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Antigone goes to school

Georgina Kakoudaki's production of the Sophoclean play (2014) for teenage audiences

ABSTRACT: Kakoudaki's production of Sophocles' *Antigone* (2014) for a teenage audience presents an interesting deviation from widespread scenic interpretations of the play. It advocates equality in life (not in death) and promotes civic awareness among young students of secondary education as the play was performed mainly at schools across Athens. I was invited to offer my scholarly opinion on the most important interpretative approaches of the play in (post)modernity, which led me to present two major trends: the depoliticization of Antigone in the works of Hegel and Lacan, and the opposite feminist discourse of the heroine's repoliticization by Irigaray, Butler, and Honig. The last two sections of the paper focus on the directorial approach which consisted in creating awareness of civic identity, and giving the students the right 'to their own opinion'. The paper concludes with an overview of the student's actual reactions when they were asked to side with one of the major characters of the play and present their arguments for their choice, thus substantiating the central pedagogical question of this production: "Do I have the right to my own opinion?"

Staging Sophocles' *Antigone* is a challenging enterprise; never more so than when aiming at teenage audiences (ages 13-18) and touring the production around secondary schools in Greece. Such is the production of *Antigone* by the 4Frontal theatrical company in collaboration with the Hellenic Theatre / Drama & Education Network directed by Georgina Kakoudaki. In 2014-16, more than 100 performances were put on in high schools across Athens, with an average of 60-80 students attending each performance. Adding some extra performances staged in the Theatre of Neos Kosmos in Athens over this period, a total of 800 to 1000 teenagers saw and commented on this production of *Antigone* participating actively in the pedagogical programs immediately following each performance. Given the

widely differentiated approaches this particular Sophoclean play has attracted over its long reception history, the director was faced with some particularly difficult decisions. What was going to be the pedagogical strategy and how would that manifest itself in performance? I was invited to help the director formulate and articulate an informed directorial approach by presenting and offering my scholarly opinion on the most important 'trends' in the interpretation of the play in (post)modernity. As I will show in the following pages, Kakoudaki's approach turned out to be focused on advocating equality among the living (not the dead), and promoting civic awareness. With the question 'Do I have the right to my own opinion?' teenage students across Athens contemplated on how to acquire civic awareness while debating their own position in the world in the turbulent times of their adolescent years.

ANTIGONE AS A PRODUCTION ADVOCATING EQUALITY IN LIFE NOT IN DEATH

Theorizing about Youth Theater is a burgeoning field of academic research on both sides of the Atlantic[1] acknowledging the pivotal role the practitioners can play in applied theatre praxis and in both raising and confronting the theorized critical questions[2] that academia sees as underlying the dramatic action. This is more relevant since much of the controversy the play engenders swirls around the issues of identity, representation, and power lying at the troubled core of any adolescence. How does Kakoudaki's staging of *Antigone* engage with these questions? The director decided to stage *Antigone* as part of what she calls 'the Trilogy of Reality' on the basis that "adolescents have the same concerns and anxieties as we, you and me; they just do not know that they will have them forever."[3] Preoccupation with these issues is not the sole "prerogative of the youth", but Kakoudaki ad-

1. For example, see: *Art Meets Research*: The International Symposium on Concepts, Contexts, and Methods of Research in Theatre for Young Audiences, April 22, 2013, University of Hildesheim, Germany. Also: Alrutz (2015a); Alrutz (2015b). For theatre for adolescent audiences in Greece see Kakoudaki (2013), (2014), (2015), (2016), and (2019).
2. Alrutz (2015a) 1-2; see also Alrutz (2015b) *passim*.
3. Kakoudaki (2013) 153; Kakoudaki (2014) 145; see also the director's note from the program of the performance, opening on the 16th of November 2014 at the Theatre of Neos Kosmos.

dresses them directly to teenage audiences. This 'Trilogy (in fact tetralogy) of Reality' consists of adapted texts from classical plays: "Aristophanes' *The Birds*: a rock performance for young adults" (2010); "Sophocles' *Antigone*: a right to my own opinion" (2014); "Aristophanes' *The Clouds*: the education I get, the education I need" (2017); and finally, "Euripides' *Helen*: the truth in lying" (2019).

