

The dramatization of a collective guilt: Aris Alexandrou's *Antigone* and the Greek Civil War as a trauma

A dramatização de uma culpa coletiva: *Antígona* de Aris Alexandrou e a Guerra Civil Grega como trauma

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Introduction

The Nazi occupation of Greece during World War II and the subsequent Greek Civil War left deep and lasting scars on the Greek psyche, forming a collective trauma that still resonates today. From 1941 to 1944, Greece endured severe hardships under Nazi rule, including widespread famine, brutal reprisals, and the decimation of entire villages. This period of extreme suffering was compounded by the internal strife that followed, as the nation plunged into a civil war between communist and anti-communist factions from 1946 to 1949. The Greek Civil War accentuated divisions within Greek society, leading to further violence, displacement, and loss. This ideological struggle was not only a confrontation between left and right but also revealed tensions within leftist thought itself, particularly between the organized structure of communist parties and the more philosophical, Marxist traditions of ethical resistance and class critique. This double blow of foreign occupation followed by civil conflict

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created a pervasive sense of vulnerability and mistrust, deeply affecting Greek cultural identity and social cohesion.

While historical trauma is a dominant theme in Alexandrou's *Antigone*, an equally crucial but less discussed aspect is collective guilt. The Greek Civil War did not simply divide the nation into victors and vanquished; it created a landscape of shared moral responsibility, where acts of violence, ideological purges, and betrayals blurred the line between perpetrators and victims. Collective guilt, however, is not only an emotional burden but also a structuring force in national identity formation. As LaCapra argues, collective trauma produces an unresolved ethical dilemma: nations struggle to balance historical accountability with the psychological need to repress painful memories². Alexandrou's play reflects LaCapra's concept of collective trauma, where nations shift between victimhood and complicity. Instead of offering redemption, it exposes the impossibility of moral absolution, forcing audiences to see how ideological commitments obscure ethical responsibility. According to LaCapra, historical trauma can also manifest in two ways: through "working through" (a reflective, reconciliatory process) or "acting out" (a compulsive repetition of unresolved pain). Alexandrou's play exemplifies this dilemma, portraying characters who oscillate between victimhood and complicity, demonstrating how Greek society struggles with collective guilt. The play's shifting portrayal of victimhood and complicity mirrors a society where political ideologies not only divided people but also trapped them in cycles of repression and retribution. Thus, Alexandrou's adaptation of *Antigone* engages with this theme by depicting characters who oscillate between oppressor and oppressed, forcing the audience to confront not only the cost of war but also the unsettling question of who bears responsibility for its atrocities. The memories of these turbulent times continue to shape the national consciousness, influencing Greek politics, social dynamics, and the collective memory of resilience and tragedy³.

Let us now move to the year 1951 and to an uninhabited Greek island called Ai Stratis, located in the middle of the Aegean Sea. It is within this setting, that the writer Aris Alexandrou exiled on account of his communist ideology creates his own adaptation of *Antigone*⁴. His work is divided into two parts, each of which presents a separate Antigone set in different historical contexts for Greece, the German occupation and the Civil War. Within this narrative context, with refe-

² LaCapra discusses how trauma is not about loss but also about responsibility, particularly in post-conflict societies where historical injustices remain unresolved. See LaCapra, 2014, pp. 43-45.

³ For more historical information about the Greek Civil War see Μαργαρίτης (2001) and Βόγλης (2014).

