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## The Architecture of Memory: The Case of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*

### Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the function of memory in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* from the perspective of its original conception and also with regard to a contemporary staging. The first part of the paper draws on memory in connection to the prehistory of the Trojan War. Retelling the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Euripides discusses memory as a non stable entity, which is formed by the specific social frameworks in which it operates. At the same time, the dynamics of memory are explored in the play through the examination of medial processes, as the written and oral word, through which memories come into the public arena, thus becoming collective ones. The aim of this first part, therefore, is to provide a bridge between the social dynamics of memory and the impact of medial technologies in shaping information about the past. Euripides' dynamic understanding of memory, where individual and groups constantly reconfigure their relationship with their past, brings us to the second part of the paper. The story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia has a strong reception history, influenced by narratives of Christian martyrdom and contemporary nationalism. A new reading of the play for a contemporary revival will be discussed in order to re-examine this aspect of its reception, by foregrounding the themes of memory and historical amnesia.

KEYWORDS: Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, memory, mnemotechnics, gender, contemporary stage, fanaticism

### Prologue

This paper aims at exploring the interaction between individuals and groups in relation to the faculty of memory in Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Accordingly, we will raise questions based on the premise that memories emerge within social frameworks (Halbwachs 1950). Firstly, under what circumstances do characters incorporate or fail to incorporate information on past events into their belief systems? Are they influenced by past events? Do they recall these events through memory? In other words,

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how, why, and what do individuals, communities, and societies remember? Drawing on the history of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, which had an apparent impact on Greek culture, in his play Euripides pointed out that memories do not stand still, but act socially; past events are welcomed and criticized, as well as carried across generations and connected with other memories. A further question concerns the medial processes, in this case of oral and written word, through which past events are diffused, and how they affect important conceptions of memory. The development of the *ars memoriae* during the fifth century BC played an important role in the development of theories on memory;<sup>1</sup> at the same time, the trauma of the Peloponnesian war produced what may be termed an *ars obliviscendi*, a ‘forgetting’ prescribed by the *polis* of Athens.<sup>2</sup>

This last comment constitutes the starting point of the second section of this paper, which draws on how theatrical reception is determined by the spectator’s memory (Carlson 2001; Favorini 2008). Our interpretative stance views this play as anti-war and anti-nationalist, even though the cultural context of its reception in modern Greece has been shaped by ‘patriotic’ interpretations of the myth, both in the performative arts and in public education. We will therefore compare and contrast culturally influential instances of the play’s reception in the twentieth century with our own reading, focusing on the role of memory within this context. We are currently involved in a contemporary revival of the play, and the observations in the second part of the paper derive from our analysis of the role of the chorus, as we are faced with the challenges of staging it. Fantastico Teatro, a Cyprus-based theatre company, is about to mount a new revival of *IA* as this article goes to print. The performances are scheduled in July and September 2017.<sup>3</sup> Maria Gerolemou was involved as translator and dramaturg, and Magdalena Zira is adapting and directing the piece. The performance will be presented at a location near the UN buffer zone of the divided city of Nicosia.

<sup>1</sup> See Yates 1966, esp. 27-49; Minchin, 2001, 100-31; Bonifazi 2008.

<sup>2</sup> On remembering and forgetting, see, among others, Loraux (2002) who discusses the Athenian amnesty of 403 BC, granted after the victory of the democrats against the oligarchs; its aim was to prevent vengeful action provoked by the memory of past wrongdoing.

<sup>3</sup> Translation/dramaturgy: Maria Gerolemou, Chrysanthi Demetriou, Maria Pavlou. Adaptation/direction: Magdalena Zira. Set and costume design by Elena Katsouri. Music by Antonis Antoniou. Movement by Photis Nikolaou. The first performance is scheduled on 23 July 2017 in Nicosia, Cyprus.

## The Social Dynamics of Memory

The space of the theatre functions as a mechanism that recycles oral past stories.<sup>4</sup> In Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, these stories, especially the ones concerning the motives of the Greeks for sailing to Troy and take revenge on the Trojans, are interpreted by various individuals and groups on the basis of their experience. Hence, in the play memory can be seen as:

- a. personal and selective<sup>5</sup> (characters often choose from their memory-repertoire what is useful, and adjust it to their needs);
- b. collective (collective memory can be defined as socially constructed and based on the common values and sentiments of a certain group).<sup>6</sup>

Both types of memory seem to be organized on the basis of two mnemonic systems:

- 1) oral speech, i.e. rumor, which has an uncertain provenance;
- 2) written word, which produces memories that leave material traces.<sup>7</sup>

By discussing the concept of memory, both individual and collective and in both written and oral form, the play does not obey a linear, teleological conception of time, but oscillates between the past and the future (Luschnig 1982: 104). In doing so, it detaches memory from past discourses. For instance, in order to put the future into perspective, in *Iphigenia in Aulis* Clytemnestra discusses the past, revealing Agamemnon's terrible crimes – he killed her first husband and child – in order to justify her upcoming decision to take revenge on him (Shrimpton 1997: 49); although the play does not clearly refer to her plan to slain her husband upon his return from Troy, the audience will recall her murderous scheme from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.<sup>8</sup> Having a strong memory constitutes one of Clytemnestra's defining features both in the *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the *Agamemnon*. In the latter play, her incapacity to forget her daughter's sacrifice places her in the category of those who are always 'remindful of their misery' (μνησιπήμων, 180). This basically becomes her very motive to plot against and eventually

<sup>4</sup> Segal (1986: 77) defines tragedy as an oral performance controlled by a written text (see also 96). On poetry as monument, see Eur. *Alc.* 962-71, *Hipp.* 1428-30, *Ion* 1143-65, *HF* 673-5, *Supp.* 429-73; Segal 1997: 318-22.

<sup>5</sup> On the selectivity of memory in the play, see Luschnig 1982.

<sup>6</sup> On social memory in antiquity, see Price 2012.

<sup>7</sup> On inscribed (written sources) and incorporate (oral sources) memory, see Rowlands 1993; van Dyke and Alcock 2003.