I was happy to be invited as a specialist on ancient drama during the preparation of three of the above performances to convey my understanding of the plays and their multilayered approaches. Working on the Antigone project in particular, I decided to introduce both director and the company to a whole slew of interpretations arising from the disparate conceptualizations of Sophocles' *Antigone* in the critical literature over approximately the last two centuries of its reception; namely the Hegelian and Lacanian approaches, and the reformulation of their major questions by the feminist theorists of the late 20th century. The drama pivots around the Antigone — Creon conflict, which, in Hegel's influential interpretation, creates the polis *vs* oikos, male *vs* female, divine *vs* human laws antithesis.[4] Creon's initial argument lapses from politically correctness into tyrannical discourse, a decline paralleled by Antigone's brave resistance and appeal to universal love progressively degenerating into stubbornness and an eclectic view of the rights of the family dead to burial (just the brother and nobody else). These attitudes of the two protagonists can be seen as the "rationalization of their passions",[5] while in the Lacanian approach the 'irreplaceability' of the brother is set 'beyond the pleasure principle', that connects directly to death, but also leads to the heroization of Antigone propounding the sheer beauty of her choice of a Good.[6]

Kakoudaki's staging focuses on the youthful Antigone who debates her position in this world by siding with the human finitude and the equality of the dead. Youthful and passionate she may be, but she cannot match Creon's political rhetoric. In Kakoudaki's *Antigone* it is Ismene and Haimon who are burdened with articulating a politically sound logos and formulating a type of behavior that promotes *equality among the living.* They demand to be heard, the former opposing political power, the latter paternal authority. The intransigence of Creon makes him the true tragic hero of the

4. Paolucci (1962) 62-74; Karakantza (2023) 25-39, 109-12; for criticism on these 'fake' Hegelian dichotomies see Karakantza (2023) 27-8; 112-14.
5. Castoriadis (1995) 204-6.
6. Karakantza (2023) 114-17; and further down in the course of the present paper.

play in Kakoudaki's production, as exemplified in his last scene when he laments on his knees over the dead bodies of his son and wife. The holder of power is a broken man 'defeated', as it were, by the two young persons of the play. Ismene and Haimon hold firmly to their position dictated by love, understanding, and compassion until the very end. But above all, they have earned the right to their own opinion, which lies at the core of the process of transcending adolescence and becoming an adult in an equitable society. In this sense, Kakoudaki's production articulates a counter Hegelian, as well as counter Lacanian discourse.

How do you turn *Antigone* into a drama promoting equality among the living, that meets the basic needs of a teenage audience, according to the programmatic principles of the director stated above? *Antigone* is one of Sophocles' bloodiest tragedies with a body count of five, all victims related to each other by blood ties. At the outset of the drama two bodies of dead brothers, both warriors, lie on the ground of Thebes, one of whom is condemned to be left unburied. As the play unfolds Antigone dies, and in her lifeless embrace Haimon, her betrothed, kills himself. The play culminates with the suicide of Eurydice, who kills herself upon the news of the death of her son; the last scene of the play (the exodos) finds Creon, holding in his arms the lifeless body of his son, a living 'corpse' among the dead.

In the long reception history of *Antigone* during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely in philosophy, psychoanalysis, political and feminist thought, one can detect, among other issues, the question whether this is a drama that promotes life or death; this debate has yielded intriguing and (understandably) conflicting results. The main focus, of course, of the various interpretations is on the person of Antigone, and collaterally on that of Creon; one of the things making Kakoudaki's production so interesting is the deviation from this conventional focus, as we shall see.

HEGEL, LACAN, AND THE 'PRE-POLITICAL' ANTIGONE

In the pages that follow I will be mapping the important trends in the reception history of the play, starting with the highly influential Hegelian approach, that still dominates the interpretation of the play in Greek secondary education. It is also the dominant point of view in surprisingly diverse contemporary discourses about the play (from productions to works that raise political and gender issues) to such an extent that the Hegelian-driven approach has acquired the value of a 'common (and very popular)

assumption' about the play. To challenge Hegel's reading, so as to allow other multifaceted approaches to emerge, I initiated a 'return' to Sophocles' text when working with the 4Frontal theatrical company in a series of seminars preceding the actual production, where the director and the actors engaged in an intense dialogue articulated in response to a close reading of *Antigone*.

I will begin with the major lines of interpretation that result from Hegel's reading of the play in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)[7] that have persisted for more than two centuries now. The first postulate, which seems to rest on the long debate between Antigone and Creon in the second episode (*Ant.* 441-525), is that the divine law exists above and against the human law, in a stark distinction leading to mutual exclusion. In the decree that Creon pronounces before the entire city, the cruelty of the newly appointed political leader, who disregards the sacred law of the gods, the divine prohibition against leaving the dead unburied, and, ultimately, the family blood ties, which take precedence over political alliances, is clearly detectable. With Hegel a certain conflict between politics and ethics is introduced, and this conflict carries well into the twentieth century in the Lacanian reconfiguration of the conflict that is contextualized afresh in the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959), a fitting subject, of course, in the wake of the WWII.[8] "Sophocles", argues Leonard, "has acted out as a starting point for a discussion of a certain impasse between the ethical and the political."[9]