⁴ The participation of ancient drama in a very difficult historical situation for Greece, such as the Greek Civil War, is a new, particularly interesting field for the reception of ancient tragedy in the twentieth century. Several recent studies, referring to historical events and individual issues, return to the subject of theatrical production in the islands of exile. Studies, such as the book of Voglis (2002) and Hamilakis (2007) and both volumes of Μαργαρίτης (2001) covering every aspect of this war, provided the first interesting information for the present research. However, special reference should be made to the scientific study of Van Steen (2011) which in the best possible way covers the whole spectrum of the presence of ancient tragedy in the islands of martyrdom after the Greek Civil War.

rence to funerary ethics, the dilemma of heroic sacrifice in an era characterized by its anti-heroic ethos becomes a central issue with a purely political dimension. Based on Gonda Van Steen's translation of the play in English⁵, this article aims to underscore two central points. Firstly, it seeks to underline the prominent presence of historical trauma as a fundamental element of Greek identity through the use of the myth of Antigone in the play of Alexandrou. Secondly, through the analysis of the first and only stage representation of this *Antigone*, it attempts to demonstrate how the ancient myth also provides a powerful lens for contemporary audiences to confront Greece's traumatic past.

An *Antigone* outgrowth of contemporary historical trauma

Attempting to establish an initial connection between the author's background and the characteristics of his *Antigone*, we can first say that Alexandrou was exposed to Marxist ideology from an early age. He participated also in the Resistance against the Nazi Occupation and later aligned with the Democratic Army during the Civil War, ultimately facing exile due to his political convictions⁶. Despite his divergence from orthodox communist doctrine, Alexandrou followed an individualistic path, avoiding adopting the mantle of a soldier writer, identified himself as defiant and an advocate of defiance and disobedience⁷. This attitude brought him into confrontations with both the Communist Party of Greece and his political partners intensifying his exile and displacement⁸. Raftopoulos argues that «in the case of Aris Alexandrou, a rare occurrence in literature, the work and the person coincide almost perfectly. [...] Lifting your gaze from the text to the subject nothing confuses you. A painter could perhaps create his portrait using his writings as a model; this only happens when there is an absolutely honest relationship between the work and the artist, and the purity of means prevails»⁹. Thus, the trauma of war, exile and betrayal are fundamental elements in the two acts of his work, which unfold independently but converge through their common theme of resistance against authority, epitomized by the forbidden burial, an emblematic act of the Sophoclean tradition.

The plot of the two acts unravels as follows: in the first act, Antigone as a member of the Resistance captures a wounded Philhellenic German soldier known as leadership Andronikos. Andronikos, who fights bravely on the side of the Greeks against Nazi forces, is unjustly executed by the group's leader, Nikodimos, who accused him of treason. Antigone buries him and faces the sentence

⁵ For the English translation of the play see Van Steen, 2011, pp. 239-306.

⁶ The Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) was the military arm of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) during the Greek Civil War, which lasted from 1946 to 1949. The DSE fought against the government forces of the Kingdom of Greece, which were supported by the United Kingdom and the United States. For more information see Βόγλης, 2014, pp. 211-247.

⁷ See Δεσποινιάδης, 2019, pp. 18-20.

⁸ See Ραυτόπουλος, 2004, p. 192.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

of execution. In the second act, Antigone assumes a role within the Democratic Army during the Civil War. General Andronikos, her lover, sends a member of the organization, Nikodimos, on a suicidal mission. Antigone, upon discovering Nikodimos' unburied corpse in a village market, wearing a mask, buries it. Uncovering a blank letter, ostensibly from Andronikos, Antigone realizes that they have been defeated and that Nikodimos' sacrifice was in vain. Antigone then reveals the truth to the other soldiers and she is executed for her act. Furthermore, between the two acts of the play, an intermezzo is inserted, performing a metatheatrical function: The intermezzo separates the two acts but also acts as a cohesive element between them. It aids the audience in transitioning from one time period to another and alleviates the emotional tension created by the events of the first act. Simultaneously, it allows us a fleeting glimpse into peaceful scenes of everyday life, which have been disrupted due to the war¹⁰. Finally, in his initial note on *Antigone*, Alexandrou writes: «Any similarity with persons who have lived, are living, or will live is entirely coincidental. Coincidental also is the dialogic form that this written work took. Therefore, any theatre company, professional or amateur, has the right to produce the entire “play” or scenes of it, without asking the permission of the author¹¹». Raftopoulos observes that the playwright, with “monastic humility”, places the word “play” in quotation marks and renounces all intellectual property rights that would arise from its representation, thereby making it freely available to any interested party¹².

