorating the ancestors who died during the Macías era because they resisted oppression. With this, the play celebrates the actions of the fallen and inspires the living to honor their legacy. Taking into account the context of surveillance and censorship that prevails in Equatorial Guinea, Morgades’s play offers a tribute to those who fell during the previous regime but also stands as a surreptitious homage to those who have been the victims of the present government. Seen this way, every time this play is represented (or read), the spirit of resistance to tyranny and the hope for a fair and democratic society are kept alive.

NOTES

1. Trinidad Morgades is a noteworthy personality in Equatorial Guinea. She was the first female who graduated from college with a BA in English; she has also been responsible for the founding of multiple organizations to fight for civil rights and common causes while living inside of a country ruled by authoritarian regimes since independence. Additionally, she taught at the Universidad Nacional de Guinea where she became the vice president until her retirement in 2010 (Equatorial Guinea: Official Web Page of the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea). All references to the play are to the 2004 edition.

2. “Although oil was first discovered in the 1960’s, it was first produced offshore in 1991 from the Alba oilfields discovered by Mobil. Production of liquefied natural gas (LNG) began in 1997 [. . .]” “Oil and Gas in Equatorial Guinea,
3. During Macías's regime, many male youngsters and adults from the islands of Annobon and Bioko had been forcefully taken away from their homes to be put in jail and forced to work in the president's plantations, some of them near Bata, in the continental region. The full interview appears in Revista Iberoamericana, 80.148.149, July–December 2014, 1141–44.

4. All translations from the Spanish are mine, unless otherwise noted.

5. Max Liniger-Goumaz (106–07) reports the death of lawyer Manuel Morgades Besari. The same historian reports that his wife, Trinidad Morgades Besari had been the first Equatoguinean to enter the Institute of Santa Isabel (today Malabo) as a professor in 1963. However, the reported relationship between the two is mistaken. They were brother and sister. This was clarified to me by author Justo Bolekia Boleká during a Skype interview on February 1, 2016.


7. To accomplish this, Zalduondo reads Morgades's play through historian Reinhart Koselleck's concepts of "space of experience" and "horizons of expectations."

8. In my essay "Bridging Literary Traditions in the Hispanic World: Equatorial Guinean Drama and the Dictatorial Cultural Political Order," included in Critical Perspectives (see bibliography) I offer an initial analysis on this play in reference to its criticism of the Macias regime. Here, I explore the implications that this play has for the current regime.

9. This meta-theatrical process of referencing existing plots and stories was in itself an exercise within the spirit of the Dionysian era (Mee and Foley 2011, 6). This has also been noted about Antígona by María Zalduondo (2014, 937).

10. Classical tragedies have become globalized references to discuss local and regional politics (Chou 2014, 138). The widespread of tragedies has been studied in abundance. Receptions of the classics in Africa have also been studied by Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson in Crossroads in the Black Aegean. Oedipus, Antigone and Dramas of the African Diaspora. Antigone's receptions across the world have also enjoyed a lot of attention from classical scholars; perhaps the best known is George Steiner's Antigones.

11. Unfortunately, most of the scholarship in classical receptions has been developed around the works of Anglophone and Francophone writers.


14. Examples include The Island (1993) by Athol Fugard, which takes the plot of Antigone to the setting of a prison during Apartheid South Africa; Noces Posthumes de Santigone (Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone, 1988) by Sylvain Bemba's, which explores the figure of the griot, epic, and Greek tragedy; and Femi Osofisan's Tegonni (1999), which problematizes the colonial and postcolonial heritage of British and Yoruba cultures.

15. There is plenty of scholarship on this connection between tragedy and democracy. I would like to highlight two books: Athens and Athenian Democracy by

16. In Equatorial Guinea, as we will comment on soon, the official party, led by the president is called the Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial (Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea). Sands, William. “Equatorial Guinea: The Changing Face of Repression.”


18. Notably, Obiang had been part of the regime he administered the Black beach prison (infamous for its torturing practices) under Mactas. William Sands “Equatorial Guinea: The Changing Face of Repression.”


20. Taylor calls this type of staging “theatricality of the state” to refer to the ways in which an authoritarian government fosters certain behaviors among the population.


23. This is a common topic of Equatorial Guinean pro-governmental propaganda today. During October 2014, Asonga TV and, specially, TVGE (Televisión de Guinea Ecuatorial), showed infomercials to praise the government while warning of foreign (European) interests to stain the national government’s reputation.

24. “Discurso con Ocasi6n del Manifiesto de Adhesión de los Intelectuales Equatoguineanos” (Obiang 1985, 351)

25. For Taylor, the repertoire: “[. . .] enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing- in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. [. . .] (2003, 20)

26. Dosinda García Alvite proposes a similar understanding but centering on Antigone as individual when she writes that the drums “advance the principles of the protagonist within the African cultural realm and the space the play provides for forces of nature to overpower human actions” (2011, 124)

27. García Alvite focuses on the written drama, but correctly points to the potential of the play to instill discussion: “[. . .] drums and dance [. . .] promote dialogue among the community members—both within the play and amongst the audience” (ibid., 118).

28. In the play, Antígona’s dance movements and words are in harmony with the rhythm of the drums and the message of the voices. According to Max Weber (1969) “An action is ‘social’ if the acting individual takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its cause.” Basic Concepts in Sociology.

29. This is not to say that Equatorial Guineans communicate mainly with drums: this tradition is being kept alive thanks to several groups who still preserve that knowledge (de Ananzadi, 2009).

30. These songs were selected by the actors. In fact, including traditional songs is already a trademark of the performances by the Bocamandja theatre company. Besides their choral-oriented style, the introduction of these songs also obeys the mission of the company to celebrate Equatorial Guinea’s diversity. This uniting effort is evident from the name of the group: “Bocamandja” is the combination
of the words for “food” in the Fang and Bubi languages, the two largest ethnic groups in the country (Bocamandja 2015).

31. The play has also been performed at the Equato Guinean Cultural Center and in other auditoriums within Equatorial Guinea. Outside of the country, it was presented on the island of Menorca, Spain in 2009.

32. New reports indicate improvement (Equatorial Guinea Ranked Second in Literacy in Africa,” 2016).

33. Throughout the country’s streets and highways, there are billboards praising the president; there are similar messages on the radio and on TV.

34. Significantly, the erupting volcano not only functions in a figurative way, but also as a concrete local reference: the dormant volcano in Malabo known as Pico Basile. In another essay, I suggested that the raise of Antígona at the end suggested that she escaped death, however, in this reading I consider that the ending is not as bright as it is seem to be, for this moment is only an after-life triumph (Rizo 2011, 151–152).

35. Furthermore, the ending of the play positions Antígona as analogue to the biblical figure of the queen of the South, who returns to hear the wisdom of Solomon: “The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42).

36. Maria Zalduondo proposes that this ending turns Morgades’ adaptation as a tragicomedy which is also made possible by the africanization of the play, i.e. the introduction of drums and dance (2014, 936).

37. Earlier in the play, they had introduced a cleansing ceremony, songs in native languages.


39. Recaredo Silebó Boturu uses into images of zombies and corpses in his poems “Soy un zombie” (“I am a Zombie,” 43) and “Sombras” (“Shadows,” 46) included in Crónicas de lágrimas anuladas (Chronicles of Nulled Tears, 2014) to “denounce moral decadence, abuse of power, corruption and censorship, factors which have resulted in an identity crisis for the Equatorial Guinean population.” (My translation, from “Crónicas de identidades en crisis: la poesía y el teatro de Recaredo Silebó Boturu,” 19).

40. Wole Soyinka develops this idea in Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World, 2005.

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