

**Colonial Alienation and the Ideology of Resistance:  
Femi Osofisan's *Tegonni* (*An African Antigone*)**

Sola Adeyemi  
*University of Greenwich, UK*

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**Introduction**

Critics have described the Nigerian dramatist Femi Osofisan as 'revolutionary', 'Marxist', 'socialist', 'leftist' and other terms that suggest non-conformism amongst traditionally conservative Yoruba writers (Amuta, 1989; Awodiya, 1993). The playwright, however, rejects these terminologies and argues that such terms 'breed specific attitudes' that prejudice peoples' reception of a writer. As such, in spite of his outwardly socialist lifestyle, Osofisan refuses to identify with any ideology, particularly in Nigeria, where his drama is most popular. In an interview in 1993, he defended his position:

We categorise, it's neat, and we file away. Very convenient for some critics... in our country, I have come to realise that the word "socialism" is a convenient password for scoundrels. We are a nation famous for misusing and misapplying words. (Awodiya, 1993: 37).

He explains that a few writers display socialist radicalism to gain the attention of the authorities with the ultimate intention of enriching themselves, after receiving ministerial appointments and business contracts, or being appointed political spokespersons. There are also those who 'believe passionately, but only in theories which they have read up in some book, and not in human beings. Some are quixotes (sic), but most are nihilists, anarchists. Their dream is to create in Nigeria, the exact replica of the revolution which happened in Russia decades ago'. (Awodiya, 1993: 37) These socialists invoke a negative perception in the people. They, as Wole Soyinka asserts, 'ignore or deny the actual stage of socio-political

evolution of their audiences and/or readers of [these] dramas'. (Soyinka, 1988: 120) In addition, Osofisan rejects being described as a revolutionary writer, stating that 'no writer should strive to be seen as a revolutionary writer... Every writer must write about what touches him genuinely'. (Awodiya, 1993: 119) The term 'revolutionary' in this instance denotes the act of using drama to foment political trouble or instigate political change in the country, a mission the playwright repudiates; societal problems instigate his dramatic impulse and he writes to highlight these problems.

In spite of his reluctance to associate with any ideology, Osofisan's drama articulates the historical and cultural processes in the society from a class perspective. Osofisan is a Yoruba man with deeply held traditional beliefs, a post-*negritudist* thinker and pragmatic writer brought up under a strong colonial, Christian influence. Nevertheless, he is a materialist whose study of other writers and cultures helps to define his writing. Osofisan is an eclectic playwright who re-interprets the ideas of other writers along his Yorùbá traditional beliefs. In his plays, he has engaged with European and African writers, including both modern and classical playwrights, and has even adapted the works of some of them. For instance, *Wèsòò Hamlet! or, The Resurrection of Hamlet* (2003) is a re-reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and *The Midnight Hotel* (1982) is an adaptation of Feydeau's *L'Hôtel du libre échange*. Amongst African writers, Osofisan has responded to the works of Soyinka, Clark-Bekederemo and Daniel Fagunwa in *No More the Wasted Breed* (1982) and *Another Raft* (1986) and *Adventures in the Forest of A Thousand Daemons* (2008) respectively. Apart from Soyinka and Clark-Bekederemo, perhaps the other major Nigerian influence on the writing of Osofisan is the poet Christopher Okigbo (1932–1967). In a personal interview in 2004, he confirmed giving some of his earliest writings, including play scripts, to Okigbo for editorial suggestions. On his dramaturgy's indebtedness to Soyinka, Osofisan states that:

I have been influenced by him [Soyinka] and I have been inspired by his work and I continue to be inspired by such works as his... I think we were fortunate to have somebody like Soyinka in our cultural life and to have had the kind of influence that he continues to exert. (in Aire & Ugababe 2006: 64).

Martin Banham (2006) highlights that Osofisan's dramatic aim is to expose the conscience of his audience by making spectators reflect on the performance to respond to societal issues. Using comic effects, metaphor, myth and historical precedence, Osofisan's drama, as he explains in the programme note to the 1979 production of *Once Upon Four Robbers* at the

University of Ibadan Arts Theatre, seeks to shock the audience into a new awareness of their collective predicament. I have identified four factors to the understanding of Osofisan's dramatic oeuvre: he employs techniques that prod his characters, and subsequently the audience, out of inertia into action, whether reflective or physical; his drama encourages the possibility of individual and collective security through self-study and self-exploration and the audience identifies with the characters' pursuits and the choices they make; hopefully, like the characters, the audience will become more revolutionary by starting to challenge the status quo; society can then change or be changed along positions that are defined and determined by the people. Osofisan responds to the phenomenon of subjective response to socially engineered chaos in his drama, using plots derived from history, and because of the unpredictability of these upheavals in the society, his pronouncements and dramatic intentions are, consequently, at times contradictory and even compromising, but never tentative.