<sup>8</sup> The future of infant Orestes as an avenger is also implied in the play (cf. e.g. l. 1450). References to the sacrifice of Iphigenia occur in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (especially *Ag.* 218-47), in Sophocles' *Electra* (563-76), and in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (23-7). Generally, on Euripides' interaction with the accepted version of the myth in his plots, see Zeitlin 1980; Sorum 1992; Foley 1985.

murder her spouse (Ag. 154-5, 180, 433-6); but on Clytemnestra and how she manages her memories, we will return later in the paper.

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Memories are filtered through each character's or group's personal ambitions and plans for the future, cognitive abilities (healthy cognitive function), gender, and age. Under these factors, both individual and collective memory prove to be a non-stable, inefficient entity in the play, as it does not help the characters to effectively communicate with each other. For example, even though one may think that he or she is retelling a widely known incident, this impression often proves to be misleading, as he or she can never be certain of how and how precisely the others remember the same episode. The different reasons given in the play for the outbreak of the Trojan war may prove a fit example of this dynamics. According to Agamemnon, the war originated from a pact between Helen's father, Tyndareus, and her suitors: Tyndareus deceitfully made Helen's suitors swear an oath that they would protect the chosen husband from any wrong in regard to his marriage. When Paris came to Sparta, Helen fell in love with him, and willingly decided to follow him to Troy (IA, 75-7);<sup>9</sup> Menelaus, mad for revenge, invoked the oath of Tyndareus by asking his wife's old suitors to help him regain her (77-83). Therefore Agamemnon, unwilling to accept the fact that Greek forces are ready to sail to Troy for Helen's sake, remembers how manipulative Tyndareus had been, and argues that he is taking part in the war only in support of his brother (84-6). On the contrary, the women of the chorus emphasize that Helen had a passive role, and claim that it was Aphrodite who made Paris seduce her (183-4); this version is in fact more in keeping with the official nationalistic discourse, in which the barbarians must be punished for raping and abducting Greek women (1264-75, 1376-82).

On his part, Menelaus' minimizes the import of Tyndareus' *dolos*, and offers other reasons for the war. First, he blames the Greek generals' political ambition, and later calls into cause the threat posed to Hellas by the barbarian Trojans (334-75). Agamemnon, however, in confronting his brother, refers to his unreasonable and excessive love for his wife as a further cause of the expedition. He claims that the Greeks had to sail to Troy because Menelaus could not protect his marriage (380-4). Agamemnon accuses Menelaus of being mad for wanting Helen back (389, 394, 407; cf. also 411), at which Menelaus responds by claiming that the true reason behind Agamemnon's change of heart – he had at first refused to sacrifice his daughter but now he is willing to carry on with it – lies in his desire to become the leader of the Greek expedition

<sup>9</sup> All references are taken from Diggle 1994. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Greek are ours.

to Ilium and not in his piety to obey Calchas' oracle,<sup>10</sup> who informed him that in order to appease Artemis, who was sending unfavourable winds, and allow his ships to set sail against Troy, he must sacrifice his eldest daughter.

In addition to personal experiences and ambitions, a particularly important element in recalling and processing an event is the possession of a healthy mind (φρήν), that allows a correct storage and retrieval of the information one comes across.<sup>11</sup> According to the *Dialexeis* (fr. 9.1-2), a rhetorical text which refers, among other things, to mnemotechnics,<sup>12</sup> memory is the product of a good mind:

μέγιστον δὲ καὶ κάλλιστον ἐξεύρημα εὔρηται μνάμα καὶ ἐς πάντα  
χρήσιμον, ἐς τὴν σοφίαν τε καὶ ἐς τὸν βίον. ἐὰν προσέχης τὸν νοῦν, διὰ  
τούτων παρελθοῦσα ἄ γνώμα μᾶλλον αἰσθησείται

[the greatest and fairest discovery has been found to be memory; it is useful for everything, for wisdom as well as for the conduct of life. This is the first step: if you focus your attention, your mind, making progress by this means, will perceive more. Trans. by Kent Sprague 2001: 292]

<sup>10</sup> According to Menelaus, Agamemnon's true nature and intentions are eventually revealed when his path to leadership is obstructed, beyond his control, by the unfavourable winds that prevent the expedition. The unexpected incident presents a steep challenge for Agamemnon's political conduct, which in the past had been pragmatic and premeditated. For example, when he had pursued leadership, he had initially pretended to be humble and approachable, in order to win the people's love and praise; once he had achieved his goal, he became distant and standoffish (337-42). But, as the play begins, in the midst of a standstill due to the wind, his firmness of purpose, i.e. to lead the expedition to Troy, appears to have been lost. Although he had initially consented to his daughter's sacrifice, he now changes his mind, apparently having considered the moral consequences of this action. Later in the tragedy, Agamemnon has again second thoughts about the sacrifice, this time because he fears Odysseus and Calchas (520, 522, 527, 528-37) will inform the Greek army of the seer's pronouncement. This would turn the army against his family. Thus, in order to justify further the decision to sacrifice his daughter, he adopts a rhetoric strategy that is in agreement with his brother's former patriotic discourse. Once again, without revealing his true motives, he rejects his wife's and daughter's pleas to stop the sacrifice by claiming that, although he loves Iphigenia, Hellas is now his ruler and Hellas must remain free, while the crimes of impudent foreigners who abducted the Greek wives must be punished (1269-75).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. further on the good quality of φρένες as prerequisite of memory, e.g. Od. 24.194-5, "how sane was the flawless Penelope, the daughter of Icarius, and how well she remembered Odysseus" (ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηλελοπειῆ κούρη Ἰκαρίου· ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος); see Bakker 2008: 73. Cf. also Aristoph. *Eccl.* 1162, where the chorus asks the audience not to be like courtesans, who can never remember anyone but their last lover.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. generally on mnemotechnics Yeats 1966, 1-49; Blum 1969: 49-50 on the *Dialexeis*.