The second important postulate is that the familial order is served by the female representative of the *oikos*, Antigone, who represents the 'pre-rational' and identifies with the 'natural' in disjunction with the rational and the political. The gendered subject in Hegelian reading is pre-political (and even anti-political I would say), for she unconsciously represents the ethical dimension of the family "that remains latent within the moment of transition to citizen."[10] The female embodies an 'immediacy' with the ethical order, and consequently with the universal, and this is the special manner in which Hegel understands Antigone as gendered subject.[11]

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7. In chapter 5 Hegel explores issues of character, ethical action, and guilt partly by way of an analysis of Sophocles' *Antigone*: see Paolucci (1962) 62-74; Leonard (2005) 113 and n. 55; Karakantza (2023) 109.
8. Karakantza (2017) 26-7; Karakantza (2023) 114.
9. Leonard (2005) 100.
10. Leonard (2005) 99; Karakantza (2023) 110.
11. Leonard (2005) 140; Karakantza (2023) 111.

When it comes to ethical life, we see another interesting distinction separating again men and women: the family lays the 'natural' ground for ethical life, while the polis nurtures ethical life in its "social universality".[12] Within the confines of the family, divine or natural laws dictate the ethical life, with which women identify; at the other end of the spectrum, in the polis, men formulate and represent human laws. It is rather obvious now how these postulates are applicable to Antigone. Antigone's awareness of what is ethical is immediate and intuitive rather than the result of a conscious deliberation in the public realm of the polis. Antigone sides with 'what is right' with an instinctive recognition of the goodness which preserves the family — she never acquires a *consciousness* of it.[13] In Hegel's words:

> … the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real word.

The law of the Family connects its members not through love, but through the obligation to bury and remember the dead maintaining its continuity. Thus, we understand why Antigone decides to bury the brother evoking the divine laws as dictating it, despite the fact that this is an unreflective position rather than a conscious decision. In contrast, man, who embarks into the social life of the polis to realize himself, sides with the human law which is the result of conscious political deliberation.[14]

Thus, in the Hegelian reading there is a definite conflict between the *polis* and the *oikos*, citizenship and familial order, each instantiated by the two protagonists Creon and Antigone respectively. What they ultimately represent, consequently, is the disjunction between politics and ethics, which is at the core of a plethora of readings ever since Hegel, no matter how anti-Hegelian the claims of subsequent critics. Lacan, for example, in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* maintains the impasse stated above, but transfers it to the field of psychoanalysis where he acknowledges the gap between "an ethics and a politics of psychoanalysis".[15] For Lacan, of course, the renewed

12. Mills (1986) 132.
13. Hegel (1977 [1807]) 274, § 457; Karakantza (2023) 110.
14. See Karakantza (2023) especially chapter 7 titled: "De-politicizing Antigone: Hegel, Lacan, and beyond", 109-26. There is, also, a controversy regarding the famous distinction between the divine and the human laws which I explore in Karakantza (2023) 25-29.
15. Leonard (2005) 105. This gap becomes the focal point of Leonard's analysis of the Lacanian 'quasi-appropriation' of the Hegelian paradigm.

interest in politics and ethics resonates with the intellectual debates in post-war era aroused by the atrocities of Nazism. These profoundly shook the ethical edifice in Europe that had been built, layer by layer, and with apparent consistency, from the Renaissance, through the Enlightenment, German Idealism, and culminated with the rapid expansion of science, politics, and psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century. This 'optimism' was deplorably devastated by the two great wars and the spread of various forms of fascism and totalitarianism throughout Europe in the twentieth century, that demanded renegotiating the notion of 'human' and 'humanism'; in Lacan's words: "[…] we consider ourselves to be at the end of the vein of humanistic thought,"[16] thus introducing, so to speak, a "post-humanistic conception of the self."[17]

With Sophocles as his main interlocutor of posthumanism,[18] Lacan sees in Antigone's choice of a 'law', a direct connection with death; this law 'comes' from elsewhere, this 'elsewhere' being the realm of the dead.[19] Antigone of course is referring to the divine laws, which, however, are not actual laws, but rather a notion of legality, a certain legal order, and a place, where she feels unassailable.[20] This action, reintroducing death into life, seems in thrall to a self-destructive impulse. Latent in this Lacanian formulation is the Freudian death drive as explored in his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* describing the compulsion of all living matter to return to an inanimate state, that is to say, to return to the peace of the inorganic world, so as to secure the psychic apparatus free of excitation.[21] The Lacanian death drive of Antigone falls outside the symbolic — it is pre-symbolic, before the linguistic dimension of the symbolic order superimposes culture onto human development.[22]

