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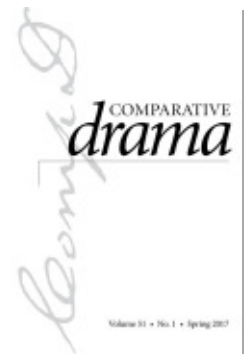
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Phillip Zapkin

Comparative Drama, Volume 51, Number 1, Spring 2017, pp. 1-21 (Article)

Published by Western Michigan University



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# COMPARATIVE *drama*

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VOLUME 51 • NO. 1 • SPRING 2017

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## **Charles de Gaulle Airport: The Camp as Neoliberal Containment Site in Two *Trojan Women* Adaptations**

**PHILLIP ZAPKIN**

In August 1988, Mehran Karimi Nasseri arrived in Paris's Charles de Gaulle Airport. And he stayed. And he stayed. He stayed until 2006, when he was taken to hospital gravely ill. Nasseri had lost his passport and the papers that were supposed to grant him refugee status in Britain. Without paperwork to prove either his identity or his right to travel to the UK, Nasseri simply remained in Terminal 1. Nasseri "lived in a lost dimension of absurd bureaucratic entanglement...[He] couldn't leave France because he did not have papers; he couldn't enter France because he did not have papers. The authorities told him to wait in the airport lounge while they sorted the paradox out."<sup>1</sup> Nasseri had become stateless in 1977 after fleeing Iran, but struggled to get the necessary permissions to come to the West. When he finally made it to Europe, he found himself trapped in the liminal space of Terminal 1. Nasseri's story is a

striking example of state control and containment of refugees. According to Maurya Wickstrom, this need to regulate the physical presence of refugees is a central preoccupation of the modern neoliberal state. Her book, *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism*, argues that under a globalized economic system, states devote substantial time, resources, and military/police force to delimiting the movements of mobile (and usually impoverished) populations.<sup>2</sup> The poor threaten the stability of an economic system built on exploitation and the uneven distribution of resources; impoverished peoples must, therefore, be contained to facilitate the smooth functioning of late capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Femi Osofisan's play *Women of Owu* (2004) and Christine Evans's *Trojan Barbie* (2009) both adapt Euripides's *Trojan Women* to protest the quarantining of the dispossessed under neoliberal governance.

While maintaining Euripides's basic themes and concerns, these contemporary plays increase the thematic immediacy of dispossession. Osofisan sets his version after the 1821 conquest of Owu, in modern day Nigeria, but the play's language is laced with satirical references to the 2003 Iraq invasion. A Bush-and-Blair rhetoric of liberation and freedom contrasts the violence and enslavement of Owu survivors. Evans is less overtly concerned with Iraq and more broadly focused on dispossession; *Trojan Barbie* foregrounds philosophical discussions of deprivation and liminal statelessness. In adapting Euripides's famous anti-war tragedy, the two contemporary dramatists locate our own economic and martial moment alongside a classical condemnation of exploitation, deprivation, and enslavement, thereby raising questions about the nature of the "freedom" so often promised by free market rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> Each play's mise-en-scène makes obvious the devastation of dispossession. The ruined village of Osofisan's play and the refugee camp of Evans's stage visually echo increasingly common sights in nations under neoliberal hegemony. The enslavement of the women makes clear the stakes neoliberal governments and corporations see for quarantining the impoverished and the oppressed. Simultaneously, however, both playwrights locate possibilities for resisting militaristic and imperialistic capitalism in aesthetics itself, suggesting that culture and the arts can help maintain identity in the face of dispossession and strengthen cosmopolitan empathy through hybridizing performance.

The system these plays oppose, neoliberalism, has become the governing ideological system of the West since the 1980s and, via the IMF and World Bank, has been imposed throughout the global south.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, neoliberalism is a comprehensive political economic philosophy privileging free-market capitalism as the primary guarantor of individual freedom and conceptualizing society, culture, and the individual in economized market terms. In other words, neoliberalism applies the logic of capitalist markets across all sectors of society, including human subjectivity. In this sense, it is a profound form of biopolitics (which will be discussed more thoroughly below). One of the foundational principles of neoliberal capitalism is privatization: the shifting of resources, property, money, and industries away from public/government control and into individual, often corporate, hands. In both the erosion of public authority and the repression of dispossessed people, neoliberalism is fundamentally anti-democratic, precipitating the destruction of shared democratic spaces and political structures. Around the world, one of the most common results of anti-democratic privatization has been the impoverishment of huge portions of the population—losing farmland, coastal fishing areas, public sector jobs, small businesses, and neighborhoods or villages destroyed for corporate or government projects. Naomi Klein estimates that throughout the world roughly one billion people now live in slums, largely as a result of neoliberal policies.<sup>6</sup> A preoccupation of the neoliberal state is containing the impoverished—who, again, pose a threat to the systems that exploit and oppress them. Camps (as theorized by Giorgio Agamben) become the principal mechanism for that repression.