In *IA*, Agamemnon describes Menelaus' desire to win back an unfaithful woman (386, 389, cf. also 401, 407), Tyndareus' oath (391), and the country's eagerness to wage war because of the same woman (411) as madness.<sup>13</sup> As far as Agamemnon is concerned, passion, both in terms of eros and bellicose desire, forces Menelaus, the suitors, and the people of Greece to remember only one aspect of the background of the Trojan war, namely the abduction of Helen by the barbarians. In fact, their willingness to go to war corresponds to pointless fanaticism which does not permit any development or changes, be they political or religious. According to Agamemnon, the passionate and blind love of Menelaus for his wife, which prevents him from forgetting her despite her infidelity, is the main cause of the expedition against Troy – which the king of Argos is nevertheless willing to pursue (378-411). While madness can, at times, force the persistence of memory, it can also erase memory completely. Let us consider the example of the mad Agaue, who is overwhelmed by *mania* and loses her consciousness as well as memory (*Ba.* 1263-95; see also *HF* 1111-45, 1410-11 and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* 878). She manages to come back to her senses and remember what happened on the Cithaeron by following her father Cadmus' instructions. First, Cadmus makes her aware of the natural environment by asking her to look at the sky (*Ba.* 1264-6); then he forces her to remember her marital and maternal role (1273-6), until she finally recognizes what she thought to be a the head of a lion, which she believes she has killed in her frenzy, as her son's (1279-4).<sup>14</sup>

Importantly, the perception of memory depends on gender too, as women in the *IA* (the chorus, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia) are generally prone to evoking emotional memories (e.g. Jocasta in Soph. *OT* 1246, Creusa in Eur. *Ion*, 250).<sup>15</sup> This becomes relevant with regard to the intensity of the emotions which are caused by an event and affect the way in which that same event is mentally recorded. That is, if an event sparks strong emotions, it will also have measurable effects on memory. For instance, Clytemnestra points to Helen as the cause of her misfortune (1168-70) and, like Menelaus, implies that the real reason behind the Greek expedition to Troy is Agamemnon's wish to become a general (1146-208). Her argument is supported by her recollection of Agamemnon's past crimes: he had killed her first husband, then forced her into marriage, and finally tore her infant child (from her first marriage) out of her arms and killed it (1148-52). Nevertheless – she

<sup>13</sup> Later on, in 1259-68, Agamemnon will refer again to the impassionate crazy wits of the army, arguing that if he does not proceed with the sacrifice of his daughter the army will destroy him and his family (see esp. 1264-6).

<sup>14</sup> On Agaue's recollection of her duties, see Favorini 2008: 16-7. See also Segal 1997: 97, 210. On failing to recognize relatives and friends when one is seized by *ἀθυμία*, see Thuc. 2.49.8.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Canli, Desmond, Zhao, Gabrieli, 2002; Nora 1989.



recalls –, despite Agamemnon's violence and duress towards her, she had made peace with him, and worked for the prosperity of his *oikos* as an exemplary wife would do (1157-65, 1202-3). However, the memory of his past crimes makes her generally suspicious towards the activities of her husband; therefore, she warns him that he should not proceed with the sacrifice of their daughter without proposing an alternative plan to the army, and she indirectly threatens him that he should fear for his life, if Iphigenia would suffer any harm (1180-4; cf. 1453-55; see also Synodinou 1985). Similarly, when Iphigenia begs for her life, she resorts to the evocation of past memories in order to persuade her father not to kill her; these memories include scenes where father and daughter are hugging and talking to each other, as well as making mutual promises of a happy future (1220-7). Thus, she wishes to inspire sympathy and affection, and urges him to look at her (βλέψον, 1238) and kiss her, i.e. to recognize her as his child, as part of his φίλοι, his family. Seemingly, Iphigenia's gender and young age are responsible for her narrow repertoire of memories, which includes family memories only. Unable to understand the importance of the expedition, she had previously wished that her father could stay with her and that Menelaus' weapons were destroyed (658); she does not even know where Troy is or where the Phrygians dwell, and naively asks her father (662). Later in the play, when she is informed of the decision of her father to sacrifice her for the benefit of Greece, since she does not know nor possess information that she could use as an argument against her father's decision, she vaguely refers to Helen and Paris. She names them as the culprits of her misery (1279-335) and narrates the story of the judgment of Paris, probably as she remembers it from the tradition. When she eventually expresses her wish to die gloriously by referring to the price that must be paid for the abduction of Helen, in order for the barbarians to stop ravishing the Greek women (1379-83, 1387-90; cf. 1265-6), she in fact merely repeats what her father and Menelaus had said earlier in the play (370-2, 1255-75; see also Rabinowitz 1993: 45-54). The fight against the barbarians, then, becomes the main reason and motive of the war, while Helen's adultery starts fading in the memory of the Greeks.

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Lack of experience and a limited repertoire of memories, as in the case of Iphigenia, could, however, be surpassed with cultivation and training. For instance, Agamemnon's letter to his wife, in which he tells her that he has changed his mind about the sacrifice and which he keeps rewriting, is carried by an old servant, a person of a lower intellectual capacity and with few chances of learning something beyond everyday knowledge either from eye-witnessing or reading. As a result, in order to recall memories of events to which he was not exposed, that is, to reconstruct past information which is not part of his

experience, the servant would need to resort to *verbatim* memorization (Thomas 1992: 153-4). More precisely, according to Rosenmeyer, “unlike Pylades [sc. in *Iphigenia in Tauris*], who can imagine, in the event of a shipwreck, delivering his message without the original script, the old man is very worried about getting the message right word-for-word (*IA* 115-16) and keeping the letter object with him as proof of authenticity” (2013: 55-6). Unskilled illiterates, who cannot remember clearly and accurately the written text they carry in case it gets lost and are unable improve their memory through training, are parodied by Aristophanes in *Nubes*. At ll. 478-80, Socrates asks Strepsiades to enlighten him about the ways of his intellect, for instance, if he has a good memory or if he has a natural gift for speaking, in order to see if parts of his mind need to be substituted or upgraded; being a prerequisite of wisdom (σοφία), memory (τὸ μνημονικόν) is the first that needs to be mended (414).