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16. Lacan (1992) 336-7.
17. Leonard (2005) 102: "[…] Sophocles is an essential interlocutor in Lacan's formulation of a post-humanistic conception of the self."
18. See Karakantza (2017) 23-27 in the section of her paper titled: "Tracing posthumanism in contemporary criticism".
19. Karakantza (2023) 116.
20. Lacan (1992) 278; Butler (2000) 51-52; for criticism of the Lacanian 'certain legality', which is based on a gross misinterpretation of the relevant Sophoclean passage (*Antigone* 450-52) by Lacan see Karakantza (2023) 116-17.
21. Freud (2009 [1920]) 81; Karakantza (2017) 26.
22. The symbolic is for Lacan a language mediated order of culture, as was for Lévi-Strauss a kinship mediated order of culture. In explaining the interrelation between the "primordial Law" (the prohibition of incest that regulates marriage) with language, Lacan writes (2001) 73: "This law, then, is revealed clearly enough as identical with an order of

In this posthumanistic resonance of his words, Lacan reopens the rupture between politics and ethics but he transfers his focus to the heroization of Antigone registered in the realm of the absolute Good. He explores the controversial part of the drama where Antigone, minutes before she dies, declares that she would bury only her brother, but not a husband or a son (*Ant.* 905-12). In her choice Lacan sees the pure *beauty* in the attainment of the Good, which is "beyond all recognized goods, beyond the pleasure principle",[23] for, in the absolute 'individuality' of Polynices, that Antigone advocates for her brother, he "remains the same beyond any changing properties that characterize his person" (without the accretion of "his good or evil deeds)."[24] It is as if Polynices is a " 'pure' signifier prior to every positive law that judges our deeds: it is the Law of the Name which fixes our identity beyond the eternal flow of generation and corruption".[25] The linguistic dimension re-enters the discussion through the 'back door': Polynices becomes the <linguistic> signifier before the acquisition of any cultural trait that modifies it and makes it susceptible to our moralistic pronouncements.

Thus, Lacan, despite his claim of his "outright rejection of the Hegelian reading",[26] maintains the rupture between politics and ethics (which is supposedly detected in the Sophoclean text) and privileges, along with Hegel, the female agency that attains the sublime beauty of the choice of the Good. Of course, as in Hegel, she obtains this heroization from an extra-political stance; rather, she chooses the brother in an 'instinctive' manner as the pellucid simplicity of her final argument ("my brother is my brother")[27] shows. The gendered female agency in both cases (in Hegel, as well as in Lacan) connects with the pre-rational or (in Lacanian terms) before the Law of the Father.

Thus far, it has become obvious, I hope, that despite his differentiated approach Lacan elaborates on a Hegelian driven discourse, which is a

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language. For without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos that bind and weave the yarn of lineage through succeeding generations. And it is indeed the confusion of generations which, in the Bible as in all traditional laws, is accused as being the abomination of the Word (*verbe*) and the desolation of the sinner."

23. Miller (1998) 209; Lacan (1992) 13; Karakantza (2017) 27.
24. Žižek (2001) 91-2.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Leonard (2005) 11.
27. Žižek (2001) 91; see also Žižek (1989) 131; Žižek (2013) 307; Karakantza (2023) 117-18.

purely male discourse that, although attempting to privilege the female (because Sophocles does), in fact condemns her to act extra-politically, unconsciously and unable to articulate her motives, and thus forever dissociating her from the civic. It is as if Antigone does not know nor understand *why* she chooses to bury Polynices.

Contrary to these powerful readings, I, in contrast, claim that Antigone emerges in the Sophoclean text as a political subject and a 'strong evaluator' (to use Charles Taylor's terminology)[28] meaning that she calculates her actions, gives sound arguments about them (regardless whether we agree or not), and, finally, acts by fully exercising her intellectual capacities.[29] She is a political subject and an agent; of course, she is also a gendered subject, but not in the way Hegel and Lacan understand it. In order to refute the above readings, we will revisit the readings of Irigaray, Butler and Honig that reinstate Antigone with the agency, the political, and the consciousness that were 'stolen' from her during the two centuries of philosophical and psychoanalytic writings.

