Iphigenia in the Buffer Zone: A Site-Specific Performance of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in Nicosia, Cyprus

© Magdalena Zira, theatre director

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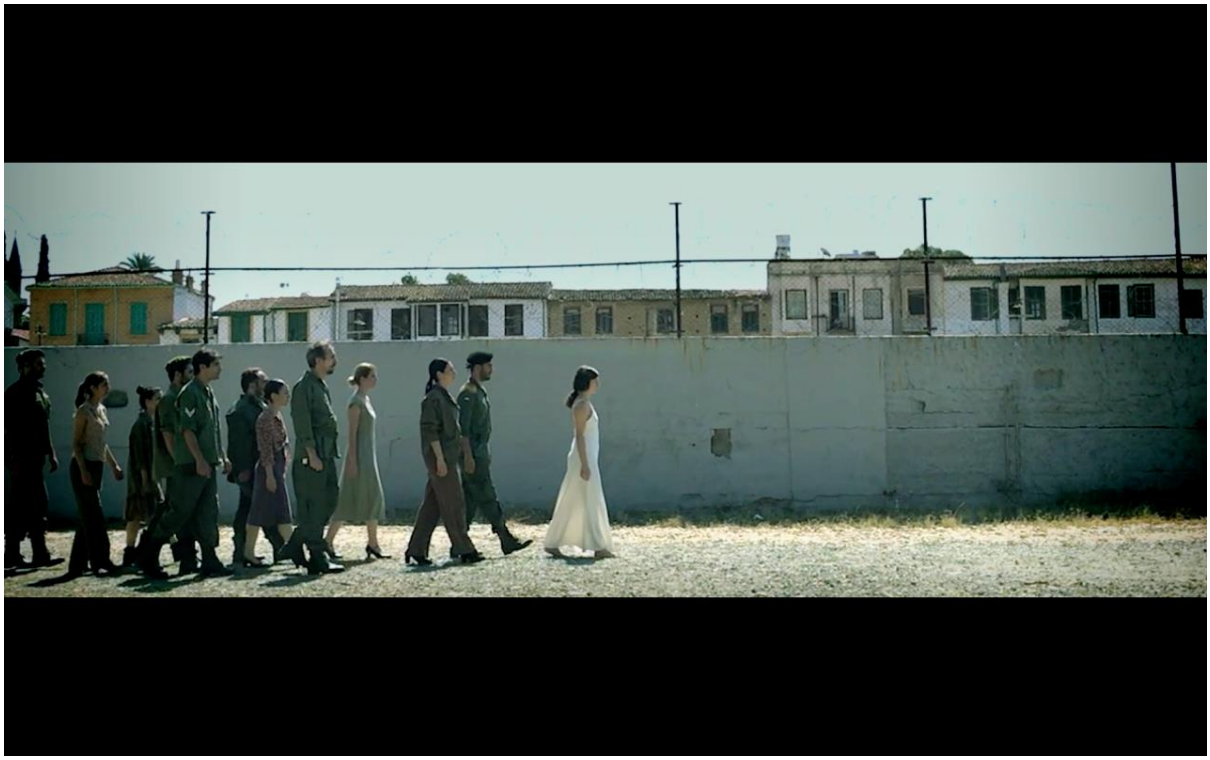
In the summer of 2017 a site-specific production of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* by theatre company Fantastico Theatro[1] took place in a politically and emotionally charged area: the buffer zone of Nicosia, capital of Cyprus, a city that has been divided since 1974. This paper has the unusual point of view of being an 'inside' account of the performance by the director. The location, an empty lot by the Greek Cypriot police station on Markou Drakou Avenue, was a point in the city where the UN-controlled buffer zone, or no-man's land, is so narrow that it is just a de facto border, marking the line of ceasefire between two opposing armies. This small stretch of land is technically on the Greek Cypriot side, by the wall and the barbed wire that marks the line of separation. Beyond the wall is a mote, part of the medieval fortifications of the old town, used as a football field by the Turkish Cypriot side. Thus, when facing the wall, which was the backdrop of the performance, and especially if there is tiered seating, we could easily see across to the Turkish Cypriot part of the city. The jurisdiction in the small area was rather vague. During the preparations for the performance the UN force claimed that the theatre company needed permission from them to hold the performance, but so did the Greek Cypriot police.

