

The Domestic Foreigner: Abjectifying Antigone

Introduction

The *Antigone* has long been presented through the explanations of Hegel as a struggle between family and state, a war between the masculinized Creon and his niece/daughter-in-law to-be, Antigone. Because of Hegel's ability to write in a way that naysayers still fit into his frameworks, it has been easier to proliferate his binaries when presenting the *Antigone* rather than attempting to break open his tricky and loophole-filled dialectics. In the following paper, I intend to join the good fight of scholars like Judith Butler, Kirk Ormand, and Françoise Meltzer to break down Hegel's binaries and attempt to show how Antigone follows in her father/brother's footsteps in exceeding the boundaries enumerated by Hegel by defining herself as what I will call an "abject domestic foreigner." This characteristic, as I aim to show, not only makes the character and story of Antigone much more adaptable but also, because of that malleability, timeless.

I will begin by defining what I mean by an "abject domestic foreigner," outlining the key elements and comparing them to the characters of Oedipus and his acolyte, Antigone. I will point out that while this concept can be used to describe Oedipus, it is fully understood and personified in his daughter/sister. The core essentials to this concept, as I will explain further in this paper, are that the character is outside of the gender spectrum, outside of the family/state divide outlined by Hegel and others, and outside the realms of heteronormative family relations. The concept hinges on the extreme foreignness of the character it is describing. This term allows us

to have a more descriptive vocabulary to better identify exactly what it is that makes Antigone

and characters like her so alien within their own stories.

After highlighting the “abject domestic foreigner” and fully placing Antigone within its definition, I aim to use this characteristic to explain how and why the *Antigone*, and specifically the character of Antigone, has stood the test of time better than the plays surrounding her father/brother. Despite Aristotle’s love affair with *Oedipus Rex* and the fact that it is the play used most often in dramatic literature and theatre history classes to exemplify Greek tragedy, the *Antigone* is performed and adapted more often than any of the plays focused on the fallen king, Oedipus. I plan to expound on this phenomenon using the “abject domestic foreigner,” explaining how this makes the *Antigone* and its titular character more malleable and, ultimately, timeless. I will look at the transgressive/subversive nature of the text and the character and, using the adaptations of Athol Fugard and Femi Osofisan, I aim to show how Antigone, as a vigilante hero, is more relatable and connected to multiple time periods despite her foreignness within her own story.

Defining the “Abject Domestic Foreigner”¹

When first trying to decide how to categorize Antigone, my original thought was that she transcends the boundaries of Theban life presented in the play—taking her outside the presented realms and, possibly, othering her from the rest of the cast. I was hesitant to use the concept of “other” to describe her simply because of its roots in feminist and postcolonial theories—most

¹In creating this term, I would be remiss for not thanking my colleague, Jeff Kaplan, for creating the paradoxical term “domestic foreigner” and I am indebted to Allan Davis as well for pointing me towards the work of abjectification performed by Julia Kristeva.

often used to denote objectification and marginalization through difference rather than granting power through those differences.²

With that said, I turned to the work of Julia Kristeva and her theory of the abject. In direct contrast to Lacan's "objects of desire" dealt with by Judith Butler,³ the abject "is radically excluded and draws [readers] toward the place where meaning collapses."⁴ The abject precedes desire, threatens our abilities of meaning-making, and "disturbs identity, system, [and] order. [The abject] does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules."⁵ In these descriptions alone, it is easy to see how Antigone fits into the borders of the abject. Through her actions, she is outside the gender spectrum and outside of the family/state divide perpetuated by the Hegelian dialectics. Through her sheer existence in the world, she is outside the realms of the heteronormative family model and separated from the boundaries of religious and civic morality.