While memory based on extended external sources, such as writing, is a privilege of the few, conventional memories based on personal experience and rumour belong to the public; they are shared and conveyed by, the many (οἱ πολλοί), whose identity in the *IA* remains unknown (λέγουσιν, 662; cf. 430, 815). On the one hand, Agamemnon remembers Helen’s and Menelaus’ marriage, and her suitors’ oath to help Menelaus if someone entered her *oikos* and abducted her (49-114) as facts he personally witnessed. On the other, the rest of the story – of how Paris got to Sparta, of how Helen fell in love with him, deserted her husband and child and sailed with him to Troy – is given as a rumour by the Argives (72). Similarly, the chorus of the Chalcidean wives who approach the Greek camp have never seen the the famous heroes of the Greek army, and may just rely on what they have heard from their husbands (176-7). Their recollections are therefore constructed by miscellaneous oral information, as commonly happens with uneducated women (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 276-7, 483-4). More precisely, informed by their husbands about Helen’s fate, the women of the chorus left their homeland Chalcis in order to see the Greek heroes (θέλουσα ἰδέσθαι, “in eagerness to see”, 189-91), who are waiting at Aulis with their ships ready to sail to Troy in order to bring back Menelaus’ wife (171-3). Surprisingly enough, Euripides ‘allows’ the women of the chorus to leave their homes and travel without having a justified reason to do so, let us say for religious matters, and without being condemned for such an audacious action as is usually the case in Greek tragedy (Foley 1981; Geroleμου 2011: esp. 26-74).<sup>16</sup> No rule in Greek traditional society would have allowed their unaccompanied presence in a military camp. Indeed, Euripides could have presented the women from Chalcis travelling to the Artemision in order to perform rituals, but, instead, their explanation for being in Aulis is primarily that they wish to see

<sup>16</sup> Cf. e.g. Macaria in Eur. *Her.* 474-83, where the maiden needs to explain her presence outside the *oikos*.

the assembled young warriors and the extraordinary sight of the ships that will take them to Troy (171). From the very beginning, the women argue that they have come to Aulis to see with their own eyes the Greek heroes and thus enrich their existing knowledge regarding how they look like; this is emphasized through sight-related language (192, 209, 254, 299). But what they see and describe is in fact an idealized picture of the Greek heroes, merged with their own past knowledge, based on hearsay only. For instance, in their description of the army as a peacefully crowd, the desperation and rage for waiting in Aulis, which is extensively described in the play (801-18, 1264-7), is nowhere to be found. In contrast, their description alludes to a heroic-athletic painted scene, which common people were regularly exposed to, since such scenes were depicted on vases and on monuments in all the Greek cities (Zeitlin 1994: 162-64; Zeitlin 1995). According to the chorus, the two Ajaxes are sitting together, Protesilaus and Palamedes are playing dice, Diomedes is throwing the disc, while handsome Odysseus sits next to Meriones. They see Achilles running in his armour, trying to outpace a chariot driven by Eumelus. Furthermore, they are particularly struck by the vision of the wondrous Greek fleet (231-95). The sight they are describing appears to be tremendously influenced from what they already knew and, as a consequence, their descriptions have neither a critical function, nor do they count as supplementary material for the chorus to contribute to the construction of a memory of the Greek army and the corresponding events in Aulis. Their impression of the Greek army and fleet can be more easily perceived as an attestation of an already established memory regarding the Achaean heroes (Scodel 1997: 87-91, esp. 88ff.). At the end of the *parodos*, the chorus tell of the army they saw at Aulis and also recall what they have heard about it at home, reassuring everyone that whoever tries to attack them will be defeated (296-302). The manner in which they express their vision is indicative of the quality of knowledge on which it is actually based, that is, on rumour. The chorus, consisting of illiterate wives who cannot rely on written data or review the tradition referring to their documented, eye-witness experience and knowledge, arrange their narrative in the form of a list, a well-known customary method of oral poetry, which – as Minchin has justly foregrounded (2001: 79, 81, 88) – aims at circulating information that people have heard before and know well.

Contrariwise, memory mediated through the written word is not legitimized in the play as the most reliable source. The oral character of the information provided by the anonymous οἱ πολλοί (“the many”), notably through rumour, had less power and validity than memory built on personal experience or attested by the assumed reliability of a written tablet (cf. Thuc. 7.8; Price 2012: 18). This, however, does not occur in the case of eye-witness testimonies, as we have seen with the aforementioned example of the chorus; their eye-witness account of the Achaean heroes does

not have the power to overcome, correct or supplement the existing knowledge of past events which comes from rumour. Similarly, the written word, which needs to be memorized in order to be spread, does not always operate successfully with regard to the enrichment of memory.<sup>17</sup> In the play, the writing-tablet (δέλτος) and, in general terms, the written word itself, represents a medium for memory that is meant to improve physical memory (35, 98, 109, 112, 116, 155, 307, 322, 891, 894). However, both physical and artificial memory are reflective of the fact that in the play “choices are frequently not irrevocable; characters do have second thoughts” (Sorum 1992: 528). Hence, both written and oral word, as medial processes through which memories come into the public arena and become collective, are influenced by alterations and manipulations which depend on the recipients’ mood, that is, their emotional state at the time of retrieving past information (cf. Lewis and Critchley 2003). This is proven by the example of Agamemnon writing his letter over and over again, since he constantly changes his mind with regard to his daughter’s sacrifice; he is divided between his duty as a leader and as a father (1255-75, 396-8, 454-68).

In this respect, memory preserved in writing could contain, just like oral memory, an abundance of lies and uncertainties. At ll. 795-800, the chorus accuse the words of the poets, carried through the written tablets, of being idle and devoid of any true meaning. This non-acceptance of the written word as the best medium for safeguarding memory is set against Palamedes’ boasting of having invented the alphabet as a remedy for forgetfulness, and as a tool to prevent the circulation of untruthful stories (Eur. *Palam.* fr. 578 Kannicht; on the reliability of writing see also Aristoph. *Vesp.* 538). Finally, the materiality of memory inscribed in tablets constitutes a further problem, mainly due to the fact that the written word can be both violated and distorted. Menelaus, for instance, enters the scene and intercepts Agamemnon’s second letter to Clytemnestra that the old man carries on behalf of his master (307). Therefore, changes, modifications, or accidents which are likely to occur in oral transmission, are treated as similar to those which could occur to written documents. “Memorative truth”<sup>18</sup> is measured not by the accuracy of the story conveyed through the writing process, but by the way past information is being used in the present. A diachronic quality is attributed to events not because of the resistance of the material which preserves them, but because of their ability to adapt to the present reality of the characters and convey a feeling of communality across space and time.

