

European tragedy as requiem, ruin, revenant in Magnet Theatre's *Antigone (not quitelquiet)* and Thomas Köck's *antigone. a requiem*¹

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Offering a comparative case study of two different postcolonial responses to Sophocles's tragedy *Antigone* from European and African perspectives, this article brings together Magnet Theatre's Cape Town production of *Antigone (not quitelquiet)* with Thomas Köck's play *antigone. a requiem* that premiered almost simultaneously in September 2019 in Hannover, Germany. Both re-examine Sophocles's tragedy to come to terms with their respective colonial histories and postcolonial challenges: while Magnet Theatre engages with the ancient material to reflect on the difficulties of fully overcoming the legacies of colonialism in post-apartheid South Africa, Köck explores the afterlives of 'thebaneuropean' colonialism as manifested in current European migration policies. Comparing the adaptation principle of Magnet Theatre's 'ruinous', fragmenting approach to the literary and theatrical archive of European colonialism to Köck's postdramatic recomposition of *Antigone* as a requiem for migrant deaths and for European tragedy itself, the article discusses the productions in their respective contexts of political protest movements. Drawing on cultural theory of ungrievability, domopolitics, and postcolonial shame, it explores the central functions of the chorus – indecisive Europeans on the verge of anagnorisis in Köck's play, the post-apartheid South African generation caught between rage and disillusionment in Magnet Theatre's production – and as well as the prominence of Ismene as a problematic survivor figure in both adaptations.

Keywords: tragedy as travelling form; tragic re-assembly; postcolonial adaptation; Greek tragedy; migration crisis; Post-Apartheid theatre; ungrievability; tragedy as protest form

Magnet Theatre's Cape Town production of *Antigone (not quitelquiet)*, to which this special issue of the *South African Theatre Journal* is dedicated, premiered almost simultaneously, in September 2019, with *antigone. a requiem*, a rewriting of Sophocles's tragedy by the Austrian playwright Thomas Köck. The Staatstheater Hannover in Germany commissioned the play from Köck, one of the most prolific political playwrights in the younger generation of German-speaking dramatists, and *antigone. a requiem* has since been produced by several theatres in Germany and Austria, including Vienna's Burgtheater.² Both *Antigone (not quitelquiet)* and Köck's play choose a decidedly postcolonial approach to the

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ancient material: they revisit a tragedy considered central to the negotiation of European values and narratives to critically examine the current afterlives of European colonialism from their respective South-African and Austrian-German viewpoints. By setting the action in a non-specified ‘thebaneuropean’ country (Köck 2019, p. 75), Köck’s play signals a broader European perspective that goes beyond national borders and concerns the entire continent. The politics of the dead are at the centre of both plays and closely connected to their respective colonial histories and postcolonial challenges. In both plays, the dead return as revenants: in Köck’s drama, they remind Europe of its colonial history and its responsibility for current migration movements, while in *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* a chorus of Antigone figures in their tomb embodies the liminal state of post-Apartheid South African society, which has not yet fully liberated itself from the colonial past.³ Both plays turn Ismene into a problematic identification figure. While in Magnet Theatre’s production she embodies the white ‘leftovers’ in South Africa who are haunted by their historical guilt, Köck’s Ismene struggles to acknowledge her own implication in colonial history and to face her responsibility for future European politics.

Formally, both plays can be described as postdramatic reassemblages of the *Antigone* material, both link theatre and theory, both use the chorus as a central device and employ a strongly rhythmic language. The specific adaptation principles of the plays differ, however, and concern both their aesthetic and political affordances: Köck’s title and subtitle call his rewriting of *Antigone* a ‘requiem’ and a ‘recomposition’, while director Mark Fleishman describes the production principle of the collaboratively devised *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* as ‘ruinous’ (Fleishman forthcoming). As a recomposition, Köck’s version blends Sophocles’s material with newly written chorus and character speeches that juxtapose the ancient lines (mostly in their translation into deliberately archaic, poetic German by Friedrich Hölderlin) with the decidedly unpoetic discourse of media debates and political speeches in the twenty-first century. The dramaturgy of *antigone. a requiem* is loosely modelled on Sophocles, but Köck’s postdramatic approach divests his rewriting of pathos and catharsis. Creating an intellectual rather than emotional exercise in European self-examination, Köck’s version replaces Polyneices with a multitude of unidentified dead bodies which wash up on the ‘thebaneuropean’ beach and trigger a political crisis (2019, p. 75). That the dead can be understood as refugees drowned in the Mediterranean is obvious but never made explicit. They oscillate between representing migrants and surreal revenants who remind Europe of its violent history of colonialism and its postcolonial responsibilities. While Köck’s Creon, a slick leader tending towards autocracy, regards the dead as invaders of Fortress Europe, Antigone insists that the Europeans must recognize the dead as their own and even as themselves. A chorus of hesitant, self-questioning Europeans serves as mediators between these positions. The chorus is finally transformed into the dead, who have come back to life and kill Creon. The drama concludes with an epilogue by Ismene as the sole survivor, who addresses the audience directly to find the appropriate way to deal with the dead.