### ***Tegonni: An African Antigone***

*Tegonni, An African Antigone* is Osofisan's most consciously intertextual play and the first to directly engage with the colonial theme since *The Cooling Spring* (1967). The context is colonial Nigeria<sup>5</sup> in the period between the existence of Yoruba city-states and the formal colonisation of the country; in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before examining how Osofisan uses *Tegonni* in his agenda for change, let us examine the antecedents to the play.

*Tegonni* is an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and the play owes its basic plotting to the Greek original; Osofisan closely engages with *Antigone's* plot and invites characters from the early play into the two main versions of *Tegonni*. The other major antecedent to Osofisan's play is the colonial context; the pacification of African people by European powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the inscription of the colonial rules into the political and cultural awareness of the people. Osofisan links the oppressive sensibilities of Creon in Sophocles' play to the major political and economic uprising against British rule in the area later to become Nigeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and to echo the pan-African sentiments of the colonial and post-colonial period. In a sense, *Tegonni* presents a shadow of the pan-African form, a localised protest which later became a

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<sup>5</sup> The present day country did not become Nigeria until the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914.

major movement. Another major element in Osofisan's play is the appropriation of Yoruba myth and legend; Osofisan introduces Yemoja, the Yoruba river goddess, to bridge the transition between the classical past and the dramatic present, and between the pre-colonial legendary past and the colonial realities. Essentially, *Tegonni* is a 'post-scription' whose aim is re-presenting colonial narratives and re-viewing original prejudices<sup>6</sup> (Adeyemi, 2000: [1]).

Lastly, Osofisan advocates radical social change in his drama. Because of the focus of his work, women, the underprivileged and the lower class in the society take centre stage in his plays, as victims or, as revolutionary ideologues. In *Tegonni*, Osofisan introduces gender issue into the context of the play by making Tegonni a non-conformist revolutionary who ventures into the male spaces of bronze casting and membership of *egúngún*<sup>7</sup> cult. This sets the tone of the play and makes acceptance of Tegonni's choice to marry the white District Officer easier to comprehend and rationalise.

### ***Tegonni*: An Exercise in Intertextuality**

The *Tegonni* text that I examine here is a major revision of an earlier workshop drama of 1994 in the USA which the playwright described as a 'manuscript in motion' (Osofisan, 2001: 204). The version I use was first presented at the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 1998. Because of the locations – USA and Nigeria – and the intended audiences, both versions are different and the emphases are shifted and placed differently, as Osofisan's intentions and agenda changed from being reactionary to the pro-democracy protests which were fall-outs of the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections in Nigeria; to being reflective of the circumstances that led to the political problems. There is a third version which the playwright reworked for the international stage, and which has been produced successfully by Chuck Mike in England, New York (USA) and at the University of Richmond, USA (19-22 April 2007). However, the Nigerian version is the closest to the Osofisan style in terms

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<sup>6</sup> My exact words: 'I use the term "post-scription" here for narratives whose aim is to explain or re-present colonial narratives in a more acceptable manner, acceptable in the sense of erasing original prejudices expressed by the original narratives, a kind of rationalisation after the fact.' (Adeyemi 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Masquerade cult devoted to ancestral veneration.

of dramaturgy and therefore suits my assessment of his writing for this essay.

To clarify the points I made above, Osofisan pitches colonial interpretation of culture against contemporary Yoruba cultural norms. *Tegonni* is set in:

the colonial past and engages colonial domination/authority at the point of its most retrograde, supremacist inscription in ideas of “weaker races” and “inferior, effeminate peoples” and the determination to absolutize, naturalize, and hierarchize racial and cultural difference (Osofisan, interviewed by Biodun Jeyifo, 2001: 204).