<sup>17</sup> On *fama* (‘rumour’) as the “repository of cultural memory”, see Hardie 2012: 3, 8.

<sup>18</sup> This definition comes from Shrimpton 1997: 52.

## A Contemporary Revival

Euripides' re-telling of the Iphigenia myth is the basis of the above mentioned contemporary revival by Fantastico Teatro, which will be discussed in this section, with emphasis on its cultural context in particular. This revival takes into account the Greek-speaking audience's expectations, influenced by its contemporary reception and cultural implications, both in the performing arts and in education, and hopes to challenge those expectations. The starting point of this staging of the *IA* is the fact that – as we have noted above – the dramatization conflict on whether the sacrifice should take place is an opportunity to expose the real motivations behind the war and, therefore, reveal its moral invalidity. Focusing on the behaviour of the chorus, in the following paragraphs we will present the main ideological framework of this contemporary revival, foregrounding the theme of the construction of collective memory in service of a prevailing ideology. In the process, we will refer to aspects of the play's contemporary reception in Greek-speaking productions, which form an important part of the context of the Fantastico Teatro productions.

A renewed interest in this play, especially on the part of practitioners who want to stress its aspects of potential criticism of current politics and its anti-war message is in keeping with recent scholarship interpreting the play as an indictment of war and chauvinism.<sup>19</sup> In this hermeneutic context, which also takes into account the historical moment when the *IA* was originally produced,<sup>20</sup> Iphigenia's famous volte-face at lines 1368-401 is seen as highly ironic and chauvinist. In her words, the barbarians are considered as mere slaves, while the Greeks are civilized freemen; besides, the value of a woman's life is nothing compared to a man's, and Troy, of which she knew nothing before coming to Aulis (662), must be conquered at all costs. Furthermore, as Christina Sorum notes, "in the dramatic fiction nothing substantiates her argument – and nothing in the mythological future accords with her intentions" (1992: 54). On her part, Edith Hall has identified the argument for the validity of the war and Iphigenia's sacrifice as an example of spin-doctoring (2005: 21-2), a word that has entered contemporary politics

<sup>19</sup> For the play's performance history, see Hall 2005. On disagreements among scholars on the its meaning and message, see Sorum 1992 and Markantonatos 2012.

<sup>20</sup> On the anti-war message and the historical context, see Blume (2012), who argues that this drama foreshadows the author's accusation against the inept Athenian political leadership in view of the catastrophic developments in the Peloponnesian war. Sorum (1992: 541) defines Iphigenia's reiteration of the patriotic narrative that justifies the sacrifice as a "fantasy". Siegel (1980: 311) sees in the *IA* a deconstruction of the idea of heroism, and reads Iphigenia's eventual volte-face as the product of a youthful mind crushed by an overwhelming pressure. Blume (2012: 183) views her speech as "chauvinistic".

in recent years only, around the time of the second invasion of Iraq. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a ‘spin-doctor’ is “a person (such as a political aide) whose job involves trying to control the way something (such as an important event) is described to the public in order to influence what people think about it”.<sup>21</sup> In her patriotic speech, Iphigenia, unbeknownst to herself, puts the ultimate spin on the truth. Spin-doctoring shapes popular opinion through distortion of the truth, essentially through the manipulation of memory. Historical memory is erased and new collective memory is constructed, in keeping with the established ideology. As our analysis has shown, a favourite Euripidean theme, that is, the challenge to canonized tradition, is closely interwoven in this play with the theme of personal and collective memory. As we will discuss, going into rehearsals for our modern Greek language revival of the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, we have detected a parallelism between our own rejection of the twentieth-century didactic, nationalistic interpretation of the play in modern Greece and Cyprus, and Euripides’ reaction against the mainstream idea that a girl’s sacrifice and the ensuing war campaign are to be praised as examples of bravery and patriotism.

In contemporary Greece and Cyprus, connotations of patriotic sacrifice have had a lasting impact on the reception of the Iphigenia myth by the audience. The play is part of the Greek and Cypriot high school *curricula*,<sup>22</sup> presumably for its morally edifying content, as this excerpt from a synopsis of the play, taken from a high-school e-book of History of Ancient Greek Literature published by the Greek Ministry of Education may show:

Iphigenia, who realizes 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.<sup>23</sup>

This passage emphasizes Iphigenia’s heroism for the common good and this school-book interpretation, which has probably been highly influential in the play’s modern reception of the majority of Greek and Cypriot audience members, may be seen as a contemporary counterpart to Euripides’ δέλτος (a word which alludes to an instrument of civic ideology and propaganda that is repeatedly brought under scrutiny in the play). In the same vein, culturally influential revivals of the play, such as the National Theatre of Greece’s 1957 production directed by Costis Michaelides with Anna Synod-

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spin%20doctor> (last access 25 June 2017). Also, according to the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition, ‘spin doctor’, *n. Polit. colloq.* (orig. U.S.) is a political press agent or publicist employed to promote a favourable interpretation of events to journalists.

<sup>22</sup> For the play in high school *curricula*, see IEP Book Collection.