IRIGARAY, BUTLER, HONIG: RECLAIMING ANTIGONE FOR POLITICAL AGENCY AND THE CIVIC

The first critic who vigorously re-politicizes Antigone is the French philosopher Luce Irigaray. In her book *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution* (1994) she dedicates chapter 3 to "Civil rights and responsibilities for the two sexes".[30] In reconsidering this hot issue, she takes as her case in point Antigone, who — as the philosopher rightly observed — was deprived of her civil agency in popular interpretations (mythical, metaphorical, ahistorical) as well as by men of letters claiming intellectual and spiritual authority.[31] Antigone is a suicidal young virgin wanting to destroy civil order for the sake of a "familial and religious pathos", according to

28. Taylor (1985) 15-44; Taylor (1989) 332-7.
29. Karakantza (2011) 38-41. I examine this notion in the case of *Oedipus Tyrannus* as well, where similar issues are raised; this time about human agency vs divine intervention: Karakantza (2020) 46, 122, 133, 145, 147; also Karakantza (2023) 127-45.
30. Irigaray (1994) 67-87. The French original was a lecture delivered at *Unità* Festival in Florence on the 10th of September 1988.
31. According to her testimony (1994) 87 on a French television program called *Océaniques* aired on the 21st of September 1987 with Pierre Boutang and George Steiner. For Irigaray's criticism on the debate see Karakantza (2023) 129.

most popular views.[32] She is definitely attracted to death, and she is thought to be "a sort of young anarchist, on a first-name basis with the Lord, whose divine enthusiasm leads her to anticipate her own death rather than to assume her share of responsibility in the here and now, and thus also in the order of the polis".[33]

Irigaray's response to this apolitical Antigone is to offer her own political view: Antigone, the philosopher claims, "does not act out of love for death", but because "it is a civil and religious offence not to bury the bodies of the dead".[34] She makes a difference in the public realm and by doing so she "attests that the order of the polis and political responsibility cannot imply a conflictual polemic solely in one's own interest [...]. She says that the law has a substance and that this substance must be respected".[35] Although Irigaray is still entangled in her reading with the 'cosmic order' and the 'maternal ancestry', which echo traditional 'female' agency, she clearly sees Antigone acting in the political space motivated not by "subjective despair or decadent nihilism"[36] but by a clear vision of what is right on the civil sphere.[37]

Following in her footsteps, the renowned feminist critic Judith Butler further restores Antigone in the political space and gives her full agency for her actions; she even re-claims her back from the realm of the dead for she re-negotiates the notion of the 'human'. In her book *Antigone's Claim. Kinship Between Life and Death* the critic concludes: "if kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws."[38]

Starting with the last remark, this can occur in a family where all kinship terms are confused, as is the family of Oedipus. The catachresis of the political action, on the other hand, forcibly introduces into the public sphere the social groups that are recognized by the political community as 'less than human' (i.e. women, slaves, and other minorities in ancient and contemporary societies). This introduction is accomplished violently, by the medium

32. (1994) 68.
33. (1994) 67-68.
34. (1994) 69.
35. (1994) 70.
36. (1994) 69.
37. For a comprehensive account of Irigaray's political approach to Antigone see Karakantza (2023) 127-31.
38. Butler (2000) 82.

of death; death, however, is seen here not as a negation of life, but as delinquenting afresh the structures of kinship and their symbolic limitations. The action of Antigone renegotiates the notion of 'viability' (that is 'life') as she transgresses these structures; structures superimposed and empowered by the dominant political male culture. The Lacanian postulates cast in relief this male culture linking the Law of the Father with language and the introduction of the human into the symbolic. Antigone, for Lacan, stands forever on the threshold of the symbolic, condemned to inaugurating it but barred from admission into the (civic) culture proper, where laws and language reside.[39] But with Butler Antigone 'reclaims' and renegotiates the very notions of the Lacanian laws of kinship, (as a linguistic structure leading to the public domain of the symbolic) redefining its borders to allow other (unprivileged) societal groups to enter the public sphere of the political.[40] Antigone, in Butler's reading, renegotiates the human.

This is a sophisticated 'equality-in-life' interpretation of Antigone's relation to death. I should add one last piece in this puzzling widespread Sophoclean notion of death as seen in late criticism on *Antigone*. This piece is offered by Bonnie Honig in her book *Antigone, Interrupted*, where she advocates that the key to interpret the play is what she calls "an *agonistic humanism* whose politics of counter-sovereignty, conspiracy and solidarity" emphasize equality in life and not equality in death — the latter being increasingly the trend in feminist and critical theory.[41] Contrary to this trend that sees in Antigone's actions the "extra political universalism of grief",[42] Honig suggests that Antigone is "a *political actor* embroiled in burial kinship, and polis politics, one who plots, conspires, and maneuvers her way in and out of trouble on behalf of the *sovereign form* that she considers to be hers by right."[43] It is obvious that the critic empowers Antigone politically by even attributing to her a sovereignty discourse that counter argues that of Creon. In the wider perspective of a "new humanism", that marks the shift of the interest in criticism from Oedipus to Antigone, (that is a shift from self-knowing to lament and finitude), Honig claims that grievability "position(s) <humans> in a sentimental ontology of fragility" that actually