The plot is similar to that of Sophocles; however, the subject matter is different. Sophocles' play ponders the values of morality against the tyranny of human law and tries to differentiate between the attraction of a strong leader and the power of a tyrant. Osofisan's argument in *Tegonni* centres on the dialectics of power play between the oppressed and the oppressor; the ruled and the ruler; the female aggressor and the male colonialist in an imperial context. Would you call her an aggressor?

*Tegonni* is set in the imaginary northern Yoruba town of Oke Osun in the late 19th century when British imperial power was at its zenith in Nigeria. Princess Tegonni is about to be married to Capt. Allan Jones, the white District Officer for the area. As the wedding procession moves from the palace to the market square, it encounters the corpse of the bride's elder brother, Oyekunle (Polyneices), with stern soldiers who have orders not to allow the body to be buried, standing guard. This is to serve as punishment for waging war against colonial rulers instead of collaborating with them like his junior brother, Adeloro (Eteocles). In a moment of defiance, Tegonni symbolically buries her brother, an action that enrages the colonial governor, Lt. General Carter-Ross, and earns her a death sentence. The governor offers to grant her a reprieve if she openly apologises, ‘before the whole town’ (p.93<sup>8</sup>). 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 Christian cross to the ‘savages’ as a civilising – almost a cleansing – act. The women stage a protest to rescue Tegonni, which further enrages the governor. He threatens to sell her into slavery, like her ancestors (p. 104). In the final confrontation, he suffers a heart attack while Tegonni is killed by gunshots.

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<sup>8</sup> All references are from *Tegonni (An African Antigone)*, Ibadan: Concept Publications Limited, 2007.

Osofisan engages with *Antigone*, using the Greek play to re-write and re-define the colonial history of the Yoruba people. However, he goes further in that use, by reconciling the colonial position and re-interpreting the British imperialist policies collectively as a negative agent in the development of Yorubaland. His attempt to re-configure history is successful, particularly because of his employment of an old historical model, Sophocles' *Antigone*, a Greek play written in 441BC, as a base. Osofisan also uses other antecedent texts like Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias' to advance his debate about the link between imperialism and tyranny (see below).

Etiologically, the name Tegonni can have two meanings in Yoruba, both of them descriptive of the character that bears the name in the play and I want to suggest that either meaning contributes to her role as the antithesis of imperialism in the play. The first meaning refers to the Yoruba word for barrenness – 'agon' or 'agan' – and the social significance that the name connotes. Childlessness carries a social stigma amongst the Yoruba but the issue of childlessness extends beyond not having a child. A woman who has a wayward child or a child not accepted into the community for one reason or the other, for instance, can be considered childless, and the child referred to as *akukuibi*<sup>9</sup>. In the play, we have Tegonni preparing to marry district officer Allan Jones. But, as Chief Isokun, the official town historian says at the beginning of the play, she is making a grave error that could turn her into an outcast (p. 12). Any child of such a union may not be recognised, given the social conditions of that period and the racial understanding, which consigned black and white into two separate groups, even if Tegonni as the mother is later accepted in the community. Essentially, she becomes a 'barren woman' with no hope of maintaining her genealogical line; an issue of cultural importance amongst Yoruba people. There is a feeling that Tegonni is aware of this fact and is actually activating the discourse to enhance her earlier decision to join the male-dominated guild of bronze sculptors and for economic reasons through access to the British market as the spouse of a District Officer.

The second meaning is closer to the reaction that Tegonni's actions trigger in the play. Tegonni, instead of the freedom fighter against oppression that Osofisan wants us to recognise, may be acting 'spitefully', creating a union with the coloniser who wields economic and political power; an act of pride or arrogance that duplicates imperialist design. On the other hand, we can translate Tegonni's act as a survival tactic –

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<sup>9</sup> Literally, 'better not to have been born', 'worthless'.

hitching up with the coloniser to enhance not only her economic power but also her social status. After all, 'the Asipa broke off his engagement with her [and] no man since then would propose to her' (p. 12); and no one in the community accepts her union with the district officer – 'even her father's spirit in heaven will not approve it' (p. 13). It is becoming apparent that she is losing the patronage she hitherto enjoyed as princess due to the death of her father, the former king, and the war of ascension between her two brothers which has proved economically ruinous to the community. As soon as the colonial government appoints a new king, her influence will diminish: as the governor says, 'a new candidate will be found' (p. 91). To pre-empt that situation, there is a valid reason for Tegonni to use her power as a beautiful woman to access the position of power that being the wife of the white officer will give her in the community.