I will focus on key points in the interpretation of the play that were charged by the meta-narrative generated by the location, as well as on the critical responses to the performance that also help reveal its political significance. I will try to be objective, if possible, and urge the reader to see footage of the performance available online at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpBYUMIYnVY&t=30s

The play was performed in a new translation into Modern Greek by Chrysanthi Demetriou, Maria Gerolemou and Maria Pavlou, and was adapted and directed by the author of this paper, Magdalena Zira.[2] Set and costume design was by Elena Katsouri, original music by Antonis Antoniou, choreography by Fotis Nikolaou, lighting design by Karolina Spyrou and the production by Fantastico Theatro. Cast: Irene Andreou, Photis Apostolides, Niki Dragoumi, Stelios Kallistratis, Valentinos Kokkinos, Panayiota Papageorgiou, Andreas Papamichalopoulos, Andreas Tselepos. Chorus members: Varsia Adamou, Alexia Alexi, Maria Iakovidou, Chrysa Nikolaou, Andreas Louka, Tariel Beridze.



Fig,1 *Still from trailer* Iphigenia in Aulis *by Fantastico Theatro (Socrates Socratous)*

The area near the infamous Ledra Palas check point, where the performance took place, is an iconic location in Nicosia. Since the political problem in Cyprus remains unresolved, a web of thorny issues arise when the line of separation, the Green line as it is more commonly referred to, is put in the spotlight. Is it an open wound or just a tourist attraction? Is crossing the checkpoint just a formality or a continuing reminder of discord? For almost half a century it has been a permanent fixture of our city and the mere mention of the buffer zone brings to mind something that is arid, dead ('dead zone' is the Greek term for no-man's land), unchangeable, the edge. What lies beyond this edge is something that many try to forget while others will remember as long as they live. With each generation our relationship with this most defining feature of the capital evolves. It is a paradox that the area in which we staged the play, despite its dramatic setting, the impressive vista, the imposing white-washed wall with the barbed wire, the view across to a parallel universe, the ruins of old colonial buildings nearby, standing like ghosts, is simply used as a car park for those who want to go through the checkpoint to walk across the border.

But theatre has the ability to put things in focus or to show them in a new light. We knew that the meta-narrative this site would create could be controversial, so from the beginning we addressed this issue in our press releases, drawing a parallel between the mythical location of Aulis and the buffer zone of Nicosia:

> Aulis: a liminal place, a non-place, a place where time has stopped, where the waiting seems endless, where memory is constructed again and again, until memory and myth become inseparable. The fleet is trapped in a harbour. There are no favourable winds. Time passes. The army forgets why they are there. The ritual slaughter of an innocent girl is decreed. The leaders must choose: the war will take place only if they kill the girl. Otherwise, nothing will happen. The heroes of the Trojan war are presented as self-serving politicians. Euripides, in his bold version of the Iphigenia myth, creates an anti-war play and dares to undermine nationalistic narratives. The performance is inspired by the location. The place: Nicosia, near the buffer zone of the divided city.[3]

In this way we framed the performance with a reflection on the decades-long stalemate in the Cyprus problem, symbolised by the no-man's land, a place that runs across the capital and in which time has

stopped. The urgency of the production's historical context was further intensified by the fact that yet another round of peace talks was taking place in 2017. After gaining much momentum and international attention, the peace talks came to a dead end on July 7, 2017. So just two weeks before our opening, which was on the 23rd of July, we were once more reminded of the significance of the 'dead zone', as a symbol of an almost pervasive fatalistic attitude towards the political impasse.

The setting, the specific interpretation of the play and the adaptation of the text were thus inseparable. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to unpack the ideas that lead us to imagine Iphigenia in the Buffer Zone.

Fig. 2 Iphigenia in Aulis *by Fantastico Theatro. Preshow. (Socrates Socratous)*

THE LOCATION

The barbed wire has become a symbol of our city and many of us have never known what it is like without checkpoints and guard posts at the end of many streets. So, it was with a degree of apprehension that we decided to set a play that undermines patriotic narratives in the most emotionally charged and politically symbolic area of Nicosia.