Theatre, and particularly theatrical adaptation, offers a tool for resisting the anti-democratic privatization of neoliberalism by exemplifying a communal performance culture. Evans's and Osofisan's plays reflect their Euripidean source text and simultaneously carry resonances of an Attic performance context rooted in the shared civic collective of the democratic Athenian *polis*. The plays hearken back to the massive crowds of the ancient City Dionysia even when modern audiences experience them in proscenium arch or black box theatres. For Athenians, tragedy was deeply connected to both civic and democratic life, training citizens for collective politics. In his analysis of Athenian audiences, Simon Goldhill writes, "to be in an audience is above all *to play the role of democratic*

*citizen.*<sup>7</sup> And as Paul Cartledge puts it, “for such average citizens, tragic theatre was an important part of their learning to be active participants in self-government by mass meeting and open debate between peers.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, conflicts in tragedy reflect the processes of rhetorical contest and civic debate at the heart of democratic Athens.

Despite a generally more atomized experience in modern theatre spaces, performance and spectating remain rooted in a common experience. In *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Marvin Carlson concludes that theatrical “performance is experienced by an individual who is also part of a group, so that social relations are built into the experience itself.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, theatre today remains (a variation of) what it was for the ancient Greeks: a collection of individuals encountering an aesthetic expression communally. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that felicitous encounters between individuals build a collectively owned cultural commonwealth. They write that this shared cultural production occurs “when, for instance, people communicate their different knowledges, different capacities to form cooperatively something new. The felicitous encounter, in effect, produces a new social body that is more capable than either of the single bodies was alone.”<sup>10</sup> Sharing different knowledges, skills, ideas, insights, or opinions builds a democratic and communal political culture, which undermines processes of atomization and private ownership underpinning neoliberal capitalism. While Hardt and Negri identify these felicitous encounters principally as interpersonal interactions, there is no inherent necessity that these meetings be direct. Making and watching theatre is rooted in the encounter of singularities within a public space. Intercultural adaptation in particular exemplifies the possibilities for finding common ground in literary/performative conversations by staging the encounter of different theatrical, performative, and literary heritages. Producing a play requires the collective engagement of actors, directors, technicians, theatre spaces, neighborhoods, and audiences.

Further, the polyphonic texture inherent in adaptation can offer an additional model for an aesthetic common. The adaptive process is fundamentally a felicitous encounter because it expands the boundaries of an art world and the beneficial experience of the aesthetic. In revising a source for a new context, adapters open up new relevancies within the

source text, giving it new meaning as a commentary on contemporary events. Further, adaptation illuminates ways in which current problems or concerns are deeply rooted in and connected to shared artistic, cultural, and human heritages. Hardt and Negri identify encounters as the basis for a commonwealth culture—the dialectical development of ideas, languages, codes, and shared experience. They ground the production of a cultural commonwealth in interactions, writing that this shared cultural production “requires, first, an openness to alterity and the capacity to form relationships with others, to generate joyful encounters and thus create social bodies with ever greater capacities.”<sup>11</sup> This communality is opposed, of course, to the current capitalist system intended to establish individual (frequently corporate) ownership of culture and ideas in the pursuit of profit.<sup>12</sup> Hardt and Negri explain, “if you use that idea productively, I can use it too, at the very same time. In fact the more of us that work with an idea and communicate about it, the more productive it becomes.”<sup>13</sup> When theatrical adaptations are felicitous encounters within a commonwealth, they challenge the violence underpinning neoliberal capitalist ownership of ideas, stories, characters, and even language. Adaptation demonstrates our ability to reclaim ownership of common language, myths, stories, and identities. Seeing adaptation as inherently confronting the ethos of ownership in late capitalist neoliberalism allows us to situate our resistance within the texture of performance and aesthetics. Adapting Euripides’s *Trojan Women* capitalizes on a culturally and politically weighty text from a cultural commonwealth to develop critiques of contemporary political economics. Both Osofisan and Evans use Euripides’s *Trojan Women* as a hypotext in launching their critiques of contemporary biopolitical regimes.<sup>14</sup>

In 415 BCE, Euripides presented *The Trojan Women*, which deals with the immediate aftermath of the sack of Troy, specifically the enslavement of the women of Troy and their dispersal as slaves to the leaders of the victorious Hellenic army. The central figure of the play, which largely takes the form of a lamentation, is Hecuba, widow of the slain Trojan king Priam and mother of Paris, Hector, Cassandra, and Polyxena (along with many others). Much of the play involves the Trojan women in a prison camp discussing their various troubles and fearing for their futures as slaves to the Greek conquerors. In beautiful, moving verse Euripides

gives viewers/readers the lament of women from whom everything has been taken—women who have lost their city, their husbands, and their children.

For the modern playwrights, loss and destitution remain at the center of their adaptations, though the specific details change. Osofisan's *Women of Owu* sets the story in roughly 1821 following the destruction of the city of Owu. Like ancient Troy, the West African city-state was sacked by a coalition of its enemies following a lengthy siege. The play's action centers on the sufferings of Erelu Afin, wife of the defeated Oba Akinjobi, former ruler of Owu. Erelu is *Women of Owu's* Hecuba, a figure vacillating between despair, defiance, and dignity. She and the women of the sacked city await their fate at the hands of the coalition members. The storyline features many of the same elements as Euripides's play, focusing mainly on the sufferings of the women and the callous indifference of the brutal victors.<sup>15</sup>