There is another reference to 'spite' concerning Tegonni, which gives a clue to her marrying the white officer. Many suitors have rejected her and the marriage she is about to contract is 'a lucky break' for her (p. 12). The reason why other suitors rejected her is linked to her membership of the carvers' guild and the masquerade cult, both male-dominated societies. Ultimately though, Tegonni's femininity has profound effects on meanings that we can draw from her character and actions. Carter-Ross dismisses her as a woman 'with the caprices of possessed children' (p. 62), a typical colonial sentiment for the 'natives'<sup>10</sup>, but it is exactly because she is woman against the might of the all-male European super class that makes her effective as a dialectical figure for resistance.

Yoruba society is patriarchal and there is a limit to the political roles of women in the governance of the community or in decision-making. Tegonni's role in the community changes, however, on learning about the death of her brothers; she becomes a figure of resistance. I stress here that the main difference between Tegonni and Antigone is that, while Antigone's action is to defy Creon and bury Polyneices, Tegonni's role is more complex and trickier. Tegonni's role involves provoking a discourse about contemporary issues of tyranny and erosion of freedom on the African continent. Her resistance is against the white governor and his

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Lord Frederick Lugard's opinion in *The Dual Mandate* (1926:70), 'the virtues and defects of this race-type are those of attractive children, whose confidence when it is won is given ungrudgingly as to an older and wiser superior', or as Cecil Rhodes puts it in 1887, at the House of Assembly in Cape Town, 'the native is to be treated as a child' ([www.ipooa.com/cecil\\_rhodes.htm](http://www.ipooa.com/cecil_rhodes.htm), accessed 12 January 2012).

draconian rules; it is against the cultural imperative of her people, which dictates a woman's position in the community; it is also against the ambition of the governor who would achieve social wealth and recognition by successfully pacifying the Oke Osun community. She fights on all fronts, and gradually, the spiral effect of her action gathers more strength as more people in the community accept her views about resistance. Impressions about her change from that of a disgraced and rejected woman (p. 12) to that of a woman who used cunning and non-coercive means to defeat the might of the colonial power. The discourse is no longer about the right or wrong of Carter-Ross as the colonial tyrant to prevent the burial of Oyekunle, the renegade prince; the discourse is the subtlety of feminine guile against the brute force of a white imperialist; and the synthesis, the resultant authority is the triumph of the individual over the state. Control of power becomes transmuted from a white, male dominated extreme (Carter-Ross) to another extreme dominated by a young black female. Tegonni's resistance, her antithesis to Carter-Ross' thesis, defines a synthesis that integrates into the pan-African discourse.

Osofisan writes Tegonni into the history of other Antigones and makes her the equal of Sophocles' Antigone instead of a follower who has to learn her role in history at the feet of the Greek heroine. This reinforces my view that Osofisan revised *Tegonni* to make the play more independent of the Greek original, and a more uniquely pan-African drama. Giving Tegonni and Antigone equal status is Osofisan's way of stating Yoruba culture's equality to other cultures; his point is that no culture is superior to the other and the colonial imperative was unacceptable on that basis.

### **Osofisan and Pan-Africanism**

Osofisan reveals the pan-African agenda of *Tegonni* when governor Carter-Ross raises the issue of slavery during the conversation with Reverend Bayo Campbell, a southern American Baptist Church missionary, who is acting as the 'father of the bride' at the wedding of Jones and Tegonni. As I have stated above, pan-Africanism began as part of the fight for recognition by the descendants of freed slaves in the United States of America, a movement that spread to England and to Africa through the efforts of W. E. B. DuBois, Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Julius Nyerere and other first generation post-colonial African leaders. Pan-Africanism encourages the recognition of Africa as homeland for black people but Carter-Ross does not accept this and subordinates the achievements of the Empire in stopping slave trade to his role as a law keeper in a 'lost village in the jungle' (p. 87). Not only is he



intolerant of Campbell, he suspects the religious activities of missionaries. When the reverend's wife organises a welcoming ceremony for him by singing a hymn, he explodes into anger and divulges the main reason for his visit – to stop the wedding of his district officer to Tegonni:

**Gov:** Welcome me – with that! Rather audacious, isn't it! This is what they call Christianity, these liberated priests who come over to Africa! They bring the word of God to the jungle, and what happens! Satan takes over! Everything changes to voodoo! Our sacred hymns are turned to dark incantations! And I am supposed to like that! I am supposed to tolerate it as "the expression of another culture", while the Devil crows triumphant in my ear!