39. Butler (2000) 3. For a more detailed account of the Butlerian approach to Antigone see Karakantza (2023) 131-34.
40. See also Wohl (2005) 159: "[Antigone] exposes the limits and limitations of the masculine universal."
41. Honig (2013) 10. My emphasis.
42. *Ibid*.
43. Honig (2013) 20. My emphasis.

renegotiates the notion of the human condition, and "generates orientations to different equalities."[44] Thus, the critic repositions Antigone within the political sphere, and gives her full agency and a novel understanding of the politics of lamentation;[45] these politics side with human finitude and frailty.[46]

THE DRAMATURGY OF THE UNEXPECTED OR 'DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO MY OWN OPINION?'

In Kakoudaki's own words, Sophocles' *Antigone* dramatically asks and answers the following burning question: "how to become and how to act as an active citizen?";[47] and consequently, "do I have the right to my own opinion?".[48] This is where my long instruction on the various critical readings of the play can be seeing bearing fruit. Adopting the "orientations to different equalities," Kakoudaki's production challenges the Hegelian-driven approaches at various levels. Firstly, by highlighting the discourses (*logoi*) of other persons of the play that surround the renowned antithesis between Antigone and Creon, as becomes clear in various directorial / dramaturgical choices. Ismene dances frenziedly in a short musical intermezzo to the sound of contemporary (and loud) rnb music just before meeting her sister, as if she followed the exhortation to public dances in honor of the gods who bestowed the victory on the Thebans (in the last antistrophe of the parodos: *θεῶν δὲ ναοὺς χοροῖς / παννυχίοις πάντας ἐπέλθωμεν*, 152-53).

Ismene seems to be so absorbed in joy that Antigone needs to call her several times (recalling the famous first line of the prologue, 'my dear sister Ismene', *ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα*) in order to catch her attention. Her absorption in dancing, according to the director,[49] implies that she is aware of Creon's decree, but that she is desperate to find a realistic solution within the current political situation. In the same vein of illustrating the polyphony of causes and attitudes underlying the action, the director inserts a pre-prologos scene where we hear of the injustice done to Polynices

44. Honig (2013) 31.
45. 'The politics of lamentation' as a means to empower Antigone, as well as women in Antiquity in general, is thoroughly explored in the same-title chapter of my book on Antigone, (2023) 60-82.
46. Karakantza (2023) 135-36.
47. (2019) 559.
48. (2019) 560.
49. In an interview she gave to me on the 28th of October 2015.

by not yielding him the power he was entitled to (after Eteocles' term in power finished). Thus, even from the outset of the production the stark separative lines between the 'bad' and the 'good' are mitigated. Ismene decides against helping Antigone bury their brother, not because she does not question the political authority or because she is powerless and submissive, but because she is aware that she cannot change anything. Moreover, coming from an utterly hapless family, she and Antigone, as the only survivors, need to cling to life. The only foreseeable chance for the Oedipus family to continue to exist is to allow the matrimonial union of Antigone and Haimon to bear fruit; their children could be the lawful heirs to the throne. Ismene presents this argument to Creon, while Antigone, burdened with all this complicated relationship to kinship, as we have seen, seems utterly oblivious to her impeding marriage. In the entire play, she does not utter a single sympathetic word for Haimon. In this sense, in order to ascribe dignity to the dead (which is the sole focus of the heroine), Antigone shows cruelty to the living.

Haimon is the person, who actually undertakes the task to promote the 'equality among the living', in his effort to convince Creon in the third episode (*Ant.* 635-765). In Kakoudaki's production this is a powerful moment, which is turned into a study of generation gap between father and son. In the characteristic subversive Sophoclean manner, however, the wise and down to earth person proves to be the son and not the father. Doubly subversive is the directorial decision to have Haimon entering the scene in a rage against the father while in the Sophoclean text the son initiates the dialogue as a moderate interlocutor and only gradually does the tension build up. The rage of Haimon takes the form of a physical assault, as he pelts his father with pieces of clothing lying on the floor in the scene. I should make a note here that in this particular production each actor carried a little pile of diverse clothing that he/she used in order either to change into a different persona (five actors shared all the roles including the members of the chorus) or to instantiate a different dramatic moment. The clothes symbolize also the dead of the city, the strewn corpses in the aftermath of the war. At a more practical level, this versatile clothing is crucial in a low-budget production crafted with easily transportable props to tour the schools in Athens and be performed in extemporaneous venues.