The production brought the Cyprus problem into focus during a crucial time for national politics. This ignited its meaning for the present and heightened the audience's emotional response. At the same time, we discovered that the way the location's meta-narrative influenced the meaning of the text was different for each individual. This was to be expected, given that the performance was given during a time of great political and ideological division.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe key moments of the mise-en-scéne that exemplify this interpretation. I decided to focus mostly on the treatment of the chorus, since it is probably the element of the production showing the most pronounced divergence from the 'traditional' interpretation of this play. The most basic dramaturgical decision we made regarding this chorus was the realistic psychological interpretation for their function and dramatic character. It has been noted that the chorus doesn't necessarily follow the rules of psychological realism in theatre, and thus choral behaviour may

seem inconsistent from one ode to the next, what Goldhill calls 'the shifting voice'.[4] However, as a practitioner, I believe that within a story-line such as that of *IA*, focusing sharply on human relationships, human decisions, and human motivation, the trajectory of the choral collective in live performance is in fact most likely to be interpreted through the prism of human psychology by the contemporary audience, and thus we should attempt to find a logical through-line in their behaviour, with wider dramaturgical significance. [5]

THEMES

1. THE SACRIFICE

A basic question that we put to ourselves from the beginning was how to justify the human sacrifice of Iphigenia in a contemporary context. The play presents a very sophisticated society. Much has been written by classicists about the politicians in the play, their chauvinism, their ability to spin the truth in pursuit of personal gain and how, by reflecting the politics of late fifth-century Athens, they also resemble contemporary corrupt politicians.[6] Furthermore, the world of the play does not appear to be genuinely religious, since neither Artemis nor any religious figures, such as Calchas, the seer who ordered the sacrifice, ever appear on stage to legitimise this divine offering. Agamemnon and Menelaus even discuss the possibility that he is someone who makes false prophecies for personal gain (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 520-21). Therefore, we decided that extreme religious fanaticism, although an interesting area to explore in a contemporary retopicalisation, was not the answer here if we wanted to stay close to the original.

Our answer was to attempt to show that the murder of Iphigenia is an inevitable outcome in a contemporary society, maybe even in our own society, if we continue to accept small daily doses of brutality in the name of a vaguely defined 'common good', until we no longer have a moral compass, until we become desensitised to violence and brutality. Therefore, in our interpretation of the play, the political 'message' of *Iphigenia in Aulis* resembles that of a dystopian tale set in the near future, rather than being a tale rooted in the mythical past.

2. THE SHAPING OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Above all the thematic axis of the staging and adaptation was the exploration of the shaping of collective memory and the perception of historical truth. This has been for a while a key issue in postcolonial adaptations of the classics.[7] The underlying ideas are, firstly, that the powerful control over how history is written and, secondly, that dominant ideologies have used the classical canon as a propaganda machine. Therefore, contemporary revivals of the classics sometimes re-examine both the accepted version of history *and* the accepted interpretation of a classical text. It is often the case that when we peel off layers of reception that have affected the meaning of these texts, we reveal something much more subversive to the established order that we originally thought.[8]

In this political and anti-establishment interpretation, the version of truth that is proliferated served the dominant ideology but also covered up crimes and silenced those who tried to speak out. Thus we saw the play as a study on how a criminal act that serves political interests can be spin doctored into a tale of heroism that serves to ignite nationalistic sentiment necessary for a war.

Additions to the text from classical and modern works referring to the Iphigenia myth served to strengthen this theme. This process itself also reflected a recurring Euripidean theme: the call to questioning of established narratives, traditions, myths and versions of history. Thus, layers of reception of this story became part of the exploration of the theme of historical truth.

We engaged with this issue from the very beginning of the performance. Through the device of a narrator, we added as a prologue an excerpt from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, which gives a completely different, violent account of Iphigenia's death, one in which she is tied up, held by men over the altar like an animal, staring in panic at her executioners and muzzled so as not to put a curse on them (*Ag.* 228-245).

The theme of collective memory and how it relates to today's audience at that specific location was also expressed in the staging from the beginning. In a 25-minute long pre-show, as the audience entered the space, the actors, all in military gear, also entered one by one, slowly, to sit on chairs scattered in front of the wall and barbed wire, as if stuck forever in time, in a futile and never-ending state of waiting.

During that time Agamemnon wrote and re wrote his letter to Clytemnestra, a visual imprint of the textual motif of the rewriting of stories so strong in this play.[9] By the end of the preshow there were torn pieces of paper all over the playing area, as the narrator began telling the Aeschylean version of Iphigenia's fate.

3. FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY

This was also a performance about female subjectivity, which we discovered working on the female chorus and on Iphigenia's character and motivations. The cycle of violence against women starts in Aulis with Iphigenia and continues with the Trojan war: in the play there are numerous references to the inevitable suffering of the women of Troy as a result of this campaign, with language echoing Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*. Thus, gender conflict was another axis of the production, since the dramaturgy emphasised the story of women in a militarised world.

The chorus of *IA* is famously problematic, politically and socially, in terms of agency, relationship to the protagonists and point of view. I am convinced that the chorus is the key to solving the enigma of a revival, so we tried to make it a focal point of the production. Ultimately, in our production it was clear that the women's version of the truth clashed with that of the leaders and was suppressed.[10]

At the same time, the point of view of the women in the play clashes with the established and almost universally accepted contemporary interpretation of this well-known and well-loved text. Naturally, the theme of historic subjectivity has no place in established interpretations. Our goal was precisely to challenge those and also to challenge the taboo status of the classics in Greece and Cyprus, especially with regard to the issues of authenticity, ownership and national identity that always surface in discussions of contemporary revivals.

What do those terms mean exactly, for a great part of the audience?

> authenticity = there is an authentic way to do a tragedy, which implies that there is a way to emulate the style, aesthetics and techniques of the original ancient performance. This claim to authenticity is of course inseparable from the following claims:
> ownership = we own this material because we are Greek
> national identity = we are Greek because we still perform these plays in ancient theatres and because the ideals promoted through the plays are diachronically Greek

Recent scholarship has shown how the above notions have dominated the discourse surrounding Attic drama revivals in Greece and Cyprus for decades.[11]

Fig.3 Iphigenia in Aulis *by Fantastico Theatro. Parodos. (Socrates Socratous)*

CONTEMPORARY RECEPTION OF *IPHIGENIA IN AULIS* IN GREECE AND CYPRUS

More specifically, in contemporary Greece and Cyprus, where our revival took place, connotations of Christian and patriotic sacrifice have had a lasting impact on the reception of the Iphigenia myth. The play is part of the Greek and Greek Cypriot high school curriculum, presumably for its morally edifying content, as evidenced by this excerpt from its synopsis in current handbooks of the history of Ancient Greek literature, which emphasises Iphigenia's heroism for the common good:

> Iphigenia, who realises that the Greek campaign is not a personal matter but an issue of the common good, gives a heroic solution: she goes willingly and fearlessly to her death for the salvation of Greece.[12] (My translation)

The school-book interpretation, which is effectively the definitive interpretation for the majority of our audience members, is an example of a Greek play or a myth used as an instrument of civic ideology and propaganda—the same kind of tactic that is brought under scrutiny repeatedly in *the play itself*. Since the 1950s culturally influential revivals of the play, such as the National Theatre of Greece's 1957 production,[13] created connotations of patriotic duty and Christian martyrdom, at a time when conservative patriotism dominated the political sphere in modern Greece, and when Greek tragedy revivals were one of the establishment's main instruments of propaganda. More precisely, Greek national self-definition through tragedy, originating in cold-war politics, is the context that we need to bear in mind here: the government's plan in the 1940s was to establish the Epidaurus festival and at the same time to present tragedy as a Greek 'product' to the outside world, using it as a propaganda tool to support the idea of continuity with a classical past.[14] In this context, Iphigenia is seen as the ultimate heroine and her volte-face speech as a genuine patriotic message: hers is the message that unites the city states under a unified Greek identity.

Creating a dialectic with this patriotic reading, which has dominated the play's reception both in the theatre and in education for decades, was a primary goal for us. One way to achieve that was to make

it as clear as possible in the performance that the patriotic argument was hollow. At the same time, the aesthetic was itself a political stance: instead of the prevailing formalism that dominates Greek drama revivals in Greece and Cyprus, we put great emphasis on psychological motivation and on human behaviour. This heightened realism closed the distance between current political dilemmas and the so-called heroic past.