Although Osofisan sets the play in nineteenth-century West Africa, *Women of Owu* is overtly a response to the "War on Terror" and the destruction of Iraq by the US-led "coalition of the willing." When the play premiered at Oxfordshire's Chipping Norton Theatre in 2004, the Iraq conflict had only recently begun, but was already unpopular with a large portion of the British public, who opposed what many saw as imperialist adventurism more suited to Thatcher's martial nationalism than Blair's New Labour government. In his "Note on the Play's Genesis," Osofisan directly connects the sacking of Owu with the Iraq invasion, writing, "it was quite logical therefore that, as I pondered over this adaptation of Euripides' play, in the season of the Iraqi War, the memories that were awakened in me should be those of the tragic Owu War."<sup>16</sup> While Oxfordshire audiences might have had little knowledge of the Owu conflict (and some probably had little knowledge of Euripides's play), allusions to the Iraq conflict provided a point of contact with contemporary British culture and politics. As Felix Budelmann puts it, "references to the Iraq war, with its contentious UK participation, made the play topical for British spectators, and more generally the sufferings caused by war, for women or men, are not an issue confined to Africa."<sup>17</sup> Osofisan evokes both Euripides's Trojan War and West Africa's past as the bases for the play's ethical response to the Iraq War in the present, and he does so in a way that purposely links the three cultural points.

Within the first scene it becomes clear that *Women of Owu* rejects the logic of the Iraq War, satirizing the rhetoric of liberation so often deployed by US and coalition politicians to justify the invasion. In scene 1, the patron god of the city, Anlugbau, returns to find Owu in ruins, and the women he meets tell how the coalition “said our Oba / Was a despot, that they came to free us / From his cruel yoke!”<sup>18</sup> This repurposing of US liberation rhetoric runs throughout the play. The defeated women reflect, “Nowadays, / When the strong fight the weak, it’s called / A Liberation War / To free the weak from oppression.”<sup>19</sup> The sad irony, as it was in Iraq, is that so many innocent people were killed, displaced, tortured, and deprived of any hope or opportunity by their “liberation.” Osofisan’s Owus mock the disavowal of the profit motive at the heart of the Iraq Invasion, as they bitterly and ironically complain about the rhetoric of their “liberators”:

*Woman:* They are not interested in such petty things  
As profit—  
*Woman:* Only in lofty, lofty ideas, like freedom—  
*Woman:* Or human rights—  
*Woman:* Oh the Ijebus have always disdained merchandise—  
*Woman:* The Ifes are unmoved by the glitter of gold—  
*Woman:* The Oyos have no concern whatsoever for silk or ivory—  
*Woman:* All they care for, my dear women  
All they care for, all of them, is our freedom!  
*Woman:* Ah Anlugbua bless their kind hearts!  
*Woman:* Bless the kindness which has rescued us  
From tyranny in order to plunge us into slavery!<sup>20</sup>

As with the impoverishment and political disenfranchisement of the Iraqi people after the war to “liberate” them from Saddam Hussein, the women of Owu end up in a materially worse position than they had been under their ostensible oppression—displaced, dispossessed, and denied any social, political, or economic control over their own destiny, with their loved ones killed, tortured, and raped.

The satirical undercurrent in the references to the War on Terror mocks the dispassionate rhetoric of liberation, which many critics of the Bush and Blair administrations argue was a humanitarian face for blatant greedy theft. The women of Owu link the violence of their city-state’s destruction and community’s enslavement to the accumulative needs



of international capital, just as many critics of the Iraq War linked the invasion to pervasive Western oil consumption.<sup>21</sup> As Marx reminds us, the quest to secure resources through violent conquest and repression is fundamental to capitalism. Chicago School economists—the chief proponents of neoliberalism—have relied on a pervasive rhetoric of individual freedom to cover over economic and humanitarian crimes committed in the name of free market fundamentalism. Milton Friedman identifies the fundamental goals of neoliberalism as freedom and individualism, and claims, “In political matters, it supported the development of representative government and of parliamentary institutions, reduction in the arbitrary power of the state, and protection of the civil freedoms of individuals.”<sup>22</sup> The empirical problem, of course, is that virtually everywhere neoliberal capitalism has been imposed around the globe, individual freedoms and personal liberty have declined drastically, including a massive expansion of the kinds of detention/concentration/refugee camps that form the setting for *Women of Owu*.

The camp is a philosophically significant space representing, on the one hand, the reduction of the human from citizenship to bare life and, on the other hand, the structure of modern global capitalism as a means of controlling and delimiting populations. Both of these are forms of *biopolitics*, or politics that attempts to establish control over life itself—a politics that moves beyond traditional legislative spheres such as taxation, national defense, and judicial law. Biopolitics becomes the guiding force of the modern state, where power manifests in the ability to put citizens beyond the control of the law. Agamben develops this argument in detail in *Homo Sacer*, arguing the camp is the *nomos* of the modern because the camp represents the state’s sovereign power to determine which subjects reside permanently outside the law. Agamben writes, “the sovereign exception is the fundamental localization (*Ortung*), which does not limit itself to distinguishing what is inside from what is outside but instead traces a threshold (the state of exception) between the two.”<sup>23</sup> What Agamben means by this is that sovereignty is the power to reduce people from proper subject-citizens to what he terms *bare life* or *homo sacer*, entities without rights whom it is permissible to kill without being guilty of homicide, but who cannot be sanctified through ritual sacrifice. Bare life is, then, an unsubject outside both the law of human civilization and divine law, a being totally unprotected and unvalued. Agamben argues

that this version of sovereignty has moved throughout modernity beyond just the realm of politics into virtually every aspect of daily life.<sup>24</sup> The ultimate embodiment of this biopolitical regime—the state of exception in everyday life—manifests itself in the space of the camp.