Magnet Theatre fragments Sophocles’s tragedy more radically than Köck’s recomposition. In accordance with their ‘ruinous’ production principle, *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* uses Sophocles as decaying material and juxtaposes three reactions to the ancient foil, which are not directly linked and which themselves

remain fragmentary (Fleishman 2021). Using the technique of ‘choreographic assemblages’ typical of the company, Sophocles’s writing is included in and transformed by the choreography that emanates from ‘specific bodies in specific spaces’ and does not grant an originary or hierarchically superior status to the written word (Fleishman 2016, p. 58). While Ismene’s monologue, which opens the piece, obsessively works its way through Sophocles’s material, the following sections – which focus on Antigone and finally Tiresias – increasingly distance themselves from Sophocles. The gradual abandonment of the European cultural heritage in favour of South African texts and contexts is central to the postcolonial aesthetics and politics of this ‘not quite’ *Antigone*. Accordingly, it derives its subtitle ‘Ninganiki Okungcwele Ezinjeni’, ‘Give not unto dogs sacred things’, from a poem by SEK Mqhayi that is spoken by Faniswa Yisa in the final part of the performance. The politics of the dead are multidimensional in Magnet Theatre’s production: instead of Sophocles’s concrete dramatic conflict about the appropriate burial of an individual, the production charts overlapping time levels and political challenges. The present is overshadowed by the violent past of colonialism, which is embodied by the personnel of Sophocles’s tragedy, and indebted to the martyrs of the struggle for freedom that Antigone represents. However, like the chorus of the protesting young Antigone generation in the middle part, which is imprisoned in their prison-grave between life and death, South Africa is caught in a liminal stage between the official end of apartheid and the establishment of a truly liberated society able to leave behind the divisions inherited from colonialism. In the final part, Tiresias offers an enigmatic outlook to the future through a South African poem of the past. In contrast to the collaborative work of Magnet Theatre with an emphasis on physical movement and song, in which a script gradually evolves but can capture only parts of the theatrical experience and the show’s video recording that I worked with, Köck’s play has been written prior to specific productions and is therefore primarily examined as a text that affords various theatrical realisations.

Köck’s theatrical requiem for Europe’s undead

In a new prologue of *antigone. a requiem* that precedes the subsequent scenes loosely modelled on Sophocles’s plot, the members of the chorus introduce themselves as late capitalist, European consumers. Overwhelmed by their affluence and the wealth of information they have to process daily and caught up in self-pity, they are unfit to perform a requiem. Instead of acknowledging the disturbing presence of the dead, they take refuge in self-imposed political blindness and long for quietness and rest. Against the original meaning of ‘requiem’ as ‘rest’, however, Köck’s play is interested in unrest, including the linguistic restlessness caused by the dead. The choral language has a particular rhythm characterized by repetitions and interruptions, which is also reflected in Köck’s writing style: he centres each line, uses neither punctuation nor capitalization, and makes extensive use of enjambments, which sometimes make it difficult to identify syntactical units and which give some lines ambiguous meaning:⁴

wir	we
schon wieder schwer am atmen stöhnen	again breathing heavily moaning
keuchen	panting
wir	we
völlig außer uns wir	completely besides ourselves we
überinformierten durch	overinformed over
deklinierten aus	discussed out
buchstabierten zu	spelled thought
ende gedachten wir	to the end we
hipsteropfer wir von	hipster victims we expelled
der geschichte ausgestoßen wir	from history we
endzeitattentäter wir	end time assassins we
späterdenbewohner wir	planetary latecomers we
[...]	[...]
überschussopfer	surplus victims
die wir von allem längst genug von	who have long since had enough of everything
allem viel zu viel wir hier	too much of everything we here
berichten völlig außer uns wir	report completely besides ourselves we
hier berichten völlig außer atem dass	here report completely out of breath that
alles am ende einfach viel zu viel am	everything in the end simply way too much in
ende einfach alles viel zu viel von allem	the end simply too much of everything
(<i>antigone</i> 7)	(<i>antigone</i> 7)

It is only after 22 more lines of such narcissistic evasion, however, that the chorus eventually reluctantly report that they have witnessed off-stage corpses washed ashore the beach. Immediately recognizing them as revenants who return to haunt Europe, the chorus try to deny and forget their disturbing arrival.