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHORUS IN *IPHIGENIA IN AULIS*

What is a female chorus doing in a military camp? This particular chorus is a big problem because they are not an integral part of the myth, have no affiliations and no agency. We were led to the conclusion that this chorus is there to highlight the fact that the main conflict in the play is a gender conflict and not a clash of national identities. One reviewer of the performance focused in particular on this interpretation of the chorus, noting that the marginal role of the chorus and its ineffectiveness is actually its main function in this drama: 'in a world in which men present their male ambition as a national campaign, women are out of place, pariahs, excluded. Even worse, they are pawns, currency and chattel in male transactions- expendable commodities, like sacrificial victims.'[15]

In the original text, the *parodos* is an example of the construction of memory in this play, perhaps one of the most striking.[16] Their description of the army constitutes a subverted *teichoscopia*, the viewing from the walls, a well-known narrative formula in Homeric epic, the most famous example of which is performed by Helen in the third book of the *Iliad* (*Il.*121-244). But since they have no bonds of kinship with these men, or any other socio-political affiliation, what exactly is their investment in the outcome of this campaign? And, more importantly, their closing lines seem to undermine most of what has been said:

> ἐνθάδ' οἷον εἰδόμαν
> νάιον πόρευμα,
> τὰ δὲ κατ' οἴκους κλύουσα συγκλήτου
> μνήμην σώζομαι στρατεύματος.
>
> (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 299-302)

> I saw here such a gathered fleet, about the rest I heard at home and thus I have saved a memory of the gathered army.

So the women did not actually see everything they describe as they enter the camp, but rather seem to have heard about it at home; or perhaps they saw what they had expected to see, having acquired preconceptions about it through tradition or through propaganda; the *teichoscopia* technique with its connotations of the heroic past and epic tradition may enhance the irony here. The central themes of the construction of memory and ideology are introduced here, along with implications about our ability to discern what is true and what is a lie, a myth, or just hearsay.[17]

In our performance the *parodos*, the entrance of the five-member female chorus, was framed with violence and fear. They appeared out of nowhere inside a militarised environment that inspired apprehension and uncertainty. A male chorus in military gear and black balaclavas was waiting for them, causing them to panic, and from that confrontation it became obvious that the women were brought here by force. Thus, their shifting role, unclear behaviour and conflicting responses were expressed by their status as prisoners and by frequent costume changes (for a chorus). These costume changes told the story of the chorus' development as dramatic characters in the plot, but also highlighted the descent of the play into a militarised, nationalistic dictatorship. This dramatic identity allowed us to follow a realistic characterisation for the chorus and to find logical answers for their involvement in the plot throughout the play. In the *parodos* they frantically changed into dresses and coats which they pulled from a bundle thrown to them and hastily shared a lipstick among them, under the watchful eyes of the male chorus. They then left the stage to re-enter for the first episode, to watch the debate between Menelaus and Agamemnon, staged like a military trial. They were now dressed in khakis, becoming part of the military theme. At the end of this episode Agamemnon ordered them to remain silent and not to reveal the conspiracy of the men to kill Iphigenia (*Il*. 541-542).

In keeping with the psychological characterisation of the chorus, in the first choral ode, instead of the original lyric about the dangers of sexual love, the women physically stopped each other from speaking, sometimes being violent towards each other: one of them had a fit while the others held her down. During this action a narrator told the story of the house of Atreus, emphasising the series of crimes that preceded the one about to happen. The ode finished with Iphigenia's and Clytemnestra's entrance, at which point the chorus, following Agamemnon's instructions, withheld the truth about the impending danger (*ll*. 590-97).

Commenting on this detail of the chorus' characterisation one reviewer writes: 'the most tragic, the most insidious characteristic of patriarchy is not the literal violence against women by men; it is the fact that women accept this violence, they internalise the hegemonic discourse as a divine (or other) order.'[18]

In the second choral ode the chorus voice a direct challenge to tradition, myth and the status quo.[19] After witnessing the protagonists' conspiracy to kill Iphigenia and the lies that Agamemnon has told his wife and daughter, their moral objections and disagreement not only with the sacrifice but with the war itself begin to take form and are clearly voiced in this ode. This is effected by another exploration of the themes of memory and of how history is told. Intertextuality again plays a big part here: in an almost meta-theatrical moment the chorus transcends time and place to evoke Euripides' *Trojan Women* 187-190 and *Hecuba* 923-932. While their solidarity with the Argive women in the plot (Clytemnestra, Iphigenia) has so far been doubtful, in this passage, through the use of language and imagery, they practically become the chorus of Trojan female prisoners, the women of Greece's enemy, as they imagine the sacking of Troy and the terrible fate of the non-combatant population. There are great linguistic and thematic similarities, such as the emphasis on the women's hair (*IA* 790, *Hec* 923), on being dragged away by soldiers (*IA* 791, *TW* 189) and on the repeated question of who (τίς) will be the Greek to lead the women into slavery. Thus, Agamemnon's and Menelaus' claim that this is a heroic campaign for the common good is deconstructed by 'bringing back' the memories of earlier Euripidean dramatisations of this campaign's, and this dramatic plot's, future, i.e. the suffering of innocents in a brutal war. This choral ode concludes with an explicit challenge of traditional collective knowledge that supports the civic ideology: in lines 794-800 the chorus wonder whether the myths they have been taught concerning Helen's parentage are true or fables (μῦθοι) transmitted down to them but modified over time:

> εἰ δὴ φάτις ἔτυμος ὡς
> ἔτυχεν, Λήδα ὄρνιθι πταμένῳ
> Διὸς ὅτ' ἠλλάχθη δέμας, εἴτ'
> ἐν δέλτοις Πιερίσιν
> μῦθοι τάδ' ἐς ἀνθρώπους
> ἤνεγκαν παρὰ καιρὸν ἄλλως.
>
> (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 794-800)

> If it is true, that Leda bore you to Zeus when he changed himself into a winged bird, or whether, in the writings of the poets these stories have come down to men changed and out of season.

For the second choral ode, we used montage to express the parallel between the women of this play and the women of Troy evoked in the original text. Clytemnestra and the baby Orestes in a pram remained on stage with the chorus and went into a *tableaux vivant* as the chorus leader seemed to have a premonition of the outcome of the war. Thus, the narration of violence to women following the sack of Troy became the voice-over narration of a tableaux of a tender moment of female domesticity: the chorus and Clytemnestra gathered over Orestes' cradle.

This choral passage transitioned into the beginning of the third episode by means of another costume change, during which we staged a moment of violence among the soldiers. The female experience of conflict was juxtaposed with the life of soldiers stuck indefinitely in a military camp. A soldier was bullied and tortured as the women had to undress on stage and change into their dresses from the *parodos*, female fragility being the backdrop for male violence.

The third stasimon in the original begins by juxtaposing Peleus' wedding and Iphigenia's horrific fate, thus presenting the human sacrifice as perverted nuptials.[20] In our production, at Clytemnestra's bidding, the women started preparing the scene for a wedding celebration, when the soldiers came in and in a drunken outburst tore everything up and sexually harassed the women.

The next crucial moment for the chorus came during the fourth episode when Agamemnon tries to convince Iphigenia that this sacrifice is her patriotic duty. A *tableaux vivant* puts the father-daughter relationship into relief, during which we inserted a stanza from third ode, about lawlessness, in justice and rebellion against the gods, and included it here as a comment, delivered by the chorus leader (ll. 1090-97).[21]

The lament (*kommos*), following the fourth episode, which in the original is a monody by Iphigenia, was again adapted with additions from contemporary texts and improvisations on the theme of marriage, further exploring the idea that in the play marriage and sacrifice are ritual twins. The imagery here enhanced the theme of violation of the female population's rights, hopes and desires in this play.

Arguably the most confusing and controversial choral passage is the paean sung by the chorus, as Iphigenia goes off stage to be sacrificed (1510-31). Following this line of characterisation and dramatic identity, punctuated as it was by violence and fear on the one hand and rebelliousness on the other, it seemed impossible for our production to incorporate these verses as a bona fide celebratory, militaristic hymn by these women.[22] Our solution here was interwoven with the decision to leave no doubts that Iphigenia's volte-face speech, a few moments before the paean, (ll. 1368 ff) was ironic.[23] Further developing the recurring themes of coercion, betrayal and propaganda, Iphigenia herself in a fit of rage forced the chorus women to repeat the most chauvinistic part of her speech: 'I give my body to Greece. Go and take Troy: they are slaves, we are free.' The women recited this as a chant until Iphigenia was dragged from her mother's embrace by soldiers. Her murder happened on stage, which cast the messenger speech at the end in a highly ironic light.

Critical Responses to the production

The discussion in the media following the production was especially revealing to us. In addition to theatre reviews there were several political pieces written about the performance. Some journalists and audience members saw it as a political comment on the inability of both sides of the conflict to move forward by shaking off nationalistic narratives that have cultivated hostility and mutual suspicion. Others saw it as a reminder of a continuing injustice against Cyprus and its people, who suffer due to decisions of a series of self-serving leaders.