The camp as a political space is profoundly economic under neoliberalism because neoliberal politics and economics are deeply intertwined. The exercise of sovereignty to deny rights to populations increasingly occurs along socioeconomic lines, with the physical structure of the camp being used to police the movements of the disenfranchised. Wickstrom argues that late capitalism relies on controlling movement, both physically and intellectually, in order to retain its hegemony. She claims, “Neoliberalism, globally distributed, puts people into forced motion and also expressly seeks to prohibit further movement, both physically into spaces of their own creation or histories, and in terms of movement toward a new politics.”<sup>25</sup> While the neoliberal economy creates ever freer flows of capital, it also presupposes the exclusion and containment of those whose labor is not seen as productive in the scheme of global economics. Klein identifies a shift in the nature of the camp under neoliberalism from spaces controlling disenfranchised labor forces to spaces controlling people excised from the global economy. She identifies the origin of this model in Israel’s militarized Gaza and West Bank occupation zones. Contrasting apartheid South Africa’s Bantustan work camps (which kept black or colored laborers from escaping) with the Israeli system, Klein writes, “What Israel has constructed is a system designed to do the opposite: to keep workers from working, a network of open holding pens for millions of people who have been categorized as surplus humanity.”<sup>26</sup> This practice of holding *surplus humanity* in camps extends around the world, everywhere neoliberalism has taken root, though most visibly throughout the global south. These camps—built with the same materials used onstage in *Trojan Barbie* and *Women of Owu*—hold people whose existence, livelihood, and culture are seen as superfluous to global capitalism.

In *Women of Owu*, the costuming and stage space physically represent the women’s deprivation. The visual aspect conveys dispossession using the kind of temporary housing increasingly becoming the standard in global south slums. Osofisan describes the set at the opening of the play: “*Along the broken wall are the temporary tents of the old market, built of wooden*

and bamboo stakes, and straw roofs.”<sup>27</sup> The materials housing the women are meant for, at best, provisional shelters, much like the plywood boards, corrugated tin, and cinder blocks characterizing the camps of the global dispossessed. Similarly, the women are cut off from domestic resources and comforts like water for washing and cleaning. At the beginning of scene 5, after a Yoruba dirge, the women complain, “Two days now without a wash; two days of waiting, / Stinking in our underwear. We have stayed like this, / In these make-shift tents, watching our city burn to ashes.”<sup>28</sup> The physical space of the stage and the ragged, dirty costumes of the women mark a sharp contrast to the former prosperity of Owu—the wealthiest Yoruba city-state of its time—and visually identifies these Owu survivors with others of the world’s dispossessed. The set for the 2014 Lagos State University revival of *Women of Owu*, designed by Biodun Abe, followed Osofisan’s lead in evoking a ruined village from early nineteenth-century West Africa. In a production review, Edozie Udeze wrote, “the desolate nature of the village further defined that the people were at war. The whole village was deserted and that in itself evoked profound pity.”<sup>29</sup> The mise-en-scène of Osofisan’s play speaks directly to the themes of loss and dispossession at the heart of Euripides’s play, which have become a reality of daily life for so many under late capitalism.

The paradoxical non-space of the camp is even more central to Christine Evans’s *Trojan Barbie*. Evans’s play—which premiered at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, MA—has thematic similarities to Euripides’s *Trojan Women*, but the plot is very different. *Trojan Barbie* follows three major characters: Hecuba, Polly X, and Lotte, while Euripides focuses principally on Hecuba. Evans’s Hecuba is more or less the woman of Euripides’s play, a dignified matriarch brought to slavery through the Greek conquest. She alternates between great dignity and deep despair. Polly X is one of Hecuba’s daughters. Euripides mentions Polyxena, but she does not appear in his version. In Evans’s adaptation, Polly X becomes a central figure, pursuing modern sculpture out of “the need in her / to make something matter” after the fall of Troy.<sup>30</sup> Whereas Hecuba—as in Euripides—spends much of her time bewailing her fate, Polly X is taken by soldiers to a dilapidated zoo, where they get her drunk and sexually assault her before delivering her for execution at Achilles’s tomb. The third major figure of the play is Lotte, who has no place at all in

Euripides's cosmology. A twenty-first-century London doll repair expert, she takes a vacation to the ruins of Troy only to find herself caught between time periods. While vacationing, Lotte meets Hecuba's daughter-in-law Andromache before being captured by Greek soldiers and brought (back in time) to the Trojan prison camp.