Moving to the analysis of the characters, it becomes evident that within the two distinct acts, the primary dramatic personas are the two Antigones and the rebels Andronikos and Nikodimos. The semiotics inherent in their names offers insights into their character ethos. The designation of the central protagonist directly alludes to the Sophoclean tragedy, underscoring a thematic continuity, while the significance of names such as Andronikos (man who wins) and Nikodimos (popular winner) carries a nuanced connotation, evoking the archetype of victorious combatants¹³. Moreover, the interchange of names between the two characters across the narrative acts hints at the fluidity with which individuals, in unstable war situations, are turned from victims into executioners. The fluid moral positioning of Nikodimos and Andronikos within the two acts underscores the instability of ethical boundaries during periods of conflict. Nikodimos, who in the first act unjustly condemns Andronikos, later becomes the victim of a similarly ruthless decision in the second act. This reversal highlights the inescapability of collective guilt: those who once passed judgment and exercised authority later fall victim to the same structures of ideological rigidity. This cyclical transformation of victim into oppressor reflects Alexandrou's broader critique

¹⁰ Μπάρκα, 2021, pp. 7-8.

¹¹ Van Steen, 2011, p. 239.

¹² Ραυτόπουλος, 2004, pp. 222-223.

¹³ Van Steen points out that «the names of the captains Nikodimos and Andronikos are Byzantine in origin, and they imply continuity between earlier and contemporary Greek history rather than with the original myth». See Van Steen, 2011) p. 158.

of ideological purity, particularly within the leftist movements of his time. The play questions whether revolutionaries, when in power, inevitably reproduce the same authoritarian structures they once fought against—a concern that resonates with both historical and contemporary political struggles. Thus, this subtle narrative device underscores the inherent instability of conflict environments, where roles and allegiances undergo rapid transformation.

In the portrayal of the central heroine, Alexandrou presents Antigone as two distinct dramatic personas, with common moral characteristics. These Antigones engage in inter-textual dialogue with the Sophoclean heroine, forging connections through their tenacious spirit, resistance against the irrationality and brutality of authoritarian rule, and their devotion to their ideals¹⁴. In addition, Alexandrou's heroines deviate from the Sophoclean archetype in terms of their social background and ideological identity. Their actions in both acts can be understood not only as personal defiance but as an effort to redeem the moral failures of their community. In choosing to bury the condemned, they perform an act of resistance against ideological purges and politically motivated executions, mirroring the Sophoclean Antigone's challenge to state authority. However, whereas Sophocles' Antigone primarily confronts divine law against human law, Alexandrou's heroines navigate a landscape where law itself is unstable, shaped by shifting political allegiances and moral justifications. Their burial of the dead thus becomes a symbolic act of reconciliation, attempting to restore dignity in a context where ethical clarity has been lost.

Furthermore, they are simple women, who, however, have a proper education and are committed to their anti-fascist, leftist ideology, which reflects both the structured, revolutionary goals of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the broader ethical concerns of Marxist humanism. While the communist movement in Greece sought the establishment of a socialist state through armed struggle, Marxist humanism—drawing from early Marxist thought—emphasized individual ethical agency, social justice, and resistance to dehumanization in political action. While communism, as a political movement, shaped the Democratic Army's struggle, Alexandrou's *Antigone* is framed through a broader Marxist lens, emphasizing class struggle, ideological resistance, and the critique of authoritarian power.

Unlike orthodox communist doctrine, which often prioritized party loyalty and political pragmatism, Alexandrou's Antigones embody an individualistic defiance that aligns more closely with Marxist humanism, a branch of Marxist thought that emphasizes ethics, agency, and moral responsibility in revolutionary action¹⁵. This ideological complexity explains why Antigone does not hesitate

¹⁴ «Alexandrou's two Antigones assume both the name and the burial act of the mythical Antigone (or of her other modern transformations), while certain other dramatic characters usurp the actions and sufferings of the heroes of the tragic myth "without even needing to borrow their names. [...] In the play, we will not encounter Ismene and Creon, Haemon and Eurydice, nor even a Tiresias, and there is no mention of Eteocles and Polynices» notes Pechlivanos. See Πεχλιβάνος, 2007, pp. 344-345.