<sup>23</sup> See Στέφος.



inou in the title role, which also toured abroad,<sup>24</sup> had connotations of patriotic duty (Fig. 1). This happened at a time when conservative patriotism dominated the political sphere in modern Greece, and Greek tragedy revivals were exploited as one of the establishment's main instruments of propaganda.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 1 Anna Synodinou as Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 15 June 1957. Photo: Harissiadis, D.A. National Theatre of Greece Archive.<sup>26</sup>

In modern Greece, this performance became part of the national collective memory, which was further cultivated thanks to the circulation of images taken from it, such as this famous photograph of Anna Synodinou (see Fig. 1 above), frequently reproduced and by now an iconic element in the mosaic of Greek contemporary reception of the Iphigenia myth.<sup>27</sup> In this picture, the outstretched arms allude to Jesus on the cross, the light shining behind her head almost forms a halo, and her expression is one of bravery

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> For the connection between modern Greek conservative nationalism and the revivals of Greek drama in the twentieth century, see van Steen 2000; Ioannidou 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Copyright: National Theatre of Greece.

<sup>27</sup> The reviews of the time, both in Greece and abroad, focused on Synodinou's performance and on Iphigenia's heroism, bravery and patriotism. See, for example, Perseus 1958; Lemarchand 1958. Synodinou is widely considered one of the great twentieth-century Greek tragic actresses; she was the leading lady in the company of the National Theatre of Greece from the mid-Fifties to the mid-Sixties, and again from 1974 until at least the mid-Nineties. Roles such as Iphigenia (1957) and Antigone (1959) launched her illustrious career, and she later played all major tragic heroines, mostly at Epidaurus.

and nobility, even ecstasy, as she offers her body to Greece (*IA* 1397). She is not a victim brutalized by an oppressive regime, but a saint, a symbol of patriotic duty, who appears to be endowed with almost super-human powers that will grant victory to her fatherland.

Although it broke with contemporary patriotic and militaristic tradition, since it contained a clear anti-war message, Michael Cacoyannis' well-known 1977 film was nonetheless marketed in a way consistent with the 'patriotic' interpretation of the Iphigenia myth.<sup>28</sup> As the caption on the video cassette cover art anticipates with reference to Agamemnon, "To save the lives of thousands, he must sacrifice the most precious of all". Aesthetic choices, such as the costuming, e.g. the wreath on Iphigenia's head, which evoked Christ's crown of thorns and more broadly alluded to Christian martyrdom, influenced the audience's reception and cast Iphigenia's as a myth of fervently unselfish sacrifice.

The aim of the new revival by Fantastico Teatro, currently in rehearsal in Nicosia, is to challenge the patriotic discourse that dominated the play's reception for decades, as exemplified by the two influential versions we briefly mentioned above. In this, we have been inspired by Euripides' own response to the established myth. In the *IA*, the playwright refined and complicated the moral dimension of the story of Iphigenia, and consequently, of the Trojan campaign, by revealing the leaders' self-serving motivations. Relying on this original richness, we hope that our revival will match Avra Sidiropoulou's definition of a successful contemporary reading, that is, one that "heightens the correspondence between the tensions and imperatives of the Greek dramatists and the anxieties and needs of the modern spectator" (2014: 15). The identity and agency of the chorus is of key-importance in this reading. Accordingly, we will now turn to the analysis of their motives and thought processes, with special regard to their relationship to the assembled army and its leaders. This has both eased and inspired our directorial choices that have concentrated on the chorus' behaviour as part of a larger political crisis under way in *IA*. In this way, the chorus' on-stage action and presence becomes dramaturgically significant.

In terms of their dramatic identity, as well as of their involvement in the plot and relationship to the place and the characters, the young women of the chorus are, as discussed above, an enigma. At first glance, the dramatized events do not seem to affect them in any way; they do not just 'survive' the events, as is the case with many choruses, but rather it seems that they were not invested in the outcome of the tragedy, since their lives will not be affected by the sacrifice, nor the campaign against Troy. They have

<sup>28</sup> On Cacoyannis' film, see McDonald 1991; Gamel 2015. On its historical and political context, see especially Michelakis 2013: 143-4 and Bakogianni 2013.



neither blood ties, nor political affiliations with the protagonists, nor are they socially dependent on them. Agamemnon addresses the chorus as “foreign women” (ξέναι, 542) and, earlier on in the play, their being foreigners, at least to the Argive royal family, is pointed at as the reason for their emotional distance from what is happening. Indeed, even though they know about Agamemnon’s decision to sacrifice his daughter, they do not reveal his plans to Clytemnestra, nor to Iphigenia (604-6). It would then seem appropriate that they appear as increasingly marginalized; after their third *stasimon* (1036-97), and until the short choral passage at the end (1510-31), choral songs disappear, and choral interventions are reduced to a minimum.<sup>29</sup> Their opinions are often lukewarm and even inconsistent: for example, although they do not agree with the sacrifice, as the events reach their *climax* and Iphigenia is about to be led away, they sing a celebratory paean. Are we then to view them as an a-political chorus, similar to the chorus of the *Phoenissae* or *Ion*, who visit Delphi for reasons of religious *theoria*?

It has been noted that the chorus does not necessarily follow the rules of psychological realism and naturalistic engagement with the action, and thus choral behaviour may seem inconsistent from one ode to the following one, a phenomenon Simon Goldhill defined as “the shifting voice” (2007: 78). Nonetheless, within a story-line such as the one of the *IA*, which focuses 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 by the audience through the prism of human psychology. This is why, in our current revival, we should attempt to find a logical through-line in their behaviour which may provide some wider dramaturgical significance.<sup>30</sup>

In the first *stasimon* (543-89), sung after a vicious fight between Menelaus and Agamemnon that includes mutual accusations of bad leadership (350-76) and erotic weakness (382), the women reflect on the destructive power of lust and on the necessity of virtue, modesty and wisdom, in both men and women (see especially 558-72). This is not surprising, given

<sup>29</sup> The common belief that this marginalization is merely a phase of the general decline of the choral form and function, especially in late Euripidean tragedies, owes a lot to Aristotle’s remarks in *Poet.* 1456a25-31. For an argument against this generalization, see Foley 2003 and Weiss (2014: 120), who notes that “[c]horal song takes up 20 percent of the total number of lines of the *IA* (21 percent including recitative) and 24 percent of the *Bacchae*, but averages 13 percent for Euripides’ surviving earlier tragedies”.