The play's first production in Hanover's Staatstheater, which had commissioned the play and where the artistic team around director Marie Bues worked closely with Köck, cast citizens of Hanover as chorus members. It thus accentuated the chorus's representative function akin to ancient Greek tragedy, where 'the audience could not rely on the chorus's judgement to interpret the action, although it could relate to the choral struggle to do so' (Foley 2007, p. 355). In the next two productions at Vienna's Burgtheater and Mülheim's Theater an der Ruhr, the choruses were composed of actors who played the other parts, too, which led to a double coding: starting with the group of actors as a chorus, each actor represented a particular voice when performing their part and melted back into the chorus whenever they were not directly involved in the action. Even though they chose different realisations, in all three productions the chorus thus expressed the polyphony and tensions within the collective that keeps expressing shifting and at times contradictory viewpoints and thereby invites audiences to reflect on their own stances towards the political crisis. The prologue of the chorus prepares the ground for the following play through a formal and political disturbance of quietness. It raises the question of how the characters, the chorus and the audience should deal with the intrusive, frightening presence of the dead: what requiem will they perform and what impact might it have on the future?

Köck's requiem is not a mass in memory of the dead or an artistic ritual with sacred overtones, but a political intervention. To understand its political concern, one work in Köck's list of inspirations printed in the play script is particularly

important: Judith Butler's book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004). Butler's work, written in response to *Antigone*, examines the politics of commemorating the victims of September 11, 2001 and the so-called 'War on Terror': while American citizens were intensely mourned, identified by name and honoured in rituals and memorials, in the US most of the foreign victims of American fighting abroad are unknown. Butler draws attention to 'how the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed. [...] [I]f a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburi-able' (p. 34). Employing Butler's ideas about (un)grievability, Köck's play examines the failure of the European migration policies which neither avoids the death of refugees nor recognizes them as publicly grievable lives. Köck's requiem transforms Butler's theory insofar as the denial of the dead leads to their increased visibility rather than their disappearance from public attention: as the messenger reports to Creon, Antigone has freed the dead from their anonymous body bags and dragged them from the beach into the city to confront the citizens with their sight and smell.

Turning the entire play into a requiem with political significance, Köck's version combines Butler's and Sophocles's interest in the political possibilities of public mourning as a form of protest. In Sophocles's tragedy, after having risked her own life for the proper mourning of her brother, Antigone eventually sings her own funeral song, her *kommos*, which Sophocles adapted from the mourning rituals of his time. As Simon Goldhill points out, her performance

is an immediate sign of the oddness of her ritual action, allowed by her strange circumstances: it is not normal to sing one's own *kommos*. The traditional *kommos* is antiphonal and involves consolation from the group to the individual mourner as well as shared, often incantatory, expressions of grief. (2012, p. 110)

Rather than offering a form of union through compassion and shared grief as typical of the *kommos*, Antigone's lament involves 'a delicate and subtle interplay' (p. 110) with the members of the chorus, oscillating between consolation and criticism of Antigone's 'self-willed temper' (Sophocles 2003, l. 873), just as Antigone wavers between pleading for compassion and distancing herself from the living. The complexity of the scene is heightened by Creon's impassive and impatient presence. As Helen Foley argues, Antigone here employs a standardized expression of public grief as a form of political protest against Creon's rule: 'she uses lamentation to carry her point assertively in a public context that might otherwise have silenced her speech' (2001, pp. 32-33, see also Honig 2013, p. 2). Through this ambivalence, her mourning song speaks to theatre audiences, who are confronted with several ways to respond to Antigone and must develop their own attitudes to her requiem (Goldhill, p. 113). In contrast to the emotional appeal of Antigone's *kommos* in Sophocles's version, Köck's recomposition does not aim to elicit an emotional response from the audience. The postdramatic rejection of psychological realism does not invite the audience to sympathize with Antigone, nor are the dead refugees ever personified or their stories told. This distinguishes Köck's drama from other recent rewritings of Antigone that explore the challenges of migration, for example Sophie Deraspe's Canadian feature film *Antigone* (2019), which portrays an Algerian immigrant family, and the play *Antigone of Shatila* (2014-2016), conceived by director

Omar Abusadaa and playwright Mohammad Al Attar, in which thirty Syrian women living in the Beirut refugee camp of Shatila reflect on their own experiences through *Antigone*. Köck's drama analyses European immigration discourses and policies cognitively and confrontationally; it aims at distanced reflection rather than at emotional participation.