¹⁵ For a discussion on Marxist humanism and the emphasis on ethics, agency, and moral responsibility in revolutionary action, see Löwy, 2005) pp. 27-33.

to oppose her own comrades when she perceives moral inconsistencies. Their resistance is not just political but also deeply ethical, revealing a conflict between ideological commitment and personal conscience. This ethical conflict aligns with Marxist humanism, particularly as theorized by Bloch, who argued that utopian hope is an essential force in political resistance. Unlike rigid ideological doctrines that demand total allegiance, Bloch's vision of utopia is inherently open-ended, allowing for moral agency even in revolutionary contexts. Alexandrou's Antigones also embody this utopian impulse—not as a naïve idealist, but as a figure who resists both fascist and communist totalitarianism in pursuit of an ethical, self-determined future¹⁶. Their defiance against both fascist and leftist authoritarianism suggests an alternative revolutionary ethos—one rooted in moral self-determination rather than party dogma. Thus, they become not only a tragic heroine but also a vehicle for Alexandrou's critique of ideological dogmatism, resonating with broader existentialist traditions in 20th-century political thought.

However, the heroines maintain their humanity and compassion: in the first act, Antigone extends care to the German prisoner Andronikos, while in the second, she perceives it as her utmost duty to ensure Nikodimos receives a proper burial. Thus, while Alexandrou's play is deeply political, its Antigone is not a mere emblem of communist militancy but a figure who challenges the very structures of power, loyalty, and ideological purity within leftist movements themselves. Alexandrou's *Antigone* therefore epitomizes an entire generation of fighters, as well as the timeless tragedy of the individual fighting to maintain his dignity and ethical morality. This dynamic aligns with the broader historical reality of post-war Greece, where many individuals carried both the burden of victimhood and the weight of complicity. The Greek Civil War was not a struggle between Left and Right but a conflict that fractured families, friendships, and entire communities, forcing individuals to participate in acts they would later regret. Alexandrou's Antigone embodies the dilemmas of those caught within this ethical limbo, reflecting the tension between ideological loyalty and human empathy.

Thus, in his *Antigone*, Alexandrou adeptly transposes the thematic elements of Sophocles' original work within the socio-historical context of his era. The work constitutes a broader criticism against the timeless alienation of struggles given in the name of high ideals, as well as against any form of power that promotes the culture of ideological coercion and opposes the values of justice, companionship and solidarity. Within Alexandrou's narrative framework, the sacrificial act of Antigone lacks justification, much like the struggle of the leftists of his generation, who saw their visions shattered with the defeat of the Civil War. Furthermore, while the play conveys all the wounds inflicted on Greek society during this period and could serve as a means for the audience to reconcile with its trauma, Van Steen points out that it does not necessarily fulfill this function. She argues that «Alexandrou made an important attempt to inspire revisionism about the Greek Left, but his attempt was left unrecognized by the theatre world until 2003, when Ardittis staged the long-forgotten *Antigone*¹⁷».

¹⁶ See Bloch, 1995, pp. 75-80 and 137-140.

¹⁷ Van Steen (2011) p. 167.