<sup>30</sup> In this respect we agree with Hall (2005: 13-14), who pointed out that, during the performance, the audience, rather than taking into consideration complicated literary or other theories for the analysis of a particular play, are more likely to identify psychologically with actors on stage, through the process of substitution.

the shocking tone of the confrontation between the two leaders, who drag each other through the mud, raising serious doubts about their suitability as military leaders, not only in the eyes of the young Chalkidean wives, but also in the eyes of the audience. The women's initial jubilation in the *parodos* is therefore replaced by a fearful mood in the first *stasimon*. Yet the most striking change in their psychology is perhaps the shift from the sensual quality of the *parodos* to the rejection of *eros* altogether. If in the *parodos* they confess that "my cheeks blushed with girlish modesty at my eagerness to see the wall of shields and the tents of the iron-clad Danaid soldiers and the multitude of horses" (188-90),<sup>31</sup> and that the sight of the fleet fills them with "sweet delight", in the first *stasimon*, they begin by praising self-restraint in love (545) and then they beg Aphrodite, goddess of erotic passion, to stay away from their beds (555). It is in the second *stasimon*, however, that the chorus voice the most memorable and direct challenges to tradition, the established myth, and the *status quo*. Their inner conflict between what they have been taught and what they are witnessing becomes sharper, while their fundamental disagreement, not only with the impending sacrifice but also with the campaign itself, begins to take clearer form. This is effected by the exploration of the themes of how history is told, as well as of the theme of memory itself. At ll. 783-92, the women start realizing that the heroes they had admired and eroticized in the *parodos* are gearing up to commit terrible atrocities at Troy, even against women like themselves. These ten-line passage, in which they visualize the fate of the Trojan women, is much more than a passing comment, and contemporary *mises-en-scène* should take this opportunity to emphasize a remarkable moment in which the chorus transcends time and place and powerfully evokes two passages from Euripides' *Trojan Women* (187-90) and *Hecuba* (923-32). Even though the Chalkidean wives have so far carefully avoided to identify themselves with the fate of the Argive 'foreign women', in this ode they strongly identify with the chorus of the Trojan female prisoners. The three plays share great similarities in language and themes, such as the emphasis on the women's hair (*IA* 790, *Hec.* 923), on being dragged away by soldiers (*IA* 791, *Tro.* 189) and on the question of who (τίς) among the Greek warriors will lead them into slavery (*IA* 790, *Tro.* 189.) Consequently, the impact of the *IA*'s second *stasimon* on the contemporaries must have been significantly enhanced by the memory of the other two plays. Thus, the narrative of a heroic campaign put forth by the protagonists could be easily dismantled by 'bringing back' the memories of earlier dramatizations of the future developments of the same plot, i.e. the Trojan campaign's af-

<sup>31</sup> 'φοινίσσουσα παρῆδ' ἐμὴν αἰσχύνῃ νεοθαλεῖ, ἀσπίδος ἔρυμα καὶ κλισίας ὄπλοφόρους Δαναῶν θέλουσ' ἵππων τ' ὄχλον ιδέσθαι.'

termath. By transcending a linear conception of time, the chorus reveal the cracks in the established nationalist narrative: instead of a story of glory and self-sacrifice for the common good, theirs suddenly becomes a story of atrocities committed at war. According to some scholars, this play, by evoking the Trojan War, may have also (painfully) brought to mind the Peloponnesian war, especially since an Athenian defeat was by then a very concrete possibility (Blume 2012: 182). This choral ode concludes with an explicit challenge to traditional collective knowledge that is passed down through the generations in order to support the civic ideology: at ll. 794-800, the chorus wonder whether the myths they have been taught concerning Helen's parentage are true, as they may as well be fables (μῦθοι) "handed down to humans and changed over time" (τάδ' ἐξ ἀνθρώπους ἦνεγκαν παρὰ καιρὸν ἄλλως, 799-800). Euripides is here once more again questioning inherited wisdom, by raising cognitive issues. Knowledge, understanding, and the reliability of memory come under scrutiny and, at the same time, the theme of deception resurfaces through the use of the word δέλτος, the same word used in the prologue with regard to Agamemnon's first deceptive letter with which he lured his daughter into Aulis by telling her that Achilles was willing to marry her.

In the third *stasimon*, the deconstruction of mainstream ideology goes a step further by questioning religion itself, as well as man's relationship with divine authority. The ode begins by juxtaposing Peleus' wedding and Iphigenia's horrific fate, thus presenting the human sacrifice as a sort of perverted nuptials.<sup>32</sup> After the chorus has described the terrible event which is about to take place, the very relationship between gods and humans is brought into question (1090-7):<sup>33</sup> the following lines reveal how the young women are extremely pessimistic about finding justice in human law, but at the same time rebellious against the oppression of the gods:

Ἀνομία δὲ νόμων κρατεῖ,  
καὶ μὴ κοινὸς ἀγὼν βροτοῖς  
μὴ τις θεῶν φθόνος ἔλθη;  
(1095-7)

[Lawlessness is more powerful than the law. / And among mortals is there no common struggle / Against the malice of the gods?]

This poignant third *stasimon*, which undermines major pillars of ancient Athenian society, such as the justice system and religious faith, is followed by a long absence of choral lyric in the play. This may be considered as the

<sup>32</sup> On the ritual identification between marriage and sacrifice see, for example, Loreaux 1991: 37-8; Foley 1982.

<sup>33</sup> On the undermining of the divine element in the play, see also Blume 2012: 186.

result of a series of disillusionments and losses in terms of the chorus' allegiance and beliefs. Thus, the silencing of the female chorus seems to go hand in hand with the loss or undermining of collective memory of the reasons of the war, and with the collapse of the traditional bonds that connect society, such as faith in divine justice and in loyalty among humans.