Scholar Clifford Davis uses Kristeva's theory of the abject to show how "the conflicts in the *Antigone* reflect the psychological tension between nascent patriarchal institutions and the excluded, but sanctified, feminine Other."⁶ Abjection occurs, according to Davis's reading of Kristeva,

...when the ego becomes so 'hyperinflated' by the 'paternal' Symbolic that the object is first obscured, and then 'flatly driven away.' Thus, the object is transmuted into the abject, which threatens and challenges the Symbolic from its banished, hidden position. As a result, the excluded object, the abject, becomes frightening and subversive.⁷

² Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 92, 420-1. ³ Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. 57- 82.

⁴ Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. 2.

⁵ Kristeva, 4.

⁶ Davis, Clifford. "The Abject: Kristeva and the Antigone." *Paroles Gelées* 13. No. 1 (1995): 5.

⁷ Davis, 7-8.

I propose that the concept of the abject can be used to describe both Oedipus and Antigone over the course of the Theban plays. While it only defines Oedipus post revelation and hubris-driven fall, the term is exemplified in the character of Antigone.

Furthermore, I aim to define Antigone as more than just abject—but also as a domestic foreigner—a paradox in her own right. While abjection involves being completely foreign within one's own space, I believe Antigone exists in a more liminal place. She is abject and wields the subversive power of abjection, but she is simultaneously inside the same cultures that denounce her. She is outside the gender spectrum, but her female presence is felt as a direct attack on Creon. She is outside the family/state binary, but she is part of the royal family. She is outside of the heteronormative family model, but she is slated to be married to the new prince of Thebes, Haemon. She is outside the borders of religious morality, but she is powerfully connected to the justice of the gods. Similar to the Buddhist logic of *Catuskotika*, Antigone presents a “four branched dilemma.”⁸

- a) Antigone is abject.
- b) Antigone is object.
- c) Antigone is both abject and object.
- d) Antigone is neither abject nor object.

I aim to show how this paradox of existence brings her past the traditional boundaries of the abject and into the realm of the “abject domestic foreigner”—a characteristic implying the abjectionification of the abject.⁹ I will prove this by highlighting the differences between the abject

⁸ Mantillake, Sudesh. "Metaphysical Understanding of Tragedy and Non-Metaphysical Performance of Engaged

and the “abject domestic foreigner” by comparing Oedipus (abject) to Antigone (“abject domestic foreigner”).

Oedipus as Abject

Oedipus is the most powerful man in all of Thebes, after all, he is king. He defeated the sphinx. He married the queen. He is the savior of the city. He has proven his masculinity time and time again. But, unknown to him, he is already, as Page duBois explains, the “miasma” of the city that must be purged.¹⁰ He has no power in the greater scheme of things. Once it is confirmed that he is the killer of the old king and, thus the pollution infecting the city, his place on the gender spectrum begins to swing. After his careful self-control is eliminated and he has literally been penetrated twice (both eyes gouged out), Oedipus becomes fully feminized, losing all of his masculine power in the eyes of Thebes. This feminization (driven by the paternal/phallic hyperinflation of Oedipus’s ego) leads to the transmutation of his body into an object excluded from Thebes, from morality, and from his original idea of self, making him into a “frightening and subversive” abject.¹¹

What is perhaps most interesting in the reaction of Oedipus is that his move from object to abject is self-imposed—and, according to Kristeva, the only way to purify an abject is to recognize the maternal, or *jouissance*. In fact, “The purifying recognition of the maternal, or *jouissance*, is a sexually painful, nostalgic acknowledgement of the maternal achieved through the semiotic.

Since *jouissance* involves a recognition of the maternal, it allows the purification of the abject.”¹² In his own way, Oedipus anoints himself as abject and, needing to be purified, he

¹⁰ duBois, Page. "Ancient Tragedy and the Metaphor of Katharsis," *Theatre Journal* 54 no.1 (March 2002): 21.

¹¹ Davis, 8.

¹² Davis, 9.

penetrates himself doubly in an attempt to cleanse himself from the actions of his past. His actions result in the flow of virginal blood from his eyes, wishing for the deed to punish and purify. The maternal, most often linked to the womb, is something that Oedipus is too familiar with—he has witnessed the birth of his children from the same womb he was carried in. Having no womb of his own, he attempts to feminize himself through the double penetration of his own eyes, bleeding from virginal sockets. The act does not decontaminate himself nor the city, instead it furthers his own exile from the house of Thebes and transforms him outwardly to match his internal abjection. Oedipus, unlike Antigone, self-imposes his exile and the consequent abjectification is of his own doing.