**Jones:** The Devil? I don't understand –

**Gov:** You will, my boy! All of you! You especially, whom I brought to Africa because there is work for us white races to accomplish here. But you catch the smell of some black arse, and you forget! (p. 46)

The empire can only exercise its authority over the 'natives' if black people know their place; which does not include sitting beside the white master as a Bible-toting missionary or as a wife. The governor had achieved his authority over black people in rail construction camps and earned the sobriquet, Slap-my-face, because of his high handedness and lack of compromise in imposing the English way of life over his subjects:

**Gov:**... We did not need to write the rules down, everybody knew what you had to do, and the options were simple. You came with the gun in one hand, and the whip in the other. You barked out orders, and you punished, summarily. You knew you were right, because you were white, and you believed in the Cross and in the Empire. You hammered the Union Jack down their throats, and made them sing "God Save the Queen"! For if you didn't do that, they would quickly revert to barbarism, to cannibalism, to living like apes (p. 99).

Further, he more than likens miscegenation to bestiality and barbarism; and considers Jones intention to marry Tegonni a criminal act which deserves to be punished with loss of privileges as a colonial officer; he would also be sent back to England in disgrace. Carter-Ross' attitude is an echo of a concubinage circular that Lord Crewe, the British Colonial Secretary (1908–1910) issued in 1909 to prohibit liaisons between white male colonial officers and their black female subjects. The dialectics was

always white male against black female, because the structure of colonial governance did not encourage women (there were no women district officers) to live in the colonies; only male colonial officers were employed in the service of the empire. Sometimes, these officers were single and alone in harsh and unfamiliar climates, making cultural and emotional associations with the colonised people inevitable.

In addition to the concubinage circular, the Governor General of Nigeria issued 'Secret Circular B' in 1914. This circular was so damning in its racist implications – more or less equating any union between white British officers and black women to bestiality – that every copy of the circular was later searched out and destroyed. Nevertheless, in spite of this policy, as Helen Callaway observed, there still occurred a few marriages between British officers and black women (1987: 14). This was not an isolated incidence in one corner of the British Empire; for instance, in 1907, in what later became the present day Namibia, the Germans declared all marriages contracted between Germans and black Africans before that date unlawful and made laws to dispossess all offspring of such marriages of German citizenship.

Therefore, when Carter-Ross flaunts his achievement of taming the natives and letting them know who the master is, he is only projecting the racist ideologies and practices that European colonisation of Africa had developed; and which pan-African sentiments seek to reverse/challenge. The European construction of the colonised, in this case black Africans, has always been that of inferior beings to be domesticated, and certainly never to be classified as the equal of white people. The action of Carter-Ross in halting the wedding then is not unique and he deploys all the usual racist arguments to aid his decision: marrying the black woman is a privilege that will make the 'natives' believe that they are equal to the white rulers (p. 92). But the order to stop the marriage introduces a conflict between white representatives of the colonial power into the drama. Osofisan portrays Carter-Ross as a tyrannical government official acting out of spite; Creon in Sophocles' original is acting to defend the law but Carter-Ross' deception is to uphold the then unwritten colonial code against interracial miscegenation.

The playwright tries to expose Carter-Ross' attitude in many ways in *Tegonni*. First, he uses 'The Story of the Tiger and Toad'<sup>11</sup> to predict the fate of oppressive leaders and to activate one of the nationalistic rallying-cries of the pan-African movement. Recited by the Spirit of Stories, summoned by Tegonni, the story is about how Ekun the Tiger betrays his

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Story of the Tiger and Frog' in the Emory production.

friendship with Akere the Toad by unjustly swallowing him and stealing his beauty to woo a princess. Osofisan links the moral of the story to the optimism of the pan-Africanists:

the one who was swallowed gained a throne, while the one who usurped power fell to disgrace – oh yes, that is always the end of those who come to rule by force, *when the light of freedom shines again, and the people regain their rights!* And it will surely be the fate of those who have seized power over us... (my emphasis; p. 73)

Kwame Nkrumah, Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe, African nationalist leaders, used statements similar to that italicised in their political campaigns. Osofisan shows us that through the ages, in various cultural settings, political hegemonies have the same root in tyranny; and that myths are employed to inscribe this tyranny into the life of the people. However, Antigone states that history will always emphasise the myth of political hegemony:

many tyrants will still arise, furious to inscribe their nightmares and their horrors on the patient face of history. But again and again, as many times as such abortions creep up, as many times will others come up who will challenge them and chase them away into oblivion. Ozymandias will rise again! But so will Antigone! Wherever the call for freedom is heard! (p. 96).