How can a theatrical requiem that does not invite compassion mourn a depersonalized crowd? In her very first scene *Antigone* programmatically states, 'my life belongs to the dead' (Köck 2019, p. 15), repeatedly declares 'these are our dead' (pp. 15; 17; 42), and eventually, she dies for her cause. Her radical identification with the dead challenges the political reason declared by Creon and the self-chosen ignorance of the chorus. As an allegory for a self-critical, postcolonial European historical consciousness, *Antigone* poses the ethically pressing and politically difficult question of how narrowly we define 'ours / our own' (p. 45) whom we bury and mourn. *Antigone* combats Creon's exclusive approach, which has been called 'domopolitics' in political theory to describe the 'fateful conjunction of home, land and security' (Walters 2004, p. 241). Such a politics recognizes the state (or in the case of Europe, the union of states) as a homeland to be protected, while at the same time this exclusionary homeland seeks to expand and subjugate others. Köck's play emphasizes these two aspects of domopolitics: the colonial past, as well as the current neo-colonial economic exploitation, are part of the globalized belief in 'thebes worldwide' (Köck, p. 20), while the home state itself is secured by walls and barbed wire to avoid backlash from its own imperialism.

While Köck's *Antigone* opposes Creon's domopolitics, her position in Sophocles's version is different. As Debra Bergoffen points out, in this respect *Antigone* is not the idealized freedom fighter she has often been turned into in adaptations and interpretations. *Antigone* has a remarkably narrow concept of kinship when she declares that she would not have risked her life for the funeral of her husband or her own child, but only for the children of her dead parents, born of an incestuous and therefore unusually close relationship. According to Bergoffen, 'What plays out in *Antigone* is not the scandal of speaking for one's own but the destructive effects of speaking *only* for one's own' (2015, p. A256). In contrast, Köck's *Antigone* argues for a radical extension of the concept of family and is willing to sacrifice her life for the dead refugees. She represents what Bergoffen envisions as a 'construct of an extended or overextended family' (A256).

The theatrical requiem thus conceives of a community independent of the feasibility of concrete political steps, and it provides the time to reflect on the appropriate treatment of the dead in order to come closer to a more just engagement with the living. In this sense, Hans-Thies Lehmann emphasizes tragedy's potential for ambiguity, disruption and suspension of the logic that normally guides our thought and action (2016, p. 177). The difference between activism on the street and aesthetic intervention was particularly palpable at the premiere of *antigone. a requiem* at Vienna's Burgtheater in September 2020, which coincided with protests outside the theatre against the decision by Chancellor Kurz not to take in refugees from the burning refugee camp Mória in Greece. While the protestors on the street voiced concrete political demands, a space of reflection was opened in the theatre that presented contradictory points of view and a space of imagination that encompassed both the utopian belief in a globally extended family and dystopian scenarios of a city of the dead littered with corpses.

As in Sophocles's version, Köck's Antigone shows an intense commitment to her bond with the dead from her very first appearance, placing her in a borderline state between the living and the dead, which finally materializes in her funeral while she is still alive. Recent research has drawn attention to a choice of words by Sophocles that associates Antigone with the borderline state of migrants: she repeatedly refers to herself as a 'metoikos', that is, as a stranger with the right to live in the polis, a resident alien. There are two main explanations for why the daughter of a ruler calls herself 'metoikos', namely her origin as 'anything but the ordinary offspring of a legitimate union between two Thebans' (Bakewell 2013, p. 81) and her slow death in the cave, which banishes her from the spheres of both the living and the dead. As Andrés Fabián Henao Castro points out in an article that uses *Antigone* to develop a political theory of the stranger, this liminal state can be related to the stranger's lack of a home and their state between grievability and un-grievability, between social recognition and social death (2013, p. 313). In Köck's version, Antigone not only radically accepts her own close bond with the dead, but she also finally succeeds in convincing the chorus of their inescapable interconnectedness with the dead. The chorus gradually accepts its historical responsibility for the current migration: 'we see our / selves in the water there trembling in front of / ourselves in the water there trembling in front of / what man / makes possible' (p. 78).

In contrast to Sophocles's version, Köck's Antigone does not bemoan her impending death in a lament. Instead, she adopts a completely unsentimental stance, while Köck assigns the *kommos* to the chorus, who lament their own fate after admitting their historical guilt. When she mocks the chorus for 'your / indulgence in your own / hopelessness your / white victim cult your / European pretence of cosmopolitanism full / of self-pity and blindness and / another undiscovered market which / you can exploit mournfully' (p. 81), she also ridicules ancient tragedy itself as the foundational European ritual of sacrifice whose global export as carrier of European values, philosophy, and art legitimized colonial exploitation and whose tragic script of a predestined fate is now used for European self-exculpation. Therefore, Antigone also sings a requiem for tragedy itself – or more precisely, for the political appropriation of tragedy as the carrier of European superiority, which turns a blind eye both to its colonial guilt and the current global economic exploitation. Köck's piece not only recomposes *Antigone*, but also forensically examines a decaying, decomposing *Antigone* that haunts Europe as a post-colonial revenant.