The play's postmodern narrative structure relies on a series of loops, apostrophes, and scenes taking place outside the main flow of the action. This temporal playfulness evokes the repetitive relations between an adaptation and an adapted text, including a sense of continual return, rebuilding, and re-understanding. Lotte, in planning her vacation to a modern Troy, reads a brochure that informs her that "the city has been razed and rebuilt nine times, each time resurrecting itself over the buried bones of its previous lives and deaths."<sup>31</sup> There is a kind of horrific inevitability to Troy (and to re-experiencing Euripides's *Trojan Women* via Evans's *Trojan Barbie*)—the city that is utterly destroyed and its inhabitants scattered to live as slaves of their conquerors. Even Mica, the official spokesperson for the occupying Hellenic army, acknowledges, "Somehow you always end up in Troy."<sup>32</sup> This sense of inevitability inheres in the reenactment of the Trojan War and Euripides's play. The form of adaptation, as reenactment, lends itself to this sense of inevitable return. In her book *Performing Remains*, Rebecca Schneider argues for the meaning-making potential of reenactment, looking at how re-performing an event preserves and adds to the store of knowledge about that history. In an uncanny echo of the postmodern temporal layering in *Trojan Barbie*, Schneider describes the queasy action of reenactment: "Touching time against itself, by bringing time *again and again* out of joint into theatrical, even anamorphic, relief presents the real, the actual, the raw and the true as, precisely, the zigzagging, diagonal, and crookedly imprecise returns of time."<sup>33</sup> In other words, the performative repetition of history or historical events collapses the distance between the present and the past, exposing the limitations of linear teleology and opening up possibilities for new pasts as well as new presents and futures.

In her author's note, Evans emphasizes the importance of transitory staging to mirror the temporal flux of the play. She begins by pointing out that "the Trojan women's camp is a barren space that suggests both ancient and modern war zones" and that "since layers of time collapse into

one another in this play, it's best served by a flexible and evocative design, where discrete spaces can form and bleed into one another, rather than being 'realistically' rendered."<sup>34</sup> The production photos available on the American Repertory Theatre's website show that the original Cambridge run utilized the general viscera of modern refugee camps—corrugated tin, plastic tarp walls, rubble, and cinder blocks—to convey the collapse of time and space into one locale.<sup>35</sup> With multiple levels and performance areas divided off by piles of rubble, the stage provided distinct spaces for simultaneous action. Even actions divided by temporality or geography visually occurred against the same (semi-)temporary background of rubble, tin walls, and plastic sheets.

This space of continual exception is precisely how Evans reimagines the prison camp of Euripides's *Trojan Women*. Evans's women are, and understand themselves to be, in a space permanently outside the rule of law and the rights of citizenship. In scene 8, Clea and Esme, two of Hecuba's imprisoned retinue, underscore this liminal existence. Clea tells a version of Nasser's story: "This Iranian guy, he'd been living in Charles de Gaulle airport for fourteen years. Got his papers cleared to escape to Paris, but then they wouldn't grant him asylum. So he's allowed to land, see, but not to leave. Can't go forwards and he can't go back."<sup>36</sup> This narrative of the threshold that becomes a prison resonates with the women in the camp, who find themselves in the same kind of space. They are neither citizens of Troy (which has been destroyed) nor properly subjects of Greek city-states since they haven't been processed and dispersed to their new positions as slaves. Agamben writes, "In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order."<sup>37</sup> In the camp, which can take the form of Charles de Gaulle airport as well as more traditional detention camps, we see the detachment of the refugee, extraordinary prisoner, or detainee from both order and identity. This detachment is physically represented on Evans's stage through a set consisting of ostensibly temporary shelters—the metal, plastic, and concrete viscera emblematic of refugee camps—that now become increasingly identifiable as permanent dwellings (e.g., in occupied Palestine or in Soweto) as the camp expands to become the norm throughout contemporary culture.

The *nomos* of the camp is not limited to the geographic space of the enclosure itself; it does not end at the fence, but rather the state of exception extends throughout the modern world. We learn from Agamben that “the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation. This is why the camp is the very paradigm of political space at the point at which politics becomes biopolitics and *homo sacer* is virtually confused with the citizen.”<sup>38</sup> The women in Evans’s prisoner of war camp recognize the expansion of the state of exception from the limits of the fence to the entirety of modern life, including their own bodies. They identify their situation as the nature of life under a biopolitical regime:

*Esme*: ...it’s like someone tore up a map  
and that map was my body.

*Clea*: There’s a country without borders  
growing like an oil spill.  
A space where you can’t live—

*Esme*: —but you can’t, strictly speaking, die.

*Clea and Esme*: That’s our new home.

Charles de Gaulle airport all over the world.

*Clea*: We don’t belong anywhere.

*Esme*: Not since our city burned.<sup>39</sup>

In part biopolitics extends throughout modern life because the state of exception is tied to the politico-cultural power of global capitalism, which reduces subjects from citizens endowed with rights and protections to commodities/capital within a system of exploitation. In *Trojan Barbie*, economic (neo)colonial ambitions play a subtle role in Greek policy vis-à-vis the captured city of Troy. The official spokesperson for the occupation, Mica, parodies language used by military officials, dignitaries, and corporate contractors in explaining plans to reconstruct the economies of areas wracked by war or natural disaster: “What is the strategic plan for Troy?—You may well ask. To think of ‘Troy’ as a failed state, mired in civil war and ancient hatreds, is to take an unnecessarily negative view. We must look to the future. We must imagine Troy rebuilding itself over the bones and rubble of the past! Pulling itself up by the crutches. I mean, by the bootstraps.”<sup>40</sup> This rhetoric—“failed state,” “mired in civil war,” and so on—should sound familiar from discussions of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century attempts to rebuild national economies in the

Middle East, Africa, Latin America, or elsewhere in the global south on a liberal capitalist model. And, just as in real-world political discourse, Mica's repetition of these buzz terms serves a purpose exactly opposite to transcending their negative connotations, reinforcing images of Troy (read, Iraq) as a failed state unable to get past ancient grievances and enter the ostensibly benevolent world of modern corporate capitalism.