### **Dialectics of Oppression in *Tegonni***

Antigone and Tegonni recite the sonnet of the Romantic English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley to point out the limits of power and tyranny, and the resurgence of hope for the coming generation of freedom fighters and Antigones, for empires never last. As Kevin Wetmore observes:

The poem is a warning against hubris, but is also a tribute to the inevitable passage of time and the progress of history that symbolically and literally wears down oppression and tyranny (2002: 192).

As Ozymandias rises, so will the clamour for freedom expose the crumbling relic of the former tyrant. Osofisan's argument in this play is that tyranny will always recur like a terrible curse to author cultural and political hegemony, and fuel the general concern for freedom, but people will always rise to protest or revolt.

Apart from the dialectics of the oppressed individual and the powerful state, another central agency in the play is pride. Both Tegonni and Carter-Ross are proud and refuse to renegotiate once they have taken a stand. This is akin to negotiations to end colonial rule in Africa. While Tegonni's pride is heroic and admirable as she defends the honour of her brother and her town, and the right to marry the man of her choosing, Carter-Ross is vain, arrogant and power-drunk.

Tegonni as a character is significant for her subversion of the cultural authority and the elevation of the rights of women in her community. Osofisan casts women in roles where they lead or join others in the quest for societal transformation. For example, in *Morountodun*, Titubi, the rich daughter of Alhaja Kabirat, leader of the market women, abandons her privileged life to join peasant women in camps to fight for social change. Tegonni is described as a headstrong woman who refuses to listen to the advice of her male compatriots. She insists on joining the all-male guild of bronze casters after a visit to the palace in Ife<sup>12</sup>. She has access to wealth and influence restricted to other women in the community, by virtue of her position as a princess. She is not betrothed to any of the important chiefs in the community, as befits her status as a princess, and she chooses to marry the white district officer because he is the only person who supports her in her quest to be a sculptor. It is noteworthy that in the whole community, the only character with progressive ideas is Tegonni and she is influential enough to make the chiefs and other women follow her example; she initiates ideas for others to carry out. For instance, her decision to marry Allan Jones persuades the community to adopt the district officer as a 'son'. Campbell makes him a member of his family, to make his wedding more realistic:

**Bayo:** Yes, my wife assembled them. Mostly from the parish. They're your "family" today, the ones who will receive the bride and formally welcome her into your life. Meaning that they will wash her feet with their prayers and song, and then carry her across the threshold.

[...] They pour out drinks, and clink glasses.

**Jones:** To your health then! To the health of my African father!

**Bayo:** And to yours, my *Oyinbo* son!... (p. 39 – 40).

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<sup>12</sup> Ile-Ife is regarded as the origin of the Yoruba people; the location of the first Yorùbá settlement; it is also the setting of the Moremi legend (*Morountodun*).

Not only has she become successful as a bronze caster, her example in breaching the gender discrimination has encouraged other women to learn the art of sculpting, as one of Tegonni's sisters says:

**Faderera:** Thanks to which you've not only grown to be one of the best in the profession, but you've also helped train other women, so that we now have our own Women's Guild of Carvers and Casters (p. 56).

It is this singular act of Tegonni's as a 'forerunner' of the women that leads to the major subversive act by the women to negotiate with the governor and free their community of his draconian decrees. They use masks to imitate *egungun* masquerade and combine that image with the sound of the bull-roarer, another secret male cult instrument, to frighten the chiefs and the governor's guards so that Tegonni can have access to the governor.