As a result of his transgression and sudden challenge to Lacan's concept of the Symbolic, Oedipus is still too powerful to simply exile. Creon must keep the maimed king in Thebes, despite the Oracle's prophecy to rid the city of the pollution of Lias's killer before it can be purified. Kirk Ormand presents Creon's act of ushering the blind, abjectified Oedipus back into the house of Thebes as a fascinating wedding procession—claiming that "the implied wedding metaphorically provides a social structure for containing the pollution—the domesticated position of the young bride entering the household that will control her access to public life."¹³ While his argument has received mixed responses, I believe the image he paints in his analysis of the scene supports my claims of Oedipus as abject. He is banished, excluded, frightening, and subversive—and it is Creon's responsibility to contain him.

Oedipus, in the minds of the ancient Greeks, has lost all of the power within his proven

masculinity—but, I argue, he has simultaneously gained something more significant and,

¹³ Ormand, Kirk. "Oedipus the Queen: Cross-Gendering without Drag," *Theatre Journal* 55 no.1 (March 2003): 23. Ormand's argument also revolves around the idea of recognizing that gender binaries didn't necessarily exist in ancient Greece but that, instead, they likely saw gender on a spectrum where one could swing like a pendulum from masculine to feminine and so forth.

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perhaps, more influential in his new feminine abjection. This different kind of authority, hidden to Oedipus in his immense grief, is known within the greater unconsciousness of the Greeks. The stories of dangerously dominant, spurned, and self-aware women fill Greek mythology—the powers and passions of Calypso, Charybdis, Medusa, and Medea (just to name a few) immediately come to mind. With his sudden and subversive abjection at the end of *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus has gained the potential for even greater destruction. Similar to these villainous heroines, Oedipus falls prey to the circumstances created by the gods and by his own passionate actions. While there is the possibility for sympathy, it is difficult to separate his good deeds from the hasty and violent killing of his father at the crossroads. These characters are implicit in their own fates, and they become abject through their own actions.

Interestingly enough, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus has begun to calm with age and he has once again learned to control his passions. He is fairly centered in the gender spectrum that Ormand illustrates—holding on to enough masculine power to garner respect and attention from outsiders, but his complete reliance on Antigone transfers much of his remaining authority to her, leaving her to outwardly carry the weight of that masculinity in public. Oedipus often exclaims in anguish how it was the duty of his sons to take care of him, yet Antigone and Ismene loyally bear the burdens belonging to the men too busy fighting over the rule of Thebes. Throughout *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is feminized in this passivity and reliance on other characters and he is abjected in his exile (from Thebes, from his masculine gender, and from the morality of

the heteronormative family model).

It isn't until he walks blindly into the sacred grove to die that we begin to see the shadow of the man he was in the first third of the Theban plays. Oedipus begins to revert back from abject to object in his final moments—he moves from exile to acceptance and his actions swing

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him once more into the realm of the masculine, matching with his corporeal body once more. In death, Oedipus regains access to the world he was banished from through his own actions and beliefs; in the same way he imposed abjection on himself at the end of *Oedipus Rex*, he imposes objection on himself at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*. In his death, he has the chance to become more than abject, but instead his body is taken away from the world and ushered into the light of the heavens. He no longer exists in the space of reality, therefore he can no longer be seen as abject.

Antigone as “Abject Domestic Foreigner”

According to Hegel, Antigone is ruled by the law of the ancient gods whereas Creon's law is the political and civic rule created through human discourse. “Antigone does not belong in Creon's realm of laws;” yet she is bound within them as long as she is alive.¹⁴ Hegel pits Creon (representing the masculine/polis) against Antigone (signifying the feminine/oikos), but his binary relation is flawed. The dualistic competition he creates is decidedly one-sided—no matter what the feminine/oikos does, it will always come under the ultimate scrutiny and authority of the masculine/polis. I aim to break down these binaries even further by exposing Antigone as representative of the abject outside of these simple dichotomies, therefore removing her from the Hegelian dialectics and positioning her as the “abject domestic foreigner,” a

paradox outside of her own time.