However, Evans's play is not entirely pessimistic, as she locates possibilities for resistance in Polly X's protest statue. The play's closing image is the culmination of Polly X's attempt to both come to terms with and resist life in the camp through aesthetics. After seeing a display of Modernist sculpture, Polly X decides to construct an art of the camp, built from the debris of the Trojan detention center, which consists mostly of broken Barbies and beer bottle caps. She envisions a project she will title "Trojan Barbie," consisting of a giant pink cardboard heart covered in bits of broken dolls. Polly X envisions this artwork as a catalyst for resistance against the Greek occupation, imagining that she and her sister will lead an uprising after the statue is constructed. As she says, "when it's done, me and Cassandra will rain down revenge on our enemies! We will smash them like dolls!"<sup>41</sup> Tying aesthetics/performance to resistance is common among refugee or detained populations. Wickstrom studies how Palestinians imprisoned in camps by the Israeli government use theatre to protest and reappropriate space, movement, freedom, and equality. She writes that through resistance to their forced existence in the camps, Palestinians join "an army indexed to the possible, in a new present in which equality (which carries liberation and return) *is*."<sup>42</sup> In other words, through the aesthetics of theatre—particularly the children's theatre on which Wickstrom focuses—Palestinians perform a space of equality, liberation, and national return, and these performances begin to reshape the terrain of the sensible. Palestinians (or Trojans or Owus) begin to enact their liberation by performing it. Polly X's modern art is the artwork of her people's destruction and through the creation of the statue Polly X immortalizes the loss, allowing the Trojans to live on through the aesthetic.

We should not ignore the symbolic dimension of Polly X's choice of medium. Decorating the cardboard heart with broken Barbies continues the identification throughout the play between dolls and the bodies of

the Trojan dead. On one level Polly X's art consists of corpses created by militaristic imperialism recontextualized as a protest against the occupation. Unfortunately, to be true to this refugee art, Polly X must herself become part of the sculpture, part of the artwork of destruction. In the powerful final scene of *Trojan Barbie*, Polly X stands framed by the heart covered in broken dolls, and, in a stylized ritual, two soldiers pull a red ribbon tight around her neck, symbolizing the princess's throat being sacrificially cut. Polly X's corpse remains framed by the heart, her own being the final body needed to complete the masterpiece. This statue raises multilayered questions about corporeality as medium (most of which are beyond the scope of this essay). By putting her own body into the Trojan Barbie statue, Polly X incorporates herself visually and performatively into the aesthetic realm, identifying her body as one among the other Trojan dead. However, we may also read this in the opposite direction: when Polly X becomes a part of the Trojan Barbie statue alongside the broken dolls/Trojan dead, she performatively elevates the dolls to the level of living human actors. The performance complicates the actor-doll dichotomy: the actor playing Polly X identifies her performing body as commodity alongside the bodies of the dolls in the statue, while at the same time asserting the dolls' status as performers. As Constance Gorfinkle notes in her review, "dolls, in different stages of [sic] broken, cracked and twisted, lie around the rehearsal studio, because, although a very human cast of 12 performs 'Trojan Barbie,' the dolls are cast members, too."<sup>43</sup> Polly X's ritual execution—a dual-purposed ritual, as she is sacrificed by the Greeks to Achilles and by herself to her art—marks a liminal movement from one state to another.

Liminality or hybridity helps the Owus perform resistance in Osofisan's play as well. The playwright interlaces the Attic framework with Yoruba songs, dances, and sayings. Budelmann points out, "As in fifth century BCE Athens, the chorus here is not an embarrassing interruption of a good plot, but central to the play and, as in Athens, participation in the chorus is conceived as a social act."<sup>44</sup> In other words, choral performance in *Women of Owu* enacts the collective impulses of both Athenian and West African societies. Further, cultural hybridity opens up possibilities for cosmopolitan empathy and challenges neoliberalism's destructive regime of dispossession. This kind of cosmopolitanism characterizes



Osofisan's work. He describes his dramaturgical style thus: "I have generally preferred an eclectic approach in the construction of my work, using whatever style or method I deem immediately apt, and dipping at will into the multiple matrix of a tradition inherited from western, Asian, and indigenous African sources."<sup>45</sup>

Osofisan presents artistic and cultural hybridity as means to resist capitalist and imperialist violence. The women of the camp use songs and dances to build communal unity in the face of the allies' destruction of their city. Erulu exhorts the women, "Ah, raise your dirges again, without trembling, even if / For the last time, women!... Start the song: / For those who survive, there's always another day."<sup>46</sup> The Chorus Leader makes a similar plea:

All we can  
Is counter misfortune with our spirit, and our will.  
So, let us dance my friends as we wait, as  
Our mothers taught us to do at such moments.  
Dance the Dance of the Days of Woe!<sup>47</sup>

In dancing as their mothers taught them, the women of Owu retain their identity and their heritage even as they wait to be divided as slaves among their conquerors. Throughout the play the women perform Yoruba dirges and dances to keep their spirits up and to remind their captors that although the city-state has fallen, the spirit of Owu lives on.<sup>48</sup>