Reflecting this movement towards the ghostly and decomposed, Köck's chorus finally transforms into the dead in a process that begins with their reluctant identification and ends in a complete transformation. The stage directions for the final scene laconically note, '*chorus enters. now chorus of the dead. filthy. zombified. mummified. wet*' (p. 110). Köck's transformation of the chorus of increasingly deadened Europeans into the chorus of reanimated dead migrants merges the two roles and functions that the chorus had in ancient Greek tragedy as 'either space defenders or space invaders' (Hall 2010, p. 29). The mass return of the dead, turning the shore into a sea of corpses, creates a hyperbolic imagery, taking up the metaphors of the 'waves', the 'streams', and the 'floods' of refugees often used in the European migration discourses and transforms them into an apocalyptic horror scenario. Instead of banishing Creon from the polis as in Sophocles's version, Creon's ruthlessly protected space is here taken over by those he wanted to keep out. The reanimated dead themselves

become activists and finally kill Creon in a gesture of forced inclusion into the collective body of the excluded.

None of the productions so far followed Köck's stage direction exactly; instead, they opted for more metaphorical visualizations, often enhanced by video projections. For instance, in the production by Vienna's Burgtheater, the performance started with the projection onto a screen at the back of the stage that showed the actors lying motionless on the floor, who then stood up and morphed into the bodies of the actors live on stage speaking as members of the European chorus. Throughout the play, the chorus passages were repeatedly spoken to an underwater image projected onto the actors' bodies and the backdrop. From the very beginning, the production thus staged its performers as revenants inhabiting a liminal zone between the dead and the living. In the final chorus speech, the actors one by one sank motionless to the floor again, morphing with the initial image of a field of the dead. Their voices were layered with a recorded performance of the chorus speech, which eventually, after the final actor had collapsed and stopped speaking live, was audible only as recorded voices played from the auditorium, thus once more highlighting the close relationship between the chorus of hesitant European witnesses onstage and the offstage audience.

The epilogue leaves Ismene on stage as the sole survivor among the corpses, giving her a prominence that she also attains in other recent African and European versions of *Antigone* (see Wald 2021). Addressing the audience directly, Köck's Ismene has the last words, which in Sophocles belong to the chorus. As a wavering European, she asks how the future treatment of the dead should be shaped. Ismene's epilogue runs towards her anagnorisis but does not quite reach it yet. It invites the audience to find its own position in the spectrum of the *Antigone*-requiem: between a radical identification with the dead and an ignorant blindness in the face of their fate, between the commitment to a proper commemoration of the dead that involves the acknowledgement of the not-quite-alive living migrants and singing the dirge for the self-proclaimed European, now undead values as embodied by Antigone. Köck's requiem asks us to commemorate *Antigone*, to bury her and to revive her in our own way for our current moment.

Magnet Theatre's ruinous *Antigone* in post-apartheid South Africa

In *Antigone* (*not quiet/quiet*), Ismene is also central as a survivor figure: the performance opens with her prologue, which, however, does not focus on the future, but obsessively deals with the postcolonial legacy of the past. Caught in verbal, gestural and dance loops, Ismene as an old woman desperately tries to communicate with Antigone in her prison-grave in order to come to terms with her own failures. Written and performed by Jennie Reznick, artistic co-director of Magnet Theatre, the monologue deals with the shame of European 'leftovers' (Magnet Theatre 2019, p. 5) in today's post-apartheid South Africa. Reinforced through *whitening* in a worn-off clown make-up, Ismene stands for what David Attwell, Annalisa Pes and Susanna Zinato in their study of postcolonial shame have called the 'white shame' and 'the transgenerational shame tainting the colonizers' descendants' (2019, p. 16). In Ismene's monologue, it is staged as an exhibited whiteness that is aware of its individual and collective guilt and wants to escape the eyes of the public. Ismene is 'shame's fossil' (Magnet Theatre 2019, p. 2), 'charged with

remembering' (p. 10): 'I saw and heard but never spoke out, never placed my body in front, never risked, never protected, never shielded another [...]. Never offered refuge or a safe house. Never carried a banner or wore a sash. Never boycotted. Never sacrificed. I am one of those to be despised' (p. 12). She realizes too late that she should have supported Antigone in her rebellion against the state; now, she wants to prove her solidarity with the dead by repeatedly sneaking out of the city past the guards to the grave, like Antigone herself once did, and tries to appease Antigone with conversations and funeral rituals in order to live up to the 'roar of the unsettled dead' (p. 9). But this belated devotion to the dead has no political consequences for the present or the future. Ismene can only hope for her death to terminate her guilt. She even asks the audience to kill her to end the curse of the past. Catastrophe and death, however, are denied to this post-tragic, grotesque figure, who is trapped as a revenant in her loops of pathos.