Amongst the Yoruba people, *egúngún* is a male cult and women are neither initiated into its secrets, nor allowed to wear the mask. Not only do the women infiltrate the male dominated cult, Tegonni's sisters 'colonise' the sacred grove of *egúngún*, because it is the only place the governor and his guards will never think of looking for them; symbolically, the community retreats to the arcane customs and traditions whose secrets are not exposed to foreigners. Osofisan constructs these women as 'those whose actions advance nation-building even as men do not value/validate their work' (Nfah-Addeniyi, 1998: 284). They are ready to risk their lives and customary beliefs for actions which they believe will release their community from the colonial imperative. Instead of engaging with the women to launch a unified action, the men remark:

**Isokun:** ... Our world is changing, even faster than we feared. [...]

**Bayo:** Yes, it's a new age! We are on the brink of a great transformation... (p. 83).

Osofisan, like Sophocles and other Greek tragedians, shows a humane response to suffering through a heroic character, heightening empathy for Tegonni. Like in *Antigone*, Tegonni's suffering/resistance produces an answering compassion, but the dramatic emphasis lies more on the ideals or values for which she suffers (Vickers, 1973: 495). Tegonni shows that 'freedom is an undying faith, the force which underwrites our presence here on earth' (p. 96) even when, out of desperation, Carter-Ross sentences her to be sold to slavery 'like her ancestors' (p. 104).

## Tegonni and the Representation of Resistance

Tegonni is not the only representation of resistance in the drama; Osofisan stresses that the history of colonial Africa, as well as that of classical Greece, is a history of conflict and revolt. Resistance is emphasised on a serious scale, as in the confrontation between Tegonni and Carter-Ross, as well as in a somewhat comical scenario, involving Antigone's retinue acting the role of soldiers guarding the 'corpse' of Oyekunle or constructing the scaffolds for the execution of Tegonni. By this act, Osofisan uses the soldiers to comment on the role of the military in a postcolonial African state, especially the incessant *coup d'état* in some African countries. First, the soldiers 'revolt' and refuse to continue the construction work; then they 'confront' Antigone with their grievances:

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sol:** You've got to find us another role. This one's no fun at all!

**Antigone:** You're tired of being soldiers?

**4<sup>th</sup> Sol:** Demoralised. All we do is carry corpses.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sol:** Or build execution platforms—

**1<sup>st</sup> Sol:** Or terrorise people—

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sol:** Burn houses—

**4<sup>th</sup> Sol:** Collect bribes!

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sol:** We're so ashamed! Is this all that soldiers do in this country?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sol:** Not even one act you could call humane?

**Antigone:** I know what you mean, but it's the times we've come into, my friends. It just happens that the soldiers here are trained to look upon their own people as enemies. As fair game to practice their weapons on (p. 53).

Osofisan uses the soldiers to comment on social injustice in Nigeria, in the same way he has used soldiers and policemen in previous plays. In the end, Osofisan reduces Tegonni to a symbol, in the same way as Antigone, who goes off to be immolated in the tomb to which Creon has sentenced her. For all her progressive intent, Tegonni becomes an idea, a

symbol of resistance against colonial power to be debated and evaluated as a complex ideological conjecture. Since the play ends in the realm of mythology, with Yemoja decorating Antigone and Tegonni, we do not have a sense of dramatic accomplishment that we have at the conclusion of *Yungba-Yungba* (1990) or even at the end of *Morountodun* where the women assume new roles of being community keepers. Tegonni's importance is subsumed into the world of myth.

## **Conclusion**

*Tegonni* has proved that when faced with a great dilemma like injustice, resistance alone is not enough; and anger and insurrection are futile. Tegonni may have learnt about resistance from Antigone, but what informs her dialectics is a form of uncommon sense, which she uses to entice the governor to the square, where her sisters and other women are waiting to confront the power of the empire with their nakedness; an act that reactivates the governor's heart problem and leads to his death. The symbolic act of Tegonni in burying her brother creates panic in the town but she herself is unrepentant.

This stubborn, resolute and eloquent articulation of the will to freedom is the primary concern of *Tegonni*. The play therefore deals with the issue of individual and collective freedom and the role of women in igniting or re-conceptualising issues. Tegonni's failed act of resistance leads to a reflection on the role of freedom fighters and the ambiguity in the pan-African movement where principles of democracy in creating the United States of Africa were embraced by the nationalistic first generation African leaders. The leaders however fail to translate their ideas into visible actions for the benefit of their people. *Tegonni (An African Antigone)* transfers Osofisan's dramaturgy to the African and global level. It is also the first in a series of plays commissioned of the playwright by institutions and theatres outside Nigeria; the beginning of a new stage in his dramatic career.

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