The importance of performance as both identity marker and marker of liminality cannot be overstated here. The possibilities that theatre and drama offer for seeing the world anew can challenge the existing state of political economic exploitation under neoliberal capitalism. In *Performance Theory*, Richard Schechner identifies change as the essence of drama. He writes, "[Victor] Turner locates the essential drama in conflict and conflict resolution. I locate it in *transformation*—in how people use theater as a way to experiment with, act out, and ratify change."<sup>49</sup> He identifies this transformative potential at three different levels: (1) in the dramatic narrative, (2) in the performers who embody a character, and (3) in the audience. This change (which we might tentatively identify with Aristotle's *katharsis*) functions because it is performed by live bodies. Politically engaged theatre evoking hybridity between ancient

Greek tragedy and contemporary political issues (and, in Osofisan's case, with West African performance traditions) can engage audiences in transformative cosmopolitan consciousness, exemplifying cultural hybridity and promoting empathy in ways that may make viewers more resistant to the isolating and exploitative values of neoliberalism. Dan Rebellato argues that theatre encourages a Kantian form of cosmopolitanism, which is premised "on *absolute equality of consideration of every person in the world*: in making a moral judgment we invoke the global community of all persons."<sup>50</sup> In other words, cosmopolitanism is a fundamentally empathetic approach to ethical action, wherein the welfare of others and the impact our actions will have on those around us is key to decision making. According to Rebellato, theatre produces this kind of empathetic cosmopolitanism when we engage with characters, either as actors or as spectators. He writes, "Acting a character involves a level of imaginative engagement with another (fictional) person, a determination to occupy and understand that person's actions, whether that is psychologically or socially. Acting might itself be considered a valuable rehearsal for the ethical principle of universal equivalence between all people."<sup>51</sup> He claims, further, that audiences' sympathetic encounters with different kinds of characters on stage primes them for empathetic decision making in the world.

Euripides's *Trojan Women* is one of the greatest anti-war plays in theatre history, and it provides a strong foundation for contemporary dramatists condemning exploitation and dispossession under neoliberal capitalism. Both Femi Osofisan and Christine Evans make effective use of Euripides's play as a hypotext, drawing on the affective impact of the ancient dirge to performatively highlight ways in which suffering, loss, and exploitation remain as viscerally alive today as they were in the bad old days of the mythic past. This lesson is particularly important now, in the era of the Syrian refugee crisis displacing millions in the Middle East. Filippo Grandi, a UNHCR High Commissioner, has described the situation in Syria as "the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions."<sup>52</sup> In December 2013, a group of Syrian refugees in Lebanon performed a version of *The Trojan Women* entitled *Syria Trojan Women*.<sup>53</sup> The project combined theatre, political commentary, trauma therapy, and giving voice to the suffering

of female refugees. The performance identified contemporary Syrian refugees with the violence and displacement experienced by Hecuba and her retinue in Euripides's 415 BCE tragedy, but the project sought an expansive message, not merely to equate one group of refugees with the sufferings of the Trojans. As producer Charlotte Eagar put it, "the genius of 'Trojan Women' is you could literally put it on anywhere, with refugees, in any conflict zone from Syria to Somalia to refugee communities in the UK. And we hope that in the future the Trojan Women project will be able to expand to other conflict zones."<sup>54</sup> This notion that there is a fundamental continuity between refugee experiences, both historically and globally, opens space for cosmopolitan sympathies.

Viewing, acting, or reading these adaptations can open us to entire worlds of different and unique experiences—experiences inflected by common ideas, themes, and concerns. As Kwame Anthony Appiah writes in *Cosmopolitanism*, "Conversations across boundaries of identity—whether national, religious, or something else—begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own.... It's enough that it helps people get used to one another."<sup>55</sup> Performance, and the arts in general, create conversations that may build connections and common ground between different cultural and historical moments. And these felicitous encounters may promote the kind of empathetic response that forms a basis for resisting neoliberalism and the displacement of our fellow human beings in favor of a performative cultural commonwealth. When Nasser, Syrians, the Owus, and Polly X walk on stage alongside Hecuba and Euripides, theatre opens new horizons for such resistance.

West Virginia University

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Paul Berczeller, "The Man Who Lost His Past," *The Guardian*, September 6, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/sep/06/features.features11>.

<sup>2</sup> Maurya Wickstrom, *Performance in the Blockades of Neoliberalism: Thinking the Political Anew* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004). Hardt and Negri argue that with increased labor flexibility under neoliberal/

post-Fordist production, the poor and working classes increasingly figure as migrants—that is, people to be controlled and vilified, even as their labor props up the global economy. They write, “In the contemporary economy, however, and with the labor relations of post-Fordism, mobility increasingly defines the labor market as a whole, and all categories of labor are tending toward the condition of mobility and cultural mixture common to the migrant” (133). However, for Hardt and Negri, migrants open possibilities for a globalized democracy by challenging the authority of national boundaries: “Migrants demonstrate (and help construct) the general commonality of the multitude by crossing and thus partially undermining every geographical barrier” (134).