As in Köck's requiem, Magnet Theatre's version of *Antigone* stages the pathos of the privileged ruler figure as self-pity. Thus, Ismene suspects that the audience is tired of her performance and feels suffocated by her stage presence: 'We are sick of your voice. Your paleness, your moaning, your self-pity, this voice going on and on, your deluded sense of self-importance [...]. Filling the space, the air, the air. We cannot breathe here while you go on and on' (Magnet Theatre 2019, p. 12). Ismene's belated anagnorisis thus stands in a complex relationship to the audience: while some audience members may share her shame, Ismene stages the rest of the audience as weary of her repetitive self-incriminations. At the same time, the fact that the privileged character assumes the voice of the people/audience is a problematic appropriation that raises the question of how fundamental Ismene's 'recognition of shame – or shame as a form of recognition' (Ahmed 2014, p. 102) is, whether she even recognizes the full extent of her transgressions. As Ato Quayson has argued in his discussion of postcolonial tragedies, this complex intertwining of collective responsibility and individual agency is characteristic of postcolonial scenes of anagnorisis (2021, p. 12), in which 'tragic recognition goes in more than one direction at once' (p. 31).

Ismene's request to interrupt her monologue also has a metatheatrical dimension. Like a ghost of the colonial theatre fallen out of time, with dusty hair, smeared make-up and a worn, old-fashioned dress, Ismene stands not only for the literary colonial archive but also for the European performance tradition. Like a windup toy, she tries to take on the codified figures of classical ballet to the onset of classical music, but repeatedly fails to execute them. Ismene's dance, through Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's music, recalls in particular a production of *Antigone* in Potsdam in 1841, which was 'a turning point in theatre history' because Europe rediscovered ancient tragedy as an artistic form of expression (Fischer-Lichte 2010, p. 334). Above all, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's composition, which attempted to develop an equivalent to the musicality of Greek tragedy, made the *Antigone* performance an aesthetically overwhelming experience that was also celebrated in Leipzig, Dresden, Munich, Paris, London and New York. In Britain, the performances of this production in Covent Garden in 1845 were the first *Antigone* stagings in over two hundred years and marked the beginning of a presence of the play on British as well as (post-)colonial stages and curricula that continues to this day (Macintosh and Hall 2005, p. 317).

With great effort and increasing exhaustion, Ismene attempts to adopt the required codified ballet poses and pathos gestures, but fails to execute them correctly,

finally interrupting the music with the words ‘This doesn’t feel right’ (performance video, min 5.00). In the choreography developed by Ina Wichterich, the attraction of dead Antigone located under the stage floor becomes palpable when Ismene fails to escape gravity with toe dance and aggressively rubs her toes across the stage floor as if to break it open. She collapses again and again, trying to physically penetrate the stage floor to be accepted into the family tomb. *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* thus begins its engagement with the postcolonial legacy by calling upon and rejecting the European theatrical tradition in order to search for a new form of expression. Accordingly, Ismene later speaks with brief flashes of enthusiasm of ‘A new start. A birth ... Look there an empty stage. E ... m ... p ... ty. Full of promise’ (Magnet Theatre 2019, p. 3), but she herself remains trapped in the repetition of the old narratives and forms until she is finally expelled from the stage only to reappear as a revenant at the end of the performance and start another Beckettian, tragicomic loop of repetition.

When the white-faced Ismene repeatedly refers to Antigone as ‘my other, my parallel’, or states, ‘We were the same possibilities unfolding in different directions’, the audience is left wondering who Antigone stands for: a white anti-apartheid fighter who, unlike ‘obedient Ismene’, stood up to the state and risked her life (pp. 2, 11, 9)? Or her black ‘sister’? The prologue leaves these questions open, and the following middle section, in which a multi-ethnic and multi-gendered Antigone chorus appears, offers resolution only to a limited extent, since the three parts of *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* do not interlock dramaturgically. As Fleishman explains,

the dramaturgical impulse arose from a realization of how separated we are so many years after the supposed end of apartheid. How despite the fact that we continue to live together in close proximity, we do not/cannot/wish not to see or understand each other, across intersecting divisions of race, gender, class and sexuality. Like the three parts of this triptych, we reach but cannot touch; we touch but cannot bind into any sense of a whole; (Fleishman 2021)

In accordance with this separation, the hatch to Antigone’s cave tomb only opens after Ismene has been driven off the stage. The middle section shows a thirteen-member chorus of young Antigone performers who amalgamate song and dance passages from laments, church and protest songs, composed by Neo Muyanga and choreographed collectively by the group, with fragments from Sophocles’s texts and the performers’ words as well as poems which Mandisa Vundla wrote in response to *Antigone*. Fleishman has described this polyphonic and multilingual choral section, performed in English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa as ‘Antigone’s scream the resounding voice of the youth of the new South Africa, angry with the slow pace of change, with the corruption of their parents’ generation who when handed the precious possibility of freedom, were unable or unwilling to care for it’ (Fleishman 2021). In this way, *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* places itself in the postcolonial South African tradition of *Antigone* adaptations and at the same time marks its historical difference: while in earlier South African adaptations, most prominently in Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona’s *The Island* (1999), Sophocles’s protagonist stood for the liberation struggle against the Apartheid regime, here the multiplied Antigones represent various protests in post-apartheid South Africa. In the South African *Antigone* tradition, where ‘a new version or production of *Antigone* often

indicates a cultural shift that corresponds to changed or changing social and political circumstances' (van Zyl Smit 2006, p. 282), Magnet Theatre's production represents disillusionment and anger with the current difficulties in overcoming the past.