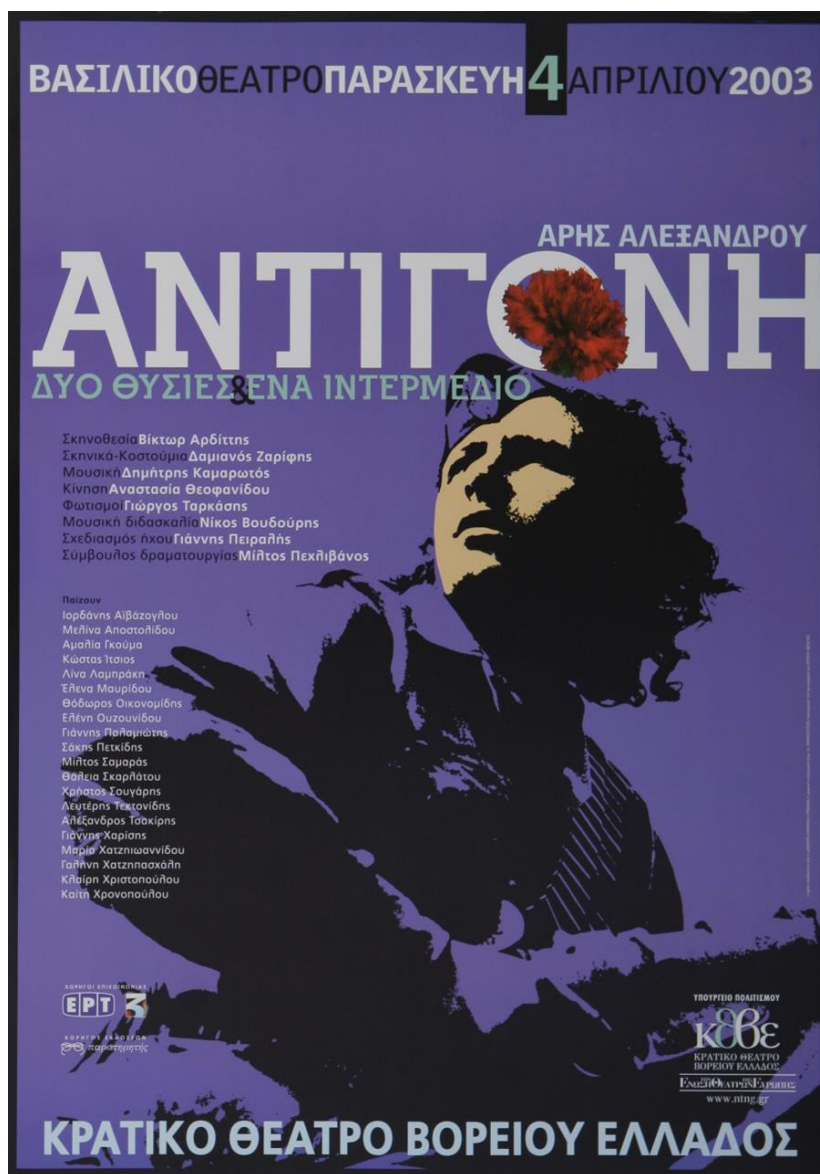


Image 1: The poster of the play *Antigone, Two Sacrifices and an Intermezzo*, ΚΘΒΕ, available in: <https://www.ntng.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&page=2&production=5766&mode=18&item=7011>¹⁸

¹⁸ Special thanks are due to the Artistic Director of the National Theater of Northern Greece, Asterios Peltekis, and to the photographer of the performance, Konstantinos Papantoniou, who granted me the right to use the photographs for this article.

An *Antigone* «completely original and painful»

In 2003, Victor Ardittis introduced to the stage this unique sample of an original new adaptation that we have from the Cold War displacement of the Greek leftists. By staging this production, Ardittis sought to challenge the boundaries of contemporary Greek political introspection. Having as subtitle the phrase «Two Sacrifices and an Intermezzo» Ardittis' performance imbued the narrative with a broader significance, surpassing the confines of its historical and political contexts. The staging of *Antigone* at the National Theater of Northern Greece in Thessaloniki caused significant social reactions, as the director himself noted. This controversy stemmed from the juxtaposition of the famous space of the National Theater of Northern Greece with the theme of Alexandrou's play, which delves into the complexities of the Civil War. Furthermore, the inclusion of a poster with an iconic photograph of a rebel adorned with a red carnation - a symbolic reference to Nikos Belogiannis - reinforced the provocative nature of the performance. As a leading member of the Greek Communist Party, Belogiannis and his co-defendants were accused of espionage and plotting to overthrow the government, charges rooted in the anti-communist fervor that gripped Greece following the Civil War. The trial was marked by its tense atmosphere and the significant international attention it garnered. He subsequently executed on March 30, 1952 and earned the title "the man with the carnation" because of his defiant act of holding a carnation during the trial, an act that has gone down in history¹⁹.