Antigone is a child of unintentionally immoral relations and a reminder to all of Thebes of the curses of the Gods. She is outside the laws of humanity because she does not fit into the moral community—simply by being alive. She is in a liminal space; both a part of the

¹⁴ Meltzer, Françoise. "Theories of Desire: Antigone Again." *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 2 (2011): 179.

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community through her blood ties to Creon and the deceased King Oedipus, but outside of the community as a result of those same incestuous blood ties. She claims to only be ruled by the divine principles for she is above Creon's man-made regulations and does not fit into their worldly parameters.

Using the work of scholar Andrés Fabián Henao Castro in his descriptions of "strangers," Antigone is simultaneously domestic and foreign in her own space.

The stranger is already outside that place called "home." However, there is no place outside it where (s)he can be, because outside her/his home there are only other homes to which (s)he does not belong either. Every place at which (s)he arrives is already someone else's home. This is the paradox of the stranger: the one who cannot belong to a world (s)he inhabits and in which (s)he exists with an equal "right" to do, because of the ways in which belonging to that world have been organized...¹⁵

Antigone is homeless—she has wandered across the land with her blinded father, she is both within and without the home of Thebes, until she is finally enclosed in her own living tomb—which ironically is the closest approximation of a true home for her since the fall of her father from the throne. While I don't necessarily agree with his use of the term stranger,¹⁶ Henao Castro explains perfectly how Antigone is representative of a true paradox— she is part of the royal

family (therefore, has a right to citizenship within Thebes) but she is excluded from the city (due to her tainted bloodline and rule-breaking characterizations).

¹⁵ Henaó Castro, Andrés Fabián. "Antigone Claimed: 'I Am a Stranger!' Political Theory and the Figure of the Stranger." *Hypatia* 28. No. 2. (2013): 309-10.

¹⁶ There is a connotation to strangeness that I want to avoid in my description of Antigone. Through her perceived foreignness, I believe Antigone is made to be less strange than the world around her. But more on this in the final section of this paper.

Considering Antigone's proven liminal status in society, I believe that she embodies more than just the abject—she is the “abject domestic foreigner.” I claim that Antigone is able to constitute an “abject domestic foreigner” because she is both an exile and an important member of the Theban community. She is outside of the gender spectrum—neither outwardly or self identified primarily as masculine nor feminine, but, instead, as a liminal representation of both. According to Françoise Meltzer, “Antigone's contention that she belongs neither to the dead nor to the living is an echo of the feminine subject with agency—a third term that reveals the place of danger because it fits into neither its native category nor the one that is its opposite.”¹⁷ Kristeva points out that “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life.”¹⁸

In layman's terms, the essential abject is the corpse stumbled upon in the back alley. It, like Oedipus, once belonged to the world but, through destruction, no longer fits into the sphere of the living. It is a thing once belonging that no longer belongs. Taking the analogy a step further, Antigone is the corpse found in the woods—it does not belong in this space but the body (because of its naturalness) has literally become part of the world it resides in. Corpses do not belong in the woods but, since that is where it resides, it decomposes to become forever linked

with the woods. It is exiled from the space, but it is part of the space. Antigone is the “abject domestic foreigner” that is both banished from Thebes but is also irreconcilably part of it. Synthesizing the work of Meltzer and Kristeva, Antigone is constantly in contact with death, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Almost her entire family is dead, her main goal is to bury the literal abject corpse of her brother, and she consistently comments on her connection with the realm of the Underworld. Her connection to death is also her connection with

¹⁷ Meltzer, 175.

¹⁸ Kristeva, 4.