The Antigone chorus begins with fragments of Antigone's lament and formulates its imprisonment in a liminal space, 'Lost between life and death forever' (Magnet Theatre 2019, p. 20), but also its determination to protest. While in the Ismene section retrospection, remorse and mourning are central, in the Antigone section these are fuelled by rage and protest, thus amplifying and intensifying the politics of the dead. The forms of protest shown are an assemblage of different contexts, genres and media; they combine quotations from protest songs and slogans of the past with current forms. The polyvalence of the Antigone figure, and thus of the politics demanded by the dead, is further heightened by the fact that Antigone fights not only against racist but also against sexist discrimination and violence, combining the anti-apartheid struggles of the past and current protests, such as the actions described by national and international media as 'poo-wars' and 'poo protests' in the winter of 2013, the #RhodesMustFall protests in 2015, and the protests against sexualized violence in 2019. For instance, when Ismene recounts, 'Even her naked body / A protest against / Against / Against the palace, against the patriarchy, against the police' (p. 18), she refers to a protest form already used against colonial rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as in the Dobsonville Township against the apartheid government in 1990, and recently used by activists in the struggle against sexualized violence (Msimang 2016; see also Young 2020, p. 159).

In contrast to Ismene's guilt-ridden white shame, Antigone thus stands for liberation from female shame. The naked feminist protests opposed both the shameful public silence concerning rape and the body shaming that accompanied the coverage of the protests. As Sisonke Msimang has argued, movements like the anti-rape protests indicate that 'this new generation of feminists rejects the notion of shame. They understand that shame is the tactic of bullies. Shame breeds silence and silence is a misogynist's greatest ally' (Msimang 2016, see also Ndlovu 2017, 75). The fact that female nudity would attract international media attention was strategically planned by the activists:

Compellingly, they used an old format alongside new technology to transmit their message. Fully aware of the camera lenses and of the potential for their images to go viral, the activists demonstrated that they are capable of both making and amplifying a scene. (Msimang 2016)

Hlengiwe Ndlovu, an activist involved in protests at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, has made it clear that the protesters were referring to a transnational network of feminists, partly linked through the organization Femen, which has used nudity for political protests in various countries since its founding in Ukraine in 2008 (Ndlovu 2017, p. 75, see also Young 2020, p. 164 and Eileraas 2014). The globally circulating form of protest is thus used for specific local concerns, with its virtual global dissemination via media being an integral part of the protest; it is a multimedia, multilocal protest scene.

This concern became particularly urgent when Magnet Theatre's rehearsals were interrupted for protests against sexualized violence and femicide that took place in response to the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana, a student at the University

of Cape Town. Mourning turned into activism and thus had a direct impact on their theatrical engagement with an ancient case of protest via mourning, in line with the principle of collaborative workshop theatre and Magnet Theatre's dedication to 'politicised performance' (Lewis and Krueger 2016, pp. 16-18). Magnet Theatre's version of *Antigone* amalgamates the travelled and onward-travelling tragedy with travelling protest forms to create a performance that explicitly wants to be 'not quiet', but functions as an aesthetic as well as political instigation of unrest.

However, the Antigone part also reflects on the limits of the politics of the dead, because the characters' agency is compromised. Thus, in a longer sequence when various monologues are recited by the Antigone actors, as each finishes their piece, they sink motionless to the floor. One monologue, written by Vundla, predicts the impossibility of a black, female revolution:

Dreaming while black
 Is a revolution delayed
 Dreaming while black woman
 is a revolution denied
 A dream with soiled hands and sinking feet
 A body broken like a promise safe couldn't keep
 We are chasing our dreams while being chased on the streets
 We are reaching for the stars
 While someone keeps reaching for our bodies
 at school
 at home
 at work
 at play
 Dreaming while black is a revolution delayed
 Dreaming while black woman
 Is a disappearing act (Magnet Theatre 2019, p. 22 23)

Despite the force of the Antigone part, the protest shown remains trapped in the in-between space of Antigone's cave, which stands for the as yet unredeemed future in which apartheid is fully overcome. *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* refuses catharsis as well as revolution and concentrates on 'the depiction of pain and an unrelieved emotional suffering', like many postcolonial tragedies (Quayson 2021, p. 29). Thus, at the end of the Antigone part, the chorus says, 'We must find ways to unbury ourselves / When we howl, for our freedom' (Magnet Theatre 2019, p. 25), as they push the stage lights to the front of the stage, increasingly blinding the audience and thus announcing the commencement of the final section of the blind seer, Tiresias.