Moving on to a very brief analysis of the performance, we can start from the setting, which referred to the new signs of desolation and destruction caused by the Civil War in Greece. the half-ruined walls that move in each scene, in the light of day and night are also characterized by a Brechtian realism²⁰. This influence from the Brechtian theatre is evident not only in the sets but also in the costumes and the stage directions given. Regarding the Brechtian costuming Grammatas argues that «Brecht imparts a utilitarian, functional significance to the costumes, freeing them from immediate evaluation based on the aesthetic categories of "beautiful" or "ugly". [...] Flashy colors and heavily decorated clothes are excluded, making way for neutral fabrics in earthy tones that are described more by their material qualities (lead, copper, rust) rather than by color designations (red, blue, yellow)»²¹.

Thus, the use of Brechtian techniques in the performance aligns with Alexandrou's own rejection of ideological rigidity. Just as Brecht's epic theatre seeks to provoke critical detachment rather than emotional immersion, Alexandrou resists simplified moral binaries. The stark, minimalist staging and utilitarian costumes mirror the play's interrogation of power structures, reinforcing its

¹⁹ On the same day that Belogiannis and his comrades were executed, the poet Giannis Ritsos wrote the poem "The Man with the Carnation" at the Political Prisoners' Concentration Camp on Ai Stratis. For the translation of the poem in English see <http://yannisritsos.blogspot.com/2009/04/man-with-carnation.html>.

²⁰ See Van Steen, 2011, pp. 168-169.

²¹ See the article of Grammatas retrieved from <https://theodoregrammatas.com/>.



Image 2: The Brechtian realism, KΘBE, available in: <https://www.ntng.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&page=2&production=5766&mode=25&pg=3&item=32199>

critique of both fascist and leftist authoritarianism. Brecht's theory of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) aims to disrupt passive reception, compelling the audience to critically engage with the political implications of the performance²². Similarly, Alexandrou's *Antigone* challenges viewers to interrogate their own historical consciousness rather than passively absorb a tragic narrative. As Ardittis writes in his director's note «Alexandrou offers a theatre that is completely original and painful, because it brings collective traumas, hopes and denials to the stage. And he does so, not to move us with the passions of the people, but to observe these wounds, still open in contemporary society and still contested in public history, and to seek a way out²³».

Finally, from the critic's point of view, the comments show that, even half a century after the work was written, public discourse in Greece was not ready to accept the political culture expressed by Alexandrou. Even though the audience warmly applauded the performance, critics identified both political and aesthetic weaknesses. This revival reignited unresolved tensions in Greek public discourse, revealing a national unease with confronting its past. The polarized reception of the play underscored a persistent discomfort with acknowledging

²² This technique employs methods designed to distance the audience from emotional involvement in the play, serving as jolting reminders of the artificiality of the theatrical performance. For more information see Brecht, 1964, especially chapters 22 and 28.

²³ The quote comes from the director's note in the program of the play. Retrieved from <https://www.ntng.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&page=2&production=5766&mode=17&item=20838>.

not only the suffering of the defeated but also the guilt of the victors. This is particularly evident in the criticism leveled against the production, with some commentators dismissing it as an unnecessary reopening of old wounds. However, such reactions reinforce the very argument that Alexandrou's work seeks to make: that Greece has yet to fully process the ethical consequences of its civil strife. The public reaction to the 2003 revival illustrates what Nora describes as *lieux de mémoire*—spaces where unresolved historical tensions resurface through cultural representation²⁴. Moreover, the staging of *Antigone* functioned not as a revival of a forgotten text, but as a catalyst for historical reckoning, forcing contemporary Greek society to engage with a past that remains ideologically contested. The theater became an arena where audiences were confronted with their own discomfort regarding Greece's Civil War past, exposing the limits of national reconciliation. The inclusion of Nikos Belogiannis' imagery further intensified this effect, as his historical execution remains a symbolic trauma point for Greek leftists. In this sense, the play's revival did not stage a forgotten work—it reactivated a collective historical wound, forcing contemporary Greek society to acknowledge the emotional and ideological residues of civil conflict.