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abjection— in her own perception, she is living but she is not alive. She loves the abject (corpse of her brother) and becomes almost completely absorbed by that passion. In the abject corpse, she sees herself mirrored—a sibling tainted by blood and living in death. It could be claimed (in a different paper) that Polyneices only truly lives and takes part in the greater life of Thebes as a corpse—he lives in death in the same way that Antigone dies in life.

Butler perhaps says it best: “[Antigone’s] fate is not to have a life to live, to be condemned to death prior to any possibility of life.”¹⁹ Butler goes on to claim how Antigone’s death is consistently doubled, “she claims that she has not lived, that she has not loved, and that she has not borne children, and so that she has been under the curse that Oedipus laid upon his children, ‘serving death’ for the length of her life.”²⁰ It almost seems as though Oedipus’s self abjectification became another tainted gene passed on to his children (Polyneices is next seen as the fully abject corpse, Antigone as the “abject domestic foreigner,” and Ismene as the mirror to abjection).²¹ While I agree with much of this, I believe it must be taken one step further—the curse laid upon Antigone by her father/brother is not the only reason for her living death. It may have been the beginning of the transmutation process from object to abject, but her own actions

and words move her from abject to “abject domestic foreigner.” Unlike Oedipus, Antigone is not self-abjectified, she is helpless to her abjectification but she still manages to push against her exile and force her way into the world that has banished her. She uses the subversive power of the abject to make a space for herself both inside and outside the spectrums.

Furthermore, the abject is most associated, as mentioned before, with both fear and *jouissance* (the maternal). Antigone’s position in the world creates fear and her connection with

¹⁹ Butler, 23.

²⁰ Butler, 23.

²¹ Although I haven’t explored this fully, I do believe there is something here worth exploring in a later paper, especially using Kristeva’s work on mirrored abjective identities.

the maternal is fraught with complications. Her life is representative of the immoral acts of her multi-titled parents (mother/grandmother and father/brother) and in the space of the unspoken laws of Thebes, every breath she takes is a painful reminder of the curse on their throne.

Antigone’s foreignness within Thebes creates a fear and an uncomfortable desire to both honor the daughter/sister of their fallen king while also wishing that her double relations to the throne were not existent. She is loved and rejected, object of Haemon’s desire and abject to all desires of the city. Antigone’s ability to create life is both a gift and a curse—she could bring forth the new generation of kings for the city, but those kings would carry in them tainted blood. She is aware of this contradiction and thus marries herself to death, furthering her from the land of the living and into the world of the abject.²²

Antigone is outside of the realm of the polis and the oikos, outside of the spectrum of gender, and outside of the heteronormative relations of family. She is a symbol of creation and destruction, a woman capable of creating life but, considering her tainted birthright, such creation would in turn be the destruction of morality coded within her incestuous bloodline. She

is marked by a harmonic imbalance—and this confusion of gender roles and kinship identities creates a space in which she constitutes the moral and social “other.” As Butler describes, Antigone’s “insistence on public grieving is what moves her away from the feminine gender into hubris, into that distinctively manly excess that makes the guards, the chorus, and Creon wonder: Who is the man here?” The subsequent “unmanning” of Creon in Antigone’s public speeches transgress and confuse the heteronormative gender roles coded within Grecian society.

Yet, although she never has the same level of political and social power as Creon, she is able to present herself as equally powerful, putting on the disguise of masculinity confidently

²² Sophocles. “Antigone.” In *The Complete Plays of Sophocles*. New York: Bantam Books, 1982: 148. Antigone exclaims, “Death will be my bridal dower,” as Creon sentences her to her living death inside her rock tomb.