To return to Haimon, as the debate between father and son reaches its culmination, Haimon gradually becomes preternaturally calm, or perhaps better, distances himself from an unyielding father. In several of the actual performances of the play the intransigence of Creon stirred people from the

teenage audience to exclaim "this is just like my father!"[50] Haimon yearns for 'better parents' feeling 'immured' in his family tradition of justice, to which, however, he cannot remain indifferent.[51] Haimon's dilemma seems to be: 'can you simply witness events without being complicit in responsibility of them? With the answer being 'no', in both the Sophoclean play and Kakoudaki's production, where this involvement represents one of the options leading to the awareness and construction of the idea of civic identity sitting at the core of the director's preoccupations, as exemplified in her paper "The 'Ephebe's Song'. Constructing Civic Identity and Active Citizenship in Adolescence Through Staging Greek Drama" (2016).

In Kakoudaki's production the violent end of the conflict between father and son prepares the ground for the next scene when Antigone, motionless and speechless amidst her discarded clothing, listens to Creon pronouncing the sentence of imprisonment. Slowly she begins to dress herself attaching long strips of patchwork cloth to her waist, burdening herself with a pastiche of a long and cumbersome quasi-wedding dress, which she maneuvers with difficulty throughout her lament and final address in the fourth episode (*Ant.* 801-928). It is as if the entire burden of her decision to bury her brother and of her impeding death is fixated on the dress that represents, and mocks, her wedding ritual.[52] It is also a powerful imagery of the cleansing the city from the corpses of war, thus becoming the *pharmakos* of the entire citizenry — an action utterly political.

The last 'movement' to promote '*equality among the living*' is instantiated by the figure of Creon who, after his meeting with the seer Teiresias, is presented as contrite as he tries to remedy the outcome of the implementation of his decisions. In haste he ordains the release of Antigone and the burial of Polynices — ironically in a reverse order (first Polynices, then Antigone) that only ensures the death of Antigone and his son. In the exodos of the play, the king on his knees laments over the body of Haimon (against the background of the bodies of Eurydice and Antigone). By entering the politics of lamentation, he gets in contact with his fragility and finitude in a new realization of his humane side hitherto unknown to him. Thus, through the medium of death Creon acknowledges the powerful demands of life to which he succumbs.

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50. A testimony from my communication with the director.
51. *Ibid.*
52. For the conflation of wedding and death rituals especially in *Antigone* see Rehm (1994) 59-71; Seaford (1987) 107-8; Seaford (1990) 76-80; Ormand (1999) 90-98; Goff (2004) 309; Patterson (2012) 385-86, 392.

STUDENTS' REACTIONS: I DO HAVE THE RIGHT TO MY OWN OPINION!

Following each performance at a school there was a 45-minute pedagogical program designed by Iro Potamousi, a trained pedagogue with a long presence in the Hellenic Theatre / Drama in Education Network that collaborates closely with the Hellenic Ministry of Education.

The central pedagogical question was about the personal choices one may have when facing a critical dilemma. From this question derived such questions as: Which of the protagonists (that is, Antigone, Ismene, Creon, or Haimon) do you identify with? Which one do you feel closer in thoughts and intentions to? Why? Can you put together a list of arguments exemplifying your favorite protagonist's position in the world of the adults? What are the consequences of your personal choices vis-à-vis people in power (teachers, parents, various persons of authority)? Do you have the right to your own opinion? What is the road to your personal emancipation vis-à-vis the world of the adults? And finally, in the process of constructing your (civic) identity which of the four is going to be your role-model? These questions invited students to reflect and express themselves.

What was debated earlier falls now nicely into place: *Antigone* turns out to be a 'disturbing' play because it is a play about civic awareness and constructing your personal identity. Students formed four groups gathered around one of the major characters of the play: Antigone, Ismene, Haimon, and Creon. Surprisingly, it was *not* Antigone who attracted the majority of the supporters; it was Creon and Ismene! In the interviews I conducted in the summer of 2020 (sadly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic all interviews were conducted online) I asked the actors and actresses to share their personal experience from the constructive 45-minute pedagogical sessions over the two-year period of the performances. Eleni Koutsioumpa (Antigone), Aristea Stafylaraki (Ismene), Apostolis Koutsianikoulis (Creon), and Stavros Giannouladis (Haimon), all share with me their valuable insights into the reactions of the students.