<sup>4</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). In promoting market capitalism as a political model, Friedman argues that “the kind of economic organization that provides economic freedom directly, namely, competitive capitalism, also promotes political freedom because it separates economic power from political power and in this way enables the one to offset the other” (9). Friedman’s goal, and that of neoliberal theorists more generally, is to diminish the power of government in favor of the power of free markets, which they conceptualize as a natural and independently functioning system of checks and balances. In practice, this ostensible uncoupling of economic and political power has meant the reduction of regulations on business and trade, which have allowed multinational corporations to expand both their economic and political power through globalized financial networks.

<sup>5</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Harvey writes that after 1982 “the IMF and the World Bank...became centres for the propagation and enforcement of ‘free market fundamentalism’ and neoliberal orthodoxy. In return for debt rescheduling, indebted countries were required to implement institutional reforms, such as cuts in welfare expenditures, more flexible labour market laws, and privatization” (29). These reforms have, almost across the globe, compromised the economies of developing nations and thrust more people into poverty while shifting wealth and resources from the global south to the financial centers of the global north.

<sup>6</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), 350.

<sup>7</sup> Simon Goldhill, “The Audience of Athenian Tragedy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 54, emphasis original.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Cartledge, “‘Deep Plays’: Theatre as Process in Greek Civic Life,” in Easterling, *Cambridge Companion*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001), 198.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 254–55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>12</sup> This is why Hardt and Negri oppose current, rigid ideas of copyright. They feel that shared culture can best be advanced through the open exchange, interplay, and development of ideas.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>14</sup> Obviously neither of these plays exclusively critiques neoliberalism, though I argue that both do. In addition, Evans’s and Osofisan’s plays deal with issues such as the oppression of women, colonialism, and violence/militarism, in ways beyond the immediate scope of this essay.

<sup>15</sup> Felix Budelmann, “Trojan Women in Yorubaland: Femi Osofisan’s *Women of Owu*,” in *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) describes some of the plot changes Osofisan makes in greater detail.

<sup>16</sup> Femi Osofisan, *Women of Owu* (Ibadan: University Press, 2006), vii.

<sup>17</sup> Budelmann, "Trojan Women in Yorubaland," 32.

<sup>18</sup> Osofisan, *Women of Owu*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–13.

<sup>21</sup> Klein argues that the stakes were, in fact, much larger than control of Iraq's massive oil fields. She says that the invasion provided a wedge with which to force open largely closed Middle Eastern economies: "not just the world's third-largest proven oil reserves but territory that was one of the last remaining holdouts from the drive to build a global market based on Friedman's vision of unfettered capitalism." Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 413. With so much wealth from petroleum in many Middle Eastern countries, Arab states historically had little need to turn to the IMF or the World Bank, which have, since the 1970s, held both the carrot and the stick of late capitalist globalization. In the strongly protected economies of the Middle East, neoliberal capitalism had difficulty taking root until 2003 when the US invasion imposed a disastrous new political economic system on Iraq.

<sup>22</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>24</sup> As Agamben puts it, "This line is now in motion and gradually moving into areas other than that of political life, areas in which the sovereign is entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert, and the priest." *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>25</sup> Wickstrom, *Performance in the Blockades*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 559.

<sup>27</sup> Osofisan, *Women of Owu*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Edozie Udeze, "Endless Agonies of Women of Owu," *The Nation* (Lagos State, Nigeria), October 26, 2014, <http://thenationonlineeng.net/endless-agonies-of-women-of-owu/>.

<sup>30</sup> Christine Evans, *Trojan Barbie* (New York: Samuel French, 2010), 54.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 16, emphasis original.

<sup>34</sup> Evans, *Trojan Barbie*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> American Repertory Theatre, "Trojan Barbie: Media," 2012, <http://americanrepertorytheater.org/events/show/trojan-barbie>.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, *Trojan Barbie*, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>39</sup> Evans, *Trojan Barbie*, 37.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Wickstrom, *Performance in the Blockades*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Constance Gorfinkle, "Theatre Preview," *The Patriot Ledger* (Quincy, MA), March 26, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>44</sup> Budelmann, "Trojan Women in Yorubaland," 21.

<sup>45</sup> Femi Osofisan, "Formal Strategy and Social Commentary in the Plays," in *Modern African Drama*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo (New York: Norton, 2002), 615.

<sup>46</sup> Osofisan, *Women of Owu*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Owu was conquered by a coalition of other West African city-states, which probably shared many cultural elements with Owu; but the conquest of Iraq by a coalition led by the US and UK posed a much more distinct threat to Iraqi culture. Osofisan protests this erosion of Iraq's cultural inheritance by locating sites of resistance in the arts and culture of a conquered people.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), 191, emphasis original.

<sup>50</sup> Dan Rebellato, *Theatre and Globalization* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 71, emphasis original.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Filippo Grandi, quoted in "Syria Emergency," UNHRC, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html>.

<sup>53</sup> The Syria Trojan Women Project later toured both under its original title, *Syria Trojan Women*, and under the title *Queens of Syria*, performing in Europe and the US from 2014 to 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Heather McRobie, Charlotte Eagar, and Georgina Paget, "Trojan Women in the Twenty First Century: Women in War From Euripides to Syria," *opendemocracy.net*, June 19, 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/heather-mcrobie-charlotte-eagar-georgina-paget/trojan-women-in-twenty-first-century-women-in-wa>.

<sup>55</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), 85.