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enough to shake Creon’s sense of gendered balance. She interrupts the harmony he attempts to create within his masculine political authority, blurring the lines of gender and state and supporting herself as outside of the recognized spectrums. Her father even names her “man” in *Oedipus at Colonus*, a title he bestows upon her as “a gift or reward for her loyalty.”²³ But, like many of the other favors from her father, is this gift truly a reward? Or is it furthering her exile? Butler claims that “By the time this drama is done, [Antigone] has thus taken the place of nearly every man in her family.”²⁴ She has taken the place of her brothers in service to Oedipus and, with the death of her father, has become the figurehead for the broken family (considering Ismene’s soft-spoken nature). Seeing the power of words in this trio of plays, Antigone takes up the mantle of “man” proudly, defiantly challenging the labels placed upon her.

Furthermore, she remains outside the realm of kinship by representing, as Butler states, “not kinship in its ideal form but its deformation and displacement.” Antigone is abjectified in her relationship to family—exiled from morality in her excessive love for her deceased relatives,

and a reminder to all of Thebes of the monstrous curse fated for the entire Oedipal line.

Antigone's relationship with her kin is suspect—her love is (dis)placed in service to her dead relatives rather than to those who are still living. The deformation of the Oedipal family is two fold; outwardly, Antigone rails against Ismene and denounces her as sister. Inwardly, the entire line is deformed due to its incestuous inception. Antigone is both sister and daughter, cousin and niece. Again, she defies the labels we would normally place upon her, leaving her to be defined in terms not yet within our typical vocabulary.

So who is Antigone and what are we to make of her? I believe she is the representation of the “abject domestic foreigner,” doomed to complete awareness of her own living death. Her

²³ Butler, 61.

²⁴ Butler, 62.

words and actions transgress the norms for she is outside of the general community of humankind. She transcends the boundaries of man-made laws and, thus, the laws of Creon, to create for herself a space occupied by her alone—allowing her agency within a place and time when there was none for women. She is equally as foreign to Thebes as she is a domestic part of it—a paradox of abjection in her own right. As Butler claims, “Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws.”²⁵

Antigone defies the rules— we are drawn to her foreignness, disturbed by it but also desperately wanting to understand it (despite the fact that her existence as the “abject domestic foreigner” challenges our own abilities to make meaning at all). She blurs the binaries of gender, of polis and oikos, and breaks down the models of kinship and morality all while positioning

herself on the spectral lines between them, giving herself agency and allowing her transgressive acts to hold weight in a political society not meant for her. Antigone is the chaotic good, the vigilante that we love to root for— connecting her to multitudes of people in various times and locations despite her foreignness within her own story.

The *Antigone* and the “Abject Domestic Foreigner” as Timeless

If we borrow from the metaphor of W.B. Worthen and see Antigone as bones belonging to the greater skeleton of the *Antigone*,²⁶ we can see how the bones are consistently shattered and

²⁵ Butler, 82.

²⁶ Worthen, W.B. "Antigone's Bones." *The Drama Review* 52, no. 3 (2008): 16. In this piece, Worthen describes the text of *Antigone* as bones. He continues his argument, claiming that “The purpose of acting is not merely to clothe Antigone’s bones with new flesh—the zombie theory of drama—but to use writing as a means to render the present relation with an audience significant” (26).

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grafted back together by playwrights and doctors of language and philosophy to create a new textual body, with new meanings for new audiences. This text, unlike the other two in its family, is most often reproduced, adapted, and translated. Although its strong heroine holds a great source of dramatic potential, the play is centuries old and revolves around issues dealing with the power of kings and the fickle natures of the gods and fate. It is, for all intents and purposes, incredibly dated. So why do we keep coming back to this particular skeleton, this specific bag of bones?

In the final section of this paper, I aim to illustrate how my concept of Antigone as the “abject domestic foreigner” can be used to understand why this particular Sophoclean text has been adapted and performed most often in the centuries since its conception. I claim that the representation of such a supremely complex character is more relatable to us now as the world

becomes increasingly globalized. Inscribing the notion of the vigilante hero on the titular character increases her agency in post-colonial societies and the paradox within her simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from the world around her can be related to the everyday experiences of resident aliens across the globe.