In a related discussion about how much the Greeks as a nation can finally endure the truth, the director mentions that «Alexandrou's *Antigone* had been absent from the stage for more than fifty years. Its revival aimed to be more than just a performance—whether more or less successful—but a gesture of broader scope that would lend itself to multiple interpretations and provoke intense discussions, transcending the specific confines of theatrical practice. In the Royal Theatre, in the heart of conservative Thessaloniki, a major state theater brings to the stage a work that speaks to the wounds of the Greek experience. The production coincides with a resurgence of public discussions about the German Occupation and the Civil War. The symbolic use of Nikos Belogiannis' image in the production further exacerbated these tensions. While Belogiannis remains an emblematic figure of leftist resistance, his execution also serves as a reminder of the state's role in perpetuating cycles of violence and political retribution. By placing this imagery at the center of the production, the performance forced audiences to confront the lingering moral ambiguities of the Civil War era—particularly the reality that guilt is not confined to one political side but is instead a shared burden carried by an entire nation. Alexandrou, the “conscientious objector,” still provokes: the critic K.G. describes the work as a “political and aesthetic mistake,” the left-wing political columnist Angelos E. refuses to participate in a public discussion about the play, organized by the European Social Forum and A.S., an exceptionally progressive woman, says that “we should not talk about these things even if they happened²⁵». Thus, we observe that even today, it remains challenging to discuss topics concerning the turbulent past of the Occupation and the Civil War publicly, as they bring ideological traumas to

²⁴ See Nora, 1989, pp. 16-19. In addition, Erll argues that cultural memory is not static; it is actively reshaped through performance and public debate. See Erll, 2011, especially chapter 5.

²⁵ Roumpani quotes the passage in her master's thesis. See Ρουμπάνη, 2019, pp. 70-71.

the surface. This difficulty persists, in my view, because the conflict between Right and Left remains central to Greece's ideological divide.

Conclusion

Aris Alexandrou's *Antigone* serves as a powerful exploration of the trauma embedded in Greek historical consciousness, particularly in relation to the Nazi Occupation and the Greek Civil War. By transposing Sophocles' tragedy onto the landscape of mid-20th century political violence, Alexandrou offers a theatrical space where the wounds of history are not only represented but also re-experienced. His adaptation reflects the enduring psychological scars left by ideological purges, betrayals, and cycles of retribution, compelling the audience to confront the long-term effects of national division. Antigone's defiance is not a political act; it is also a traumatic response to a world where justice has become unstable and memory itself is contested.

The structure of the play reinforces this sense of historical repetition and unresolved grief. The mirroring of events in the two acts, where roles are reversed and executioners become victims, suggests that trauma is not confined to a single moment but reverberates across generations. Alexandrou's portrayal of Antigone illustrates the paradox of trauma: it is both an individual experience and a collective phenomenon, shaping the identity of those who suffer as well as those who bear witness. In this way, the play resonates with contemporary trauma theory, which asserts that historical violence is not confined to the past but continues to shape both national and personal narratives in the present.

Furthermore, the controversy surrounding the 2003 revival of *Antigone* underscores the difficulty of confronting traumatic history in public discourse. The reluctance to stage the play for over fifty years reflects not only political sensitivities but also a deeper cultural resistance to fully engaging with the legacy of the Civil War. Even when the play was finally brought to the stage, reactions to it revealed that the trauma of the past remains unresolved, resurfacing in new forms of ideological and cultural conflict. This ongoing discomfort suggests that historical memory in Greece is still deeply fragmented, marked by competing narratives that struggle to coexist.

