EVPHROSYNE

REVISTA DE FILOLOGIA CLÁSSICA

NOVA SÉRIE

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CENTRO DE ESTUDOS CLÁSSICOS

FACULDADE DE LETRAS DE LISBOA

MMXIX

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The Syria Trojan Women from therapeutic theatre to a cry for action

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According to SCPR, The Syrian Centre for Policy Research, from the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011 until the end of 2018, more than 500,000 people have been killed and there are 13.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. And according to the UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, from 2011 until February 2019, 11.8 million people have been forcibly displaced, a number that includes 5.7 million refugees and 6.2 million internally displaced.

In this context of diaspora of the Syrian people, what Miriam Cooke, Professor of Arab Cultures at Duke University, called "artists-activists"[1] emerged, that is, artists that are putting their lives at risk by using their art not only to resist injustice but also to expose it to the eyes of the rest of the world[2]. Among these artists-activists we have to include several playwrights and theatre directors. It is true that theatre used for political purposes in Syria began long before the so-called "Arab Spring"[3] and is as old as the Assad regime. The novelty is that, from 2011, a set of scenic proposals arose

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[1] M. Cooke, *Dancing in Damascus – Creativity, Resilience, and the Syrian Revolution*, New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 1.

[2] For example, Ganzeer (whose real name is Mohamed Fahmy), one of Egypt's most famous street artists. He had to leave his country to escape imprisonment for a false accusation of being part of the Muslim Brotherhood. Or the cartoonist Ali Farzat, who has published more than 15,000 caricatures. He was abducted by people from the government, his hands were smashed and he was left for dead on the side of a road. Regarding the replies of artists to the violence in the first years of the Syrian Revolution, we suggest reading M. Cooke, op. cit., and for a more general discussion about the practices of cultural resistance, we suggest reading N. Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st century*, Brooklyn / London, Melville House, 2015.

[3] We suggest reading E. Ziter, *Political Performances in Syria: from the six-day War to the Syrian Uprising*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

as a result of therapeutic theatre workshops in which refugees, the most visible face of the Syrian tragedy, are the protagonists.

One of these projects is *The Syria Trojan Women*, directed by Omar Abu Saada. Graduated by the High Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus, he was the co-founder of a group called Studio Theatre where the theatre is used as a space or forum applying the techniques of Augusto Boal[4], a Brazilian theatre practitioner, drama theorist and political activist that created the Theatre of the Oppressed, a political-theatrical method based on the belief that theatre is strong enough to mobilise workers and the oppressed to fight against the oppression caused by the capitalist system. Abu Saada worked for years in remote villages in Syria[5], prisons and refugee camps with interactive workshops. *The Syria Trojan Women* is precisely the result of one such therapeutic theatre workshop. As M. Cooke points out,

> For the women in the camps, it was not enough to share their experiences in stutters and broken sentences. They needed help with their stories so that in telling them they might begin to understand what they had undergone (…) Like prison experience, the violence of the regime repression of the revolution was hard to put into words.[6]

Therefore, when they were given the Euripides play[7], these Syrian women refugees in Jordan, found the words and voice needed to mourn the loss of so many and to describe the horrors they have been through. Euripides' *The Trojan Women* takes place in the aftermath of the fall of the city of Troy. The men are all dead and only the women remain. Hecuba, the Queen of the fallen city, awaits on stage with the Chorus to know the fates of her daughters Cassandra and Polyxena and her daughters-in-law Andromache and Helen. Their city is destroyed, the men in their family dead and they are spoils of war to be taken by the Greeks as slaves[8].

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[4] A. Boal, *Teatro do Oprimido e outras Poéticas Políticas*, Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1991.