I will begin with Ismene, a persona which is normally or 'quietly' sidelined in most contemporary productions of the play. Directors very often feel 'uneasy' about this girl who, from the outset of the play, refuses to side with Antigone and supports her cause in words and acts which make her seem cowardly. In this particular production Ismene was strong and compassionate siding with reason and the continuation of life. The main reason

why the students sided with her (instead of Antigone) is that she seemed realistic and to be promoting equality in life, thus giving them a less 'heroic' but more 'pragmatic' model of living. Ismene seemed 'real' and her actions doable. Ismene attracted the second larger group of students on the basis of being 'down-to-earth' and 'smooth', but also firm in her opinions.

On the contrary, Antigone was too 'perfect' to be true. Attractive in her intransigence though she remained, she was not in a dilemma anymore; she had already made her decision before the outset of the play, as a student commented when asked —among other things— "How do you act when facing a dilemma?" To her, Antigone seemed to have already given the answer. True, her decision cost her life and made her too perfect to reach. And yet, as should be expected, Antigone attracted a number of students around her, who turned out to be the most active politically. They sided with her because of her heroism, and her disobedience to a harsh political leader, which makes her an apt candidate for the 'revolted' youth to identify with. There was also an astonishing incident with a student who found an opportunity to disclose his sexual orientation: he dared to 'come-out' thanks to Antigone's heroism. He declared it in words echoing those of Antigone: "this is my identity and I will defend it no matter what the cost may be". When one is facing the harsh dilemma of admitting an identity which falls outside the heteronormative reality, then Antigone can be a role model.

Haimon was as 'popular' as Ismene. At the beginning of the debate, he confronted his father with strength and anger which gradually subsided, leaving a 'reserved' and 'self-absorbed' young male adult to leave the stage with the firm decision to find and support Antigone. To this end, the famous choral song that follows, dedicated to the catastrophic power of love, is sung in turn by all members of the chorus building a 'background' for Haimon's action: he tried to reach out to Antigone, who was passing by as she was being led to her death. His effort to reach and hold her was prevented by Creon and a member of the chorus who physically blocked his way to her. The main reason why the students identified with him was love: they felt that Haimon embodied the power of love, as he stood up to his father to defend the woman he loved. Although the conflict with his father stirred up some reaction regarding familiar situations ('ah, this reminds me of the conflicts with *my own* father'), the kernel of sympathy for him derived from his unrestrained support of Antigone, which was based on love. Haimon showed it practically in the last scene of the play where his suicide in his lover's embrace was reported by the messenger. 'Love' is one of the main

'ingredients' theater is made of, and students acknowledged it as one of their abiding preoccupations in their adolescent years.

Lastly, Creon: my major surprise, as was for the actors' in the theatrical praxis. Why did he invariably attract the majority of the students around him? Apostolis Koutsianikoulis who played Creon gave me his testimony, as well as his own interpretation of this puzzling situation. To start with the students, he told me that they acknowledged that Creon represented the law and reason, without which a human society could not survive. The actor could not fail wondering: did this echo their teachers' or their parents' opinion? Did they internalize the many prohibitions still imposed on them? Being on the threshold of adulthood, the students were very much aware of the existence of people in power who dictated advice, rules and orders to them on various matters: from how to dress and behave (parents) to how to be a good student and succeed in life (teachers and parents). Was Creon a 'soft' model of what they had already been familiar with? Here comes the directorial touch: throughout the play, Creon was a calm and self-restrained person, supporting his cause with reasonable arguments. The last scene depicting Creon as a 'broken man' failing to 'undo' his misdoings perhaps gave rise to the feeling of empathy in the hearts of the youth. Creon failed as a political leader, he also failed as a family man: the corpses of his own family were lying around him (in this production the corpse of Antigone was also brought on stage). Too harsh a punishment for somebody who only tried to do his job!

To conclude: My own contribution to the production of *Antigone* offered the director and the actors an array of modern and postmodern interpretations of the play. I singled out the pre-political Antigone in the writings of Hegel and Lacan, still a mainstream interpretation in some readings/productions of the play. Feminist writings 'repaired' the unfairness of the pre-political reading by fully repoliticizing Antigone. Kakoudaki decided to focus on civic and equality-in-life elements of the play. The actors embodied and interpreted the directorial vision producing a play specially 'designed' for a teenage audience. The perennial question in critical writings on Sophocles' *Antigone* "who is right, who is wrong, and why?" is thus replaced in this production with the much more meaningful questions: "what is my position in this world?" and "do I have the right to my own opinion"? giving a positive answer to the latter to the delight of all persons involved.

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