Returning to the work of Henao Castro, he calls Antigone “stranger,” claiming that the particular term “bears a meaningful ambivalence that is lost in the English word ‘foreigner.’ ‘Stranger’ indicates someone unfamiliar, uncommon, infrequent, odd, rare, as well as alien, outsider, outcast, and foreigner.”²⁷ While I stand by my own use of the term ‘foreigner’ due to my hope of eliminating any chance of ambivalence and connotations of strangeness towards Antigone, his reasoning is soundly convincing for his own purposes. Henao Castro asserts that Antigone is representative of the “noncitizen, foreigner, stateless, refugee, and also as the

²⁷ Henao Castro, 308.

subject-position providing the perspective from which one theorizes and tries to (re)invent.”²⁸ Seen through this lens, Antigone is the resident alien; she is part of the world around her and simultaneously excluded from it.

Although this paradox is not seen in the other members of the Oedipal family line, there is still something to the notion of the “abject domestic foreigner” that must be dealt with. Although resident aliens and other paradoxical citizens in contemporary society do deal with the contradictions expressed within Antigone, the abjection causes some slight hiccups. Abjection, once more, precedes desire, threatens our abilities of meaning-making, and “disturbs identity, system, [and] order. [The abject] does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules.”²⁹ With that said, not all of these characteristics are met in the average resident alien. They may shift our meaning

making processes, but they don't threaten them; they may change the general views of the communal identity, but they certainly don't disturb them. And the respect for borders and rules is a matter of opinion—respect is subjective but I believe that these rules may be unrecognized due to cultural differences rather than purposefully disrespected in any way. They may have similarities to the abject, but they certainly do not fit the entire description.

But there is something undeniable in the relations made visible between resident aliens and the “abject domestic foreigner” of Antigone. Similar to the necessity of distance before touching on taboo topics, I believe that the abject nature of Antigone, while somewhat similar to the general feelings of resident aliens, removes her just enough from the picture to allow the critical distance necessary for fully understanding and dealing with the character and her actions. Her “alienness” even from resident aliens keeps her sympathetic while allowing her actions of the underdog vigilante to ring more strongly. The nature of the domestic foreigner, of the

²⁸ Henao Castro, 308-9.

²⁹ Kristeva, 4.

resident alien, allows Antigone to be malleable and, returning to Worthen's metaphor, her bones are more flexible than most. Antigone's abjection brings her power despite her liminal status outside and within the world of the play. 16

While putting the original text of the *Antigone* under the umbrella of universality may be a flawed misnomer, scholar Wumi Raji asserts, “*Antigone* has remained fascinating to people from different climes and ages. It has continued to be studied, performed, translated, and adapted but always as a parable against absolute power.”³⁰ But with every adaptation and appropriation, there is a power struggle between inclusion and exclusion that must be dealt with. What to add, what to tweak, and what to cut become charged questions as the nature of the text can be boiled

down to the basic elements, giving the author complete agency as he rebuilds the skeleton of the text from the very marrow. This question of exclusion and inclusion in the creation of adaptation feeds into the concepts held within the text of the *Antigone*.

Athol Fugard uses this power in his adaptation, *The Island*, by putting the influential words of Antigone in the mouths of South African political prisoners—domestic in their lives while living within foreign cells, abject in the eyes of the colonizers who placed them there. Antigone herself may not exist within the play, but her words, her speech, her voice is resurrected from their living death and put into the mouths of two men putting on a play for their fellow domestic foreigners. She gives power to the powerless and agency to the oppressed. Antigone, through her liminal state outside the boundaries of human existence, can say and do the things that those held within the boundaries cannot. Similar to the ways in which comedians can say provocative things under the guise of comedy or how actors could say things about kings and queens under the guise of playing masked characters, Antigone's words comes from a place

³⁰ Raji, Wumi. "Africanizing *Antigone*: Postcolonial Discourse and Strategies of Indigenizing a Western Classic." *Research in African Literatures* 36, no. 4 (2005): 138.

of passion and truth. Unfortunately for Antigone, she is as equally within the bounds as she is outside of them, straddling the gap between—so she can still feel the consequences of her actions. The men in *The Island* plan to use her inciting words knowing that there is nowhere worse than where they are—they are untouchable.