[5] "You need to know that before 2011, there was no way to overcome censorship in Syria. It was a double censorship, on both the text and the performance itself. There were so many red lines. You couldn't talk about politics, about dignitaries, about corruption, or sex, or religion... I was never able to put on a show without having to change a few things, to come up with alternative solutions. It's in that context that our company began following the model of the Theatre of the Oppressed, founded by Augusto Boal on the basis of the understanding of social problems and the search for their solutions" Omar Abu Saada (F. Cossu, *While I was waiting. Interview with Omar Abusaada*. Festival Avignon, 2016).

[6] M. Cooke, op. cit., p. 102.

[7] For further reading, see: A. Etman, "Translation at the intersection of traditions: the Arab Reception of the Classics", in L. Hardwick, C. Stray (edd.), *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2008, pp. 141-152; M. Almohanna, "Greek Drama in the Arab World", in B. Van Zyl Smit (ed.), *A handbook to the reception of Greek Drama*, London, Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, pp. 364-381.

[8] For commentaries, see: S. A. Barlow (ed.), *Euripides. Trojan Women*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1986; J. Morwood (ed.), *Euripides. The Trojan Women and Other Plays*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000 (with an introduction by Edith Hall); P. Burian, A. Shapiro (edd.), *Euripides. Trojan Women and Other Plays*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

This play of Euripides, much likely performed in the Great Dionysia of 415 BCE, has been admired for its anti-war message and many of its contemporary adaptations reflect precisely that[9]. Indeed, there are several scholars who defend the idea that at the time of the performance, *The Trojan Women* already had a relationship with contemporary events. In fact, Euripides didn't live in the time of the glorious battles of Marathon and Salamis, a time of splendour in which Greece had defeated Persia in a war for Greek freedom. He rather lived in the troubled time of the Peloponnese War, a war no longer between Greeks and Barbarians, but of Greeks among themselves. That dispute ended in a number of misfortunes, both for the conquered and for the conquerors, which led to the collapse of the Athenian empire. In the winter of 416-415 BCE, just a few months before the performance of *The Trojan Women*, Athens conquered the island of Melos, a *polis* founded by Sparta that was trying to remain neutral during the conflict. According to Thucydides[10], the Athenians killed the entire adult male population and enslaved all the women and children. Given the similarities between this massacre and the plot of the play, it is easy to understand why several scholars have seen in *The Trojan Women* a response to the conquest of Melos. It should be noted, however, that in recent decades, several researchers have questioned whether Euripides actually wrote the play with that intention, for several reasons, namely chronological: from the conquest of Melos, probably in the winter of 416 BCE, until the performance of *The Trojan Women*, in March 415 BCE, Euripides would have had very few months to write the play, present it to the archon, and recruit and train choir members and actors[11]. Regardless of the author's intentions, which we cannot be sure of, we tend to agree with N. T. Croally when he points out that the most important thing is "the fact that the writing of the play is not really the issue: it was a matter for the audience to decide in March whether they saw the play as a response (as *their* response) to Melos"[12].

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[9] Among others: In 1964, *Les Troyennes*, by Jean-Paul Sartre, draws an analogy with the torture and massacres that took place during the Algerian War of Independence; in 1977, Tadashi Suzuki, a Japanese theatre director, makes an adaptation in which Troy stands for Hiroshima; in 1994, the version of Tony Harrison, set at the nuclear premises at Greenham Common in England, is a protest against the Thatcher government that allowed the Americans to place nuclear weapons in that facility. For further reading about the contemporary reception of *The Trojan Women*, see: M. McDonald, *Ancient Sun, Modern Light: Greek Drama on the Modern Stage*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1992, chapter 1; F. Macintosh, "Tragedy in performance: nineteenth and twentieth-century productions", in P. E. Easterling, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 284-323; B. Goff, *Euripides: Trojan Women*, London, Bristol Classical Press, 2012, chapter 3; L. Romero Mariscal, "Las condenas de la guerra de Las Troyanas de Eurípides", in A. Pociña, J. M. García (coords.), *La paz y la guerra*, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 2013, pp. 369-384; N. S. Rabinowitz, "Trojan Women", in L. K. McClure (ed.), *A Companion to Euripides*, Chichester / West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 2017, pp. 199-213.