Once the audience became part of the experience, it became clearer to us that this production was not just about how the truth about the past is contested, but also about our collective responsibility, as the people, in the proliferation of hegemonic narratives that warp the truth—our ability to turn a blind eye to violence and injustice within our own society.

Some reviewers focused on contemporary misinterpretations of the play, such as this piece by Dr Antonis Petrides:

> the history of interpretations that the play received by classicists and non-classicists is evidence of how at times hegemonic ideologies can hold hostage even the academic analysis of texts. In the history of academic misinterpretations, the misinterpretation of *Iphigenia in Aulis* stands out for the extent of its deviation from the obvious. For years the play was read as something entirely different from what it obviously is (or from what we contemporary classicists want to believe that it is): it was read as a patriotic tragedy and Iphigenia was seen as a model of a heroic woman, who sacrifices herself for Greece.[24]

Naturally the importance of the location dominated most reviews:

> a play in which ideologies go bankrupt, established narratives are deconstructed and people are dying of hunger and thirst caused by their leaders' obsession with their own private interests—a play in which personal ambition is presented as Patriotism and the war for Helen is presented as a War for Greece. Such a performance could not have been produced with such intensity except at the line of separation: the place where the tragic consequences of our own patriotic narrative, the results of the choices made by our own purveyors of patriotism are as obvious as a punch in the face.[25]

Political journalist Yiorgos Kakouris in his article focuses on the deconstruction of heroism that is part of the original text's content and on the mechanisms of myth creation such as prophecy or the notion of collective duty: he finds parallels with today in the the ideas of religion or nationality. He sees the location where the performance was given as 'the line of opposition between opposing armies, opposing versions of history and opposing myths. […] The story of Iphigenia is suited to the Green Line because it is about the transition from history to myth, from morality to political necessity […] And it was a performance that Cyprus needed at this stage in its history.'[26]

Political editor Andreas Paraschos, in a piece expressing disappointment in the collapse of the peace talks for the Cyprus problem, mentions this performance.[27] His pessimism about the situation in Cyprus is intensified by his observations about the political situation in many areas around the world, where millions of oppressed people dream of justice, but will never be granted it because of bigger geopolitical interests. 'Truth and justice are always elusive, like in the performance of *Iphigenia in Aulis* that we saw recently', he writes.

The subjective definition of historical truth is also picked up in this piece by Petrides:

> Hegemonic discourse always defines the "truth" (that is the dominant, dogmatic view of the situation, which is crowned by the halo of divine wisdom), always dictates the ideologies which in turn dictate policy. Hegemonic discourse always adds content even to collective memory. And yes, our own [collective] memory, our I Don't Forget, do not belong to us; they are implants of hegemonic discourse.[28]

Theatre critic Nona Moleski chose the title 'Our own Aulis' for her review and focused on the anti-war message and the symbolism of the location: 'it is here we have parked our own fleet and the favourable winds have forgotten all about us—the wall with the barbed wire stops every course and obliterates every hope.'

Theatre critic Argyro Toumazou finds the setting haunting, an allegory for our suffering in the hands of manipulative, ambitious leaders: 'The performance haunts us by projecting into our minds our own leaders and the sacrifices of the younger generations that were all in vain, all in the name of a so-called liberation campaign.'

The one very negative article was entitled 'Iphigenia among the villains' (Ιφιγένεια εν φαύλοις) and rather than being a theatre review, it focused on the political ramifications of the performance.[29] The author, a freelance writer on politics and society, denounced what he called the immorality and ignorance of the creative team. He was offended by the deconstruction of these heroic characters, especially of Iphigenia, whom he called 'an emblematic heroine, the first Greek woman.' The piece characterises the performance as corrupt and laments the destructive influence of 'European individualism' on our interpretation of the classics. It is villainy, he claims, to call this a theatrical performance of a play by Euripides. In other words, the deconstruction and denouncement of chauvinistic speech was seen as a betrayal of the original and of the author's intention. At the same time, and more importantly, it was seen as a betrayal of our national identity, because of the denouncement of a campaign for the 'freedom of Greece' and because of the ironic treatment of any nationalistic argument. Interestingly, having thought through the possible counter-argument that Euripides attacks nationalistic ideas in many of his plays, the writer of the piece claims that in *IA*

Euripides, nearing the end of his life, and having spent some years in exile, had changed his mind and his love for his homeland was rekindled.