Ultimately, *Antigone* is not simply a retelling of a classical myth but a theatrical act of mourning, where the nation's historical trauma is staged, debated, and left open-ended. The play challenges audiences not just to remember but to question the mechanisms of forgetting and repression that have shaped Greek historical identity. Rather than offering reconciliation, it exposes the inability of official narratives to fully account for the losses, betrayals, and moral ambiguities of the past. In doing so, *Antigone* remains profoundly relevant—not just as a work of political theater, but as a crucial intervention in the ongoing negotiation of memory, trauma, and national identity in Greece. Yet, Alexandrou's play does not only function as a lamentation of historical suffering—it is a political act of reckoning. It forces its audience to consider the limits of historical responsibility, much like Arendt's notion of the 'banality of evil', where the mechanisms of

ideological obedience produce moral failures across the political spectrum²⁶. In this context, *Antigone* is not simply a heroine of resistance; she is a witness to the failures of all ideological projects that demand total allegiance. Her burial of the dead is an act of defiance, but it is also a symbolic attempt to restore historical consciousness, calling for an ethical engagement with the past that transcends partisanship. The play, therefore, does not simply depict trauma—it demands that we confront it. Thus, as long as political power continues to shape historical narratives, *Antigone* remains not just a theatrical work, but a persistent challenge to Greece's unresolved struggle with its past. The continued controversy suggests that reconciliation remains elusive, raising an unsettling question: How long must a nation wait before it is ready to tell the truth about its own history?

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²⁶ Arendt discusses the “banality of evil,” arguing that atrocities are often committed not by fanatics or monsters but by ordinary individuals who obey orders and conform to ideology without critical thought. See Arendt (2006).

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Abstract

This article examines how Aris Alexandrou's adaptation of *Antigone* (1951) functions as both a critique of ideological absolutism and a meditation on collective guilt. By analysing its structure, thematic content, and performance history, this study demonstrates how Alexandrou disrupts the binary narratives of victimhood and complicity, challenging both leftist and rightist historiographies of the Greek Civil War. It explores how Alexandrou's deviation from the traditional Sophoclean narrative serves as a political and ethical commentary on ideological violence, exile, and national identity. By presenting *Antigone* as a complex, ideologically driven figure, Alexandrou critiques both fascist and communist authoritarianism, highlighting the moral ambiguities of resistance. Additionally, the article examines the 2003 stage production by Victor Arditis, arguing that its reception underscores the challenges of addressing historical wounds in public discourse. Through a close reading of the play's structure, themes, and performance history, this study positions Alexandrou's *Antigone* as a crucial work in the reception of ancient tragedy in modern Greece.

Resumo

Este artigo examina como a adaptação de *Antígona* (1951) de Aris Alexandrou funciona simultaneamente como uma crítica ao absolutismo ideológico e uma reflexão sobre a culpa coletiva. Através da análise de sua estrutura, conteúdo temático e história de performance, este estudo demonstra como Alexandrou desestabiliza as narrativas binárias de vitimização e cumplicidade, desafiando tanto as historiografias de esquerda quanto as de direita sobre a Guerra Civil Grega. Explora-se como o desvio de Alexandrou em relação à narrativa sofocleana tradicional opera como um comentário político e ético sobre a violência ideológica, o exílio e a identidade nacional. Ao apresentar *Antígona* como uma figura complexa e ideologicamente motivada, Alexandrou questiona tanto o autoritarismo fascista quanto o comunista, evidenciando as ambiguidades morais da resistência. Além disso, o artigo analisa a encenação de 2003, dirigida por Victor Arditis, argumentando que sua recepção ressalta os desafios de abordar feridas históricas no discurso público. Por meio de uma leitura atenta da estrutura, dos temas e da história de performance da peça, este estudo posiciona a *Antígona* de Alexandrou como uma obra fundamental na recepção da tragédia antiga na Grécia moderna.