[10] Thucydides, 5.116.

[11] For further reading, see: A. M. Erp Taalman Kip, "Euripides and Melos", *Mnemosyne*, series 4, 40:3-4, 1987, 414-419; N. T. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic: The Trojan Women and the Function of Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 231-234; B. Goff, op. cit., pp. 27-35.

[12] N. T. Croally, op. cit, p. 232, n. 170.

In the fifth century, as today, these women, wives, and mothers, such as Andromache and Hecuba, stand for the passive victims of wars. Unlike men who die, these women must endeavour to survive through the spoils of war and deal with their sufferings[13]. As Andromache says:

> In my opinion, death is the same as not being born, and death better (by far) than living a painful life. For the dead man after experiencing the ills of life does not suffer. One who falls from happiness to unhappiness is mentally bewildered because of former prosperity.[14]

These are women who once lived happy lives and are now fighting for their survival. No wonder that, although almost 2500 years have passed, the Syrian women identified with the story and the characters: the loss of their homes and family, the destruction of an entire city, the cruelty towards women and children, the change of fortune, the impacts of war:

> Hecuba – Up, you poor one: lift your head and neck from the ground. This is no longer Troy nor we the Queen of Troy. Bear your fortune as it changes[15]. (…) What is there that I do not mourn in my wretchedness, I for whom country, children and husband are all gone?[16]
> Ah, I am wretched indeed! This is now the ultimate and final outcome of all my suffering. I am leaving my country, and my city is lit with flame.[17]

These words of Hecuba sound real to Syrian women. Here are some of their reactions after getting to know the play[18]:

> I feel as though the text is talking about us, all the details of our lives and what we went through ourselves. It is like us, we were all queens in our own houses, our houses were our kingdoms. We are like Hecuba: we lost everything.
> (Fatima)[19]

> Troy's story is very similar to Syria's story, its women, its children, the country that was destroyed. So when they offered us this text and this play we were very keen to participate because we all lived the real experience. It's not like we needed to write a new story, whatever happened in Troy was documented, but it's no more than what happened in Syria.
> (Maha)[20]

> When Hecuba turns to have a last look at Troy she makes a speech about never seeing her country ever again, and I cry when I read it, because when we were at the border about to cross into Jordan my husband told me to look back at Syria for one last time, because we might never see it again.
> (Suad)[21]

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[13] We suggest reading E. Rodríguez Cidre, Cautivas Troyanas – *El mundo femenino fragmentado en las tragedias de Eurípides*, Córdoba, Del Copista, 2010.

[14] S. A. Barlow, op. cit, vv. 636-640.

[15] Ibidem, vv. 98-101.

[16] Ibidem, vv. 106-107.

[17] Ibidem, vv. 1272-1274.

[18] The last names of the women stay confidential for safety reasons.

[19] Website of the Trojan Women Project.

[20] In the fundraising video made for the United Kingdom tour by Developing Artists.

[21] Website of the Trojan Women Project.

Thus, after six weeks of therapeutic theatre sessions by a group of women who had never acted before, and which number had fallen from 60 to 25 for several reasons, it was time to present the results to the public. Because, as wrote Edward Blaise Ziter, Professor of Theatre History at the Department of Drama at New York University,

> (...) in therapeutic theater, actors take control of painful memories by transforming these memories into raw material for art. As art, it exists to be shared (...) Since the goal is to fashion trauma into art, the therapeutic process is only complete after a run of public performances. Making the private public is the final step in an artistic/therapeutic process.[22]