This discourse is part of the cultural context explained above, in which Greek drama revivals in Greece and Cyprus have for decades been bound up with issues of national identity and national politics. The piece was proof that the historical, cultural and political context of this performance was still potentially explosive. In particular, the search for identity of the society in which the play was performed and whose orthodoxies it challenged, and the conflict between tradition and new sensibilities within this society, were the most prominent 'sensitive nerves' that the production touched. Without wishing to enter into the debate of what constitutes an adaptation and what a 'faithful' revival, we would claim that it was indeed a performance of a play by Euripides, inspired by his persistent challenging of accepted narratives and by his humanist message.

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Στέφος Αναστάστιος, Εμμανουήλ Στεργιούλης, Γεωργία Χαριτίδου. *Ιστορία της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής Γραμματείας, Α’, Β΄και Γ΄ Γυμνασίου.* Υπουργείο Εθνικής Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων, Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο, Οργανισμός Εκδόσεων Διδακτικών Βιβλίων, Αθήνα.

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[1] Fantastico Theatro, of which the author is the artistic director, is an independent company based in Cyprus and was founded in 2012. Our first production was Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, in a new translation by Vaios Liapis. Our work has a dual focus: we work on classical texts, whenever possible in new translations, adapted to respond to current socio-political and aesthetic concerns. At the same time, we are committed to developing and promoting new writing for the stage by local playwrights. We strongly believe in the activist role of the performing arts and that guides our repertory choices.

[2] The translation was faithful to the original. In order to achieve a contemporary aesthetic in terms of acting and characterization the episodia were in translated into prose, while the choral odes were slightly more lyrical.

[3] Excerpt from the press release for *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Fantastico Theatro.

[4] Goldhill (2007) 78.

[5] In this respect I agree with Hall that the audience during a performance, rather than taking into consideration complicated literary or other theories for the analysis of a particular play, is more likely to identify psychologically with actors on stage, through the process of substitution (Hall 2010: 17). See also Zira (2019: 196).

[6] See for example Hall (2005), Blume (2012), Siegel (1980), Sorum (1992).

[7] See for example Goff and Simpson (2007), Mee and Foley (2011).

[8] On nationalistic narratives in the contemporary reception of *IA* see Gerolemou and Zira (2017).

[9] See Gerolemou and Zira (2017).

[10] On the dramatic identity and dramaturgical function of the chorus of *Iphigenia in Aulis* see also Zira (2019: 189-201).

[11] See for example Ioannidou (2010), Lalioti (2002), Van Steen (2007).

[12] Αναστάστιος Στέφος, Εμμανουήλ Στεργιούλης, Γεωργία Χαριτίδου. (http://ebooks.edu.gr/modules/ebook/show.php/DSGYM-B120/550/3616,15462/)

[13] The production was presented at the 1958 international theatre festival Théâtre des Nations at the Sarah-Bernhardt theatre (now Théâtre de la Ville) in Paris.

[14] See for example Van Steen (2007: 155-57) and (2000: 51). On the formation of a discourse of Greek exceptionalism on the basis of a direct relationship with ancient texts and spaces see also Ioannidou (2010: 389-90).

[15] Petrides (2017).

[16] See Zira (2019: 196-97) for a more detailed analysis of the *parodos* and its possible historical and cultural context.

[17] For the mechanism of the construction of memory in this play see Gerolemou and Zira (2017).

[18] Petrides (2017).

[19] See Zira (2019: 197-98).

[20] On the ritual identification between marriage and sacrifice see for example Loraux (1991: 37-8) and Foley (1982).

[21] On the undermining of the divine element in the play see also Blume (2012: 186).

[22] There is debate on the authenticity of these lines. On the problem of authenticity of the final sequence of *IA* see for example Weiss (2014) and Kovacs (2003).

[23] Sorum (1992) characterises Iphigenia's reiteration of the patriotic narrative that justifies the sacrifice as a 'fantasy' (541). Siegel (1980) sees in *IA* a deconstruction of the idea of heroism and specifically in the volte face speech a youthful mind affected by overwhelming pressure (311). Blume (2012) views the volte face speech as 'chauvinistic' (183).

[24] Petrides (2017)

[25] Petrides (2017).

[26] Kakouris (2017).

[27] Paraschos (2017).

[28] Petrides (2017).

[29] Fereos (2017).