Femi Osofisan contends in conversations about his Antigone adaptation *Tegonni, an African Antigone*, that Antigone “belongs to several incarnations,”³¹ allowing Sophocles' original text to be morphed and adapted in as many ways as one could imagine. The body of the original text is malleable—a supple skeleton for theatre artists to mold and collaborate with. Osofisan's

character of Tegonni moves through the margins within the recently colonized country of Nigeria, attempting to find a way to survive between the worlds of the colonizer and the colonized. She endeavors to find the liminality that Antigone had within her own story, insisting “against all odds, on becoming a sculptor—a trade believed to be the exclusive preserve of men—and succeeds in blazing the trail for the first guild of women casters.”³² Osofisan uses Antigone as a spiritual and inspirational guide for Tegonni on her journey as she moves from this monumental success to her fall, forced to publicly apologize for her defiance and to renounce her marriage to one of the colonizing officers.³³

As seen in these variations, the *Antigone* is easily adaptable and, I claim, that adaptability comes primarily from the “abject domestic foreigner” conceptualization of the lead character. This theory explains how we can continue to find her relatable across the globe and helps remind audiences that we are all much more alike than we may outwardly look. Antigone is a domestic foreigner—within and without a home of her own—and this feeling is easily relatable in our

³¹ Raji, 144.

³² Raji, 145.

³³ Raji, 147.

contemporary and complex global community. We can see ourselves in her, for better or for worse. Yet, she is still distant enough from us in her abjection that we are able to look at her character and her actions critically, seeing her for all that she is. The binary issues dealt with in the *Antigone* (gender, morality, civic duty, and family relations) are issues that will always be a part of the greater global consciousness—maintaining Antigone’s temporality despite her own inability to fit into the period of her own story.

Conclusion

The *Antigone* holds within it struggles between family and state, gender differences, family models, and civic morality—all things we deal with in contemporary society. In her search for belonging, Antigone learns that she belongs in a space unlike anyone else, a liminal space spanning both sides of these struggles. The Hegelian dialectics paint the *Antigone* in easy dichotomies, but, like life, dichotomies are never easy. Antigone resists the boundaries placed upon her by Hegel, creating for herself a concept that defies the binaries: the concept of the “abject domestic foreigner.” She is a living paradox, simultaneously abjectified and accepted within her damaged home of Thebes. Unlike the self-imposed abjection of her father/brother, Antigone’s abjection is passed down to her—she cannot escape it—yet she does not allow it to slow her down.

Over the course of the three Theban Plays, we see represented all of the stages of abjection coined by Kristeva. The corpse of Polynieces in the *Antigone* represents the completely abject object, the corpse unrecognized by God or science in a place it does not belong. In *Oedipus Rex*, we witness the self-abjection of Oedipus and the attempt at purging the abject from his body in his self-penetration (mimicking the penetration of the maternal womb but

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failing to purify). Ismene represents the mirrored abject—and object that stands in direct contrast to the abjection around her. And, finally, we see Antigone—the more-than-abject, the “abject domestic foreigner,” who surpasses the boundaries of abjection termed by Kristeva, creating for herself even more power in her subversiveness.

Antigone is a force of nature, outside the realms of law, birth, gender, and religion. She is

completely foreign from us. Yet, she is a sister, a daughter, a fiancée; an independent, intelligent, and plucky hero that we all can or at least wish to relate to. In *Antigone*, we see our hopes and fears—and we love her for that. We return to her time and time again not because we wish to know how we are supposed to solve this problem of foreignness within our own lives, but because we want to know what problems the paradoxical nature of *Antigone*'s “abject domestic foreignness” can solve for us.³⁴

³⁴ This is very similar to a question posed by Bonnie Honig in response to the constant pushing of the “us versus them” mentality of solving problems with outsiders in literature. As articulated in Henao Castro's article, Honig questioned: “What problem does foreignness solve for us?” (311).

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