The piece was premiered in 2013 in Amman, the capital of Jordan, at the King Hussein Foundation National Centre for Culture and Arts. Everything in the play (scenery, costumes, lighting, the staging options) is reduced to the simplest expression, so that the viewer's attention focuses exclusively on the actresses' words. On stage, there are only three benches, a screen and a microphone. The actresses wear black dresses and black hijabs and two of them wear niqabs, pointing out that these women are traditional, real women and not professional theatre actresses. The staging choices made by Abu Saada constantly show the supremacy of the actor's personal stories over Euripides's lines. We hear the characters' speeches in video projections at the back of the stage, on a screen divided in half. On one side, a woman looks directly to the camera and on the other side we see a woman in profile. The first introduces herself, says her age and talks about the character of the play that struck her the most, in this case, Hecuba:

> (…) seventeen years ago, I too desired death and felt that a taste of bitterness would linger in my mouth until the end of my days no matter how long I lived.

Then, we hear in the voice of the woman in profile Hecuba's lines in which she describes the horror of seeing her husband butchered. Next, the first woman talks about herself and her affinity to the Euripides's text. As such the audience can see the "before" and the "after". The happiness of the refugee, based on the company of her family, is in opposition with the unhappiness of another time where she felt stripped of her memories, like Hecuba. And this is how the audience meets Euripides's characters Hecuba, Cassandra, Andromache.

On the contrary, the women on stage cope with the traumas of their actual life as refugees. And these statements are hard to listen to. For example, a middle-aged woman leaves the chorus, sits alone in a chair on the downstage and places her hands on the lap. The only movement on stage is in her lips, telling the audience about her crossing back to Syria to see her mother, who had gone into a coma. After her death, men with masks entered the house. They sent their nephews, still children, to the ground,

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[22] E. B. Ziter, "The Syria Trojan Women: Rethinking the public with therapeutic theater", *Communication and the Public*, 2:2, 2017, 177-190, 179.

and threatened to take them if her brother, Mohammed, did not go peacefully with them, promising that he would return. She had already returned to the Jordanian refugee camp when she received the call from her sister:

> – Mohammed has died.
> – How?
> – I don't know. The Red Cross found him in a road. He was shot in the mouth.

Another woman tells the audience how she fled from Al-Bayda while the men of her family decided to stay. She does not have to say anything else. In the Al-Bayda massacre 150 people lost their lives. Her story ends with her brother-in-law returning to Syria to identify the corpses and attend the mass burial. The description of these stories is brutally direct:

> They took them. They tied their hands and blindfolded them. They took them to a place far away. To a warehouse. To a room inside a room. It was a place no one knew. They stood them by a wall. Then they shot and killed them. Their corpses lay on the ground for four days.

These recollections are delivered in Syrian dialect, contrasting with the characters' speeches and the chorus's odes, both delivered in classical Arabic used in writing and formal speech, reminding us once again of the difference between reality and drama.

In the final part of the play, eight women come to the downstage to read letters that they wrote to loved-ones that stayed in Syria, showing us different experiences, but the same feelings of longing and sadness. One of the women writes a letter to her home in Syria:

> I miss you too my precious. I miss your walls and your doors. I miss every corner you had. I miss your stairs and standing by the window. I miss kissing your walls, and lying on your tiles. Oh, my dearest house, I wish I could go back to you so that I can talk to you and tell you what happened to me after I left you. You protected me and gave me dignity. I was like a tree, then someone came and uprooted me.

These women, one at a time, come out of the chorus, probably one of the most innovative components of this performance. The play begins with a chorus of women, backlit against a bright screen at the bottom of the stage, so that we can only see silhouettes. Then the lights go up and the audience can see their faces. It is this chorus that discloses the present situation, not Poseidon, as in the Greek play:

> Troy is but a smoking city. It has been sacked by the Greek spear. The sacred groves are desolate and the sanctuaries of the gods are awash with blood. Gold and Trojan spoils are being sent to the ships of the Greeks. They are waiting for a fair wind to blow from the stern so that they can have the joy of looking upon their wives and children. Scamander echoes with many a howl from female captives as they are allotted their masters. But all Trojan women who have not been allotted are in these tents. They have been picked out for the foremost men of the army.