It is indeed only 400 lines later that the chorus sing their final song (1510-31), which comes after a long choral silence and right after two lyric passages sung by Iphigenia.<sup>34</sup> These lines, whose authenticity has been contested, may provide further room for the exploration of the chorus' relationship with the female protagonists and the political situation as a whole. While at this point of the tragedy one would typically expect a lament, the chorus, at Iphigenia's bidding, sing a battle paean. As Naomi Weiss has argued, we have here a dynamic return of *choreia* after a long silence, rather than a final marginalization of these women (2014: x). If we agree with scholars who support this passage's authenticity, and especially with Weiss, who suggested that the monody and the choral passage are thematically, emotionally, and musically interconnected, and therefore belonged to the first performance, this chorus voice an unprecedented display of solidarity towards Iphigenia. This passage therefore marks a great change in the chorus' attitude; they initially did not show much sympathy for the female protagonists, while now the focus, interest, and emotional investment of their words have clearly shifted from the assembled army, to Iphigenia's character. Nonetheless, although in our directorial concept we have tried to find a moral and emotional justification for their behaviour and consistency in their motivation, this battle paean, which comes after the illustration of the horrors of the war in the previous odes, could still be problematic. In fact, it is possible that they merely wish to support Iphigenia and inspire her with courage, in order to lift her spirit and to ease her final exit, by vocally celebrating her bravery. They obey her bidding to sing a paean, instead of a lament, in order to give her a celebratory farewell, but this does not mean that they believe in the militaristic tone and patriotic content of her words as happened earlier in the play, when they had welcomed Clytemnestra and Iphigenia (599-607) to Aulis, thus displaying their ability to conceal important facts as well as their true emotions. In fact, in line 1403 their reaction to her final speech reveals how they deem the princess' sacrifice as morally unacceptable: "the goddess's whim is sick" (τὸ τῆς θεοῦ νοσεῖ). Yet, apart from their desire to comply with Iphigenia's wish, another possible interpretation of the paean is that it is the result of fear. After they have realized how violence dominates the play's final scenario,

<sup>34</sup> On the problem of authenticity of the final sequence of the *IA*, see, for example, Weiss 2014 and Kovacs 2003.

in which “lawlessness is more powerful than the law” (ἀνομία δὲ νόμων κρατεῖ, 1095), they pretend to endorse militarism and civic ideology. Fear or disillusionment have silenced their criticism, and their dynamism has been curbed too (cf. Scodel 1997: 89ff.). A third possibility would be Euripides’ will to illustrate how historical amnesia may guide the people’s actions and beliefs. By having the the chorus behave like this, the playwright may have wished to show us how quickly in the course of the play the people can accept that a criminal act, initially censured as morally dubious, may be eventually read as the ultimate symbol of patriotism. Rather than changing their behaviour, in the *exodos* the chorus resumes the superficiality, frivolity, and lack of memory they had displayed in the *parodos*. In any case, the women’s battle paeon, which transforms the horror of Iphigenia’s slaughter into the traditional, canonized narrative of necessity and bravery must be imbued with irony, which accomplishes and rounds off the the finale of what may be defined as an ‘anti-war play’:

ἴδεσθε τὰν Ἰλίου  
καὶ Φρυγῶν ἐλέπτολιν  
στείχουσαν, ἐπὶ κάρρα στέφη  
βαλουμένην χερνίβων τε παγᾶς,  
βωμόν γε δαίμονος θεᾶς  
ῥανίσιν αἱματορρῦτοισ  
χρανοῦσαν εὐφυῆ τε σώματος δέρην  
σφαγεῖσαν. εὐδροσοὶ παγαῖ  
πατρῶαι μένουσι χέρνιβές τέ σε  
στρατός τ’ Ἀχαιῶν θέλων  
Ἰλίου πόλιν μολεῖν.  
ἀλλὰ τὰν Διὸς κόραν  
κλήσωμεν Ἄρτεμιν,  
θεῶν ἄνασσαν, ὡς ἐπ’ εὐτυχεῖ πότμῳ.  
ὦ πότνια, πότνια, θύμασιν βροτησίοις  
χαρεῖσα, πέμψον ἐς Φρυγῶν  
γαῖαν Ἑλλάνων στρατὸν  
† καὶ δολόεντα Τροίας ἔδη,  
Ἀγαμέμνονά τε λόγχαις  
Ἑλλάδι κλεινότατον στέφανον  
δὸς ἀμφὶ κάρρα ἐὼν †  
κλέος ἀείμνηστον ἀμφιθεῖναι.  
(IA 1510-31)

[Behold her as she goes on her way, the destroyer of Ilium and of the Phrygians, her head crowned with garlands and sprinkled with drops of purifying water, she goes to pour her blood on the goddesses’ altar and on her own beautiful neck. For you your father will pour streams of lustral water,

for you the army of the Achaeans is waiting eagerly, longing to leave for Troy. But let us praise Artemis, the goddess of Zeus, the queen of the gods, as if this were a happy occasion. Venerable goddess, who delights in sacrifice, send the Greek army to the land of the Trojans, to the treacherous Trojan homes, and grant Agamemnon's spear a wreath of victory and undying glory for Greece.]

In our production we decided to emphasize the idea of coercion at this point in the play. The chorus is forced to recite, instead of this paean, an excerpt of Iphigenia's speech at ll. 1368ff., in the style of a patriotic anthem. They do this in the presence of the army, who gradually surround Iphigenia to take her off to be sacrificed, and their dominant emotion is fear for their own lives.

## Epilogue

In his investigation of the construction of memory, Euripides exposed its mechanisms in order to suggest the possibility of a conscious shaping of memory. This led him to challenge canonized tradition, transmitted by the poets in writing, by means of a supposedly everlasting medium, that is the writing tablet (δέλτος). His challenge to the tradition provides us with a fundamental element for the understanding of this play as a whole. Euripides re-told the famous Iphigenia myth appealing to his contemporaries' memory of it, while discussing the limits of *techne* and the authority it exerts on the human mind. What happens when memories are mendaciously manipulated? This is the question the play repeatedly raises and answers by creating an intricate and complex world of uncertainty, duplicity, political corruption, moral ambiguity, and constantly shifting opinions; it is a world in which an act of institutionalized violence quickly goes from being seen as a terrible crime, to being presented to – and accepted by – that same majority who condemned it as a patriotic sacrifice for a noble cause.

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