In a video installation on three screens at the back of the stage, performer Faniswa Yisa recites in English as well as Xhosa a narrative allegorical poem by SEK Mqhayi. Written in 1908, shortly before the founding of the South African Union, it reflects on failed political leadership. Intermittently, scenes of the political unrest and protests in South Africa are shown on the screens. As a video installation that allows for no direct contact between the performer and the audience, Tiresias's outlook on the future was performatively more detached than the previous two parts. The passages spoken in Mqhayi's anachronistic, poetic Xhosa were also linguistically more difficult to access, even for Xhosa speakers in the Cape Town audience. These formal distancing devices correspond to a conceptual and political distance, as the final, prophetic part by the blind seer indicates a new, as yet unattainable stage of thinking and living:

following Sophocles's gender-switching character, Yisa as Tiresias's white-painted face and voice remain ambiguous and otherworldly, hinting at a possible future beyond the current categories of gender and race. The tentative final part of the triptych thus corresponds to the mission of Magnet Theatre, which sees itself as a 'leap into the unprecedented and the unknown' and as a 'machine for thinking the future' (Fleishman 2016, p. 72). The displacement of the ancient European foil in favour of a historical South African text signals this outlook on a new, if still hazy, stage beyond (post)colonial patterns.

* * *

Having premiered almost simultaneously in September 2019, *antigone. a requiem* and *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* offer two different postcolonial responses to Sophocles's tragedy from European and African perspectives. Both productions re-stage *Antigone* explicitly as a travelled tragedy, as material that has been transformed by colonialism and its postcolonial aftermath. Köck's rewriting as a requiem explores European migration policy through an apocalyptic staging of necropolitics at Europe's borders. Köck not only recomposes Sophocles's original, but also stages the postcolonial cultural heritage as a decomposing material disfigured by its history. His requiem maintains the dramaturgical skeleton of Sophocles's tragedy, but bloats it with additional material: formally, his play therefore resembles the bodies of drowned refugees or undead European revenants that he is interested in. This is a requiem for migrant deaths as well as for European values as allegedly crystallised in Sophocles's *Antigone* and its long history of adaptation and interpretation. The collaboratively written and choreographed South-African production fragments Sophocles more radically, pursuing a ruinous production principle that treats Sophocles as a derelict leftover of the European heritage which is rebuilt for South-African purposes and with South-African forms. *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* features three fragmentary responses to the ruins of *Antigone*, reflecting the divisions in post-apartheid South Africa: Ismene's monologue evokes the colonial past that continues to haunt the present, the protesting young generation in the Antigone part represents the current liminal state of South African society, which has not yet fully liberated itself from the colonial past, while the concluding part of the blind seer attempts to map the future. The multiplied Antigones stage a multi-layered, de-individualised politics of the dead that amalgamates past protests against colonization and the apartheid regime with current protests. However, as the Antigone chorus lingers in prison, the efficacy of their politics remains questionable. Both productions end with an outlook to the not yet fully imaginable or inhabitable future, with the promise of a politically more just stage that will not only require new political forms of local and global cohabitation, but also new theatrical forms.

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Notes

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2. After its premiere at the Staatstheater Hannover, directed by Marie Bues, *antigone. a requiem* opened in September 2020 on the Akademietheater stage of the Austrian Burgtheater, directed by Lars Ole Walburg, and in Mülheim’s Theater an der Ruhr, directed by Simone Thoma. In December 2021, it was produced at the Schauspielhaus Bochum, directed by Franz Xaver Mayr in combination with Wolfram Lotz’s play *Die Politiker (The Politicians)*. In summer 2022, while I am completing this manuscript, three more German productions have been announced for August and September 2022 by Dortmund’s theatre group HER.STORY (directed by Emel Aydo Aydoğdu), the Städtische Bühnen Osnabrück (directed by Christian Schlüter) and the Ensemble für unpopuläre Freizeitgestaltung (ensemble for unpopular leisure time) in Dornbirn (directed by Stephan Kasimir).
 3. See Hardwick and Gillespie as well as Van Weyenberg for seminal discussions on how *Antigone* was used as instrument of colonization.
 4. Köck’s semantically compressed writing style and his extensive use of enjambments and semantic ambiguity make it hard to translate his writing into English. I have therefore included both the German original and my English translation that tries to preserve the rhythm and most of the ambiguities of the original.

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