While in Attic Theatre, the chorus commented and clarified the words and actions of the characters, here it frames not the lines of characters that appear in film projections on the screen only, as already mentioned, but the longer narratives of the women seated on stage, hence pointing out the individuality of the actresses over the mythical characters. The ode following the story of Al-Bayda massacre is recited in darkness while the woman who told the story is still and silent in a chair, visible within a small circle of light. The chorus begins with a droning hum that grows louder until it explodes in a lamentation for the destruction of the city. And it comes as a surprise that these odes from the play by Euripides represent some solace from the pain that belies the actual testimonies.

As a matter of fact, there are not many words from the tragedy of Euripides in this play, but it is striking and compelling to see the merger between Ancient Troy and contemporary Syria as attested by these words of the chorus that shows the extinction of an entire city:

> You will soon fall upon the dear earth into anonymity. You will cover the earth with your destruction. The dust is winging its way to the sky like smoke. It is forbidding me from seeing the house I lived in. The name of our land will pass into oblivion. Each one of us has lost what is dear to them. Miserable Troy exists no more.

The Greek Tragedy serves as a way to express the problems of these women in a post-dramatic angle. As established by the German theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann, post-dramatic theatre is more concerned with producing an effect on spectators than on being true to the text. Which leads us to the question of whether a testimonial theatre play, as this one, is an act of individual rehabilitation or a political act. And my answer is: both. Indeed, first of all, this play empowered these women to speak out loud about their traumas and share their pain. In their own words:

> The idea of the play is such a good one: we are getting the opportunity to talk about what we're going through and at the same time we feel that we are doing something important and that we're appreciated.
>
> (Raneem)[23]

> My participation in this play revitalised me. It gave me a sense of responsibility. I feel more optimistic now: it empowered me and made me feel stronger. It helped me overcome some of the issues resulting from our crisis.
>
> (Fatima)[24]

In fact, on the night of the performance in Amman, the audience was composed by the family of the performers, other refugees and Jordanians who are living with nearly 600.000 registered refugees in their country. However, when the production accepted the invitation from the Tällberg

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[23] MARK TRAN, "Syrian women share their stories in new version of ancient anti-war play", *The Guardian*, November 28, 2013.

[24] Website of the Trojan Women Project.

Foundation, the play surely meant different things to the audience formed by CEO's, scholars, artists and former government officials. The play was performed at CERN[25], the European Council for Nuclear Research, in Geneva, Switzerland, in October 2014, as an important part of a workshop that "aimed to explore the implications for mankind and society of the accelerating pace of evolution, in all its dimensions"[26]. And in this moment, the play ceased to be just a moment for healing.

In the same year this production was invited by Georgetown University in Washington DC and Columbia University in New York to tour the United States. However, the visas for these refugees were denied under the excuse that it was not possible to confirm that these women would leave. As if the fact that they had left in Jordan husbands, brothers, children, the few family members they still have, was not enough[27]. Nevertheless, the performance went ahead, though as a virtual conference with recorded excerpts, behind-the-scenes documentary footage and a live debate (via Skype) with the women who participated in the play and with other members of the project's artistic team including Omar Abu Saada. Entitled "Voices unheard – The Syria: Trojan Women Summit", this was also a chance to discuss the situation of Syria, the refugees and the role of the arts with leading policy experts and artists.

Also, the filmmaker Yasmin Fedda followed and filmed the process of creation of the play in Jordan. Thus, interspersing images of the play with those of women telling their stories in miserable apartments in Amman, she created a documentary entitled *Queens of Syria* that, in addition to being seen in several countries, has won several awards at different festivals[28].

And in 2016 the play was re-adapted for a United Kingdom tour, which also resulted in a documentary made by Charlotte Ginsborg and Anatole Sloan entitled *The World to hear: Queens of Syria UK Theatre Tour*. The play was part of the "Trojan Women Project"[29] and it was premiered at the Young

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[25] Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire.

[26] Website of the Tällberg Foundation.

[27] Their visas were denied under the Immigration and Nationality Act, section 214(b): "This law applies only to nonimmigrant visa categories. If you are refused a visa under section 214(b), it means that you: (...) Did not overcome the presumption of immigrant intent, required by law, by sufficiently demonstrating that you have strong ties to your home country that will compel you to leave the United States at the end of your temporary stay". As said by Cynthia Schneider, a former U.S. ambassador to the Netherlands and co-chair of Georgetown's Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, which organized the event: "I honestly thought the fact that these women had dependent small children and dependent parents [in Jordan] and none speaks English, and they don't have any connection in the U.S., what would be the likelihood under those circumstances that that would happen?" (P. Marks, "Visa denials scuttle play with Syrian actresses at Georgetown", *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2014).

[28] Among others: Black Pearl Award for Best Documentary Director from the Arab World at Abu Dhabi Film Festival (2014), Special Mention from the UNHCR (the United Nations Refugee Agency) at the 3rd edition of the Human Rights Film Festival in Tunis (2014), UNHCR/CONARE Director's Prize at Cinemigrante Festival in Argentina (2015) and Best Documentary Award at International Festival of Women's Film in Morocco (2015).

[29] The "Trojan Women Project" was founded by Charlotte Eagar (a film producer and former journalist) and William Stirling (also a former journalist) and, as stated in the website

Vic Theatre, in London, with 13 refugee women. This was a clear adaptation of a therapeutic theatre play to new contexts and new goals. Indeed, in this new play, directed by Zoe Lafferty and called *Queens of Syria*, some things from the original play were changed. The costumes, for example. The new ones evoked traditional clothes, but in bright colours like burgundy, purple and mustard. It is true that, as pointed out by E. B. Ziter, "aesthetics can come at the expense of the efficacious, when the display of artistry eclipses healing"[30]. However, this new production was efficacious by a different point of view and regarding his purpose which was to call for international action. In fact, as a general rule, the public seems more likely to empathize with those who share their aesthetics. Also, new scenes were introduced. One of them point, on the one hand, to the absurdity of some questions made by the European journalists. On the other hand, it shows the prejudices that these people have had to deal with when they arrived Europe:

> – Why did you run away from Syria?
> (…)
> – Do you have nightmares?
> (…)
> – How come you have a smart phone?
> – Sorry, it's not sad enough. Do you have a sadder story?

I thus believe we can say that through tours and university and festival screenings, these Trojan Women projects went from promoting personal healing to a new revolutionary public sphere based on new models to improve civic commitment.

Following the same process of creation, Abu Saada, with the writer and playwright Mohammad Al Attar, staged two other adaptations of Greek plays. Born is Damascus in 1980, Al Attar is graduated in Literature by Damascus University and has a Master's degree in Applied Theatre by the Goldsmiths University in London. Currently living in Berlin, he has been an active voice on the Syria's issues and he is the author of several plays that have been adapted for performances on stage[31].Thus, in 2015, his adaptation of *Antigone*, by Sophocles, was renamed "Antigone of Shatila", Shatila being the name of the refugee camp where the women that acted in the play were living. Directed by Omar Abu Saada, this performance was shown in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. In this play, Hiba Sahly, a 23 years old refugee, identifies her own story with that of Antigone – she has lost two

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(www.trojanwomenproject.org), the Project "has been creating joint therapeutic drama and advocacy projects for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Europe and the UK since 2013.". The last of his projects was *The Trojans* performed in 2019 by a cast of Syrian refugees living in Glasgow, Scotland.

[30] E. B. Ziter, op. cit., 2017, p. 187.

[31] Including, among others, *Withdrawal* (a play about a couple living in a small apartment in Damascus, taking refuge from the mechanisms of social control of the society), *Could you please look into the camera?* (based on interviews with Syrians detained during the Uprising and where testimonies of torture are told directly to a camera) and *While I was Waiting* (where a comatose patient serves as a metaphor for Syria).

brothers and could not bury any of them because of the war. Other woman, Rasha, 22 years old, identifies herself with Ismene. However, to Omar Abu Saada, this play goes deeper:

> The main theme of this text is a very important one for these women… insurgency, rebellion, disobedience… Did they do right or wrong in deciding to ask for freedom? This question has been endlessly discussed in rehearsals – both whether Antigone is right to insist on doing what she believes is moral despite the tragedy she brings, and whether the price Syrians are paying for challenging President Bashar al-Assad has been worth it.[32]

And in 2017, the adaptation of Mohammad Al Attar of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, also directed by Omar Abu Saada, was staged in the historic Volksbühne, in Berlin, with nine Syrian young women telling their own stories of escape[33].

The intention of Al Attar and Abu Saada by working with the Greek plays was to make three episodes, now finished, that showed the lives of the Syrian people in different phases of the Syria war from the point of view of women. As Mohammad Al Attar points out,

> (…) it was never my intention to deliver a final statement, but rather to encourage audiences to engage in a deeper way in the Syrian tragedy. This is my goal. It is an attempt to remind people of this fact: Despite acknowledging that the political and military maps are very (*sic*) and complex, it should not prevent you from taking actions, and from asking more profound questions regarding how and why did we allowed this to happen.[34]

Thus, through the similarities between the Greek tragedies and the Syrian tragedy, two objectives are achieved: on the one hand, promoting personal healing of the traumas that these women have suffered. As said by Suad, one of the women that participated in the play, "I have a scream I have to let out.". After all, as M. Cooke beautifully wrote:

> When the words that actors have repeated for millennia came out of their mouths in Arabic, and the words were not theatre, but their lives, these women ceased to be victims; they became survivors. Moreover, saying these words to an audience that recognized the overlap between the classic and the recent trauma turned these women into heroines.[35]

On the other hand, it serves to raise awareness. An invitation to the audience to identify with these women as individuals. These women are Syrians, but they could be French, English, German, American, or of any other nationality. The goal is to remember the audiences that these women

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[32] T. Ross, "Syrian refugee women in Lebanon take heart from Antigone – in pictures", *The Guardian*, December 10, 2014.

[33] This adaptation was first performed as stories in September of 2017 in the former Tempelhof airport, which today is the space of one of the largest refugee camps in Berlin.

[34] T. Feldhaus, Interview, *Volksbühne Berlin*, n.d.

[35] M. Cooke, op. cit., p. 103.

are humans[36] and to cause discomfort in the hope that this discomfort leads to action. The answer to the question made by Suad, "I have a scream I want the whole world to hear. But I wonder if it will resonate?" is, after all, in the timeless and universal words of Euripides:

> "Dying and living are very different things, my child. The former is nothing, but while there's life, there's hope.[37]

Abstract: In a context of diaspora of the Syrian people, we find a set of innovative scenic proposals as a result of therapeutic theatre workshops in which refugees, the most visible face of the Syrian tragedy, are the protagonists. It is our goal to show how the interactions between the ancient and the modern, in addition to ensure the timelessness and universality of the Greek ancient drama, contribute not only to give these women a voice but also contribute to create a new revolutionary public sphere. We would like to show how these projects of adaptations of Greek tragedies went from promoting personal healing to a new revolutionary public sphere based on new models to improve civic commitment.

Keywords: Greek Tragedy; Syria; Reception.

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[36] As noted by Rachel Shabi, "Faced with the largest refugee crisis since the World War II (…), the reaction around much of Europe has been a hardening of hearts and a bolstering of border patrols. Whether it is wealthier nations such as Britain or France, or poorer European Union members such as Romania or Bulgaria, the comments are strikingly similar: countries are too full, refugees are someone else's problem and migrants are either a security threat, a terrible culture clash or a financial burden, to the extent that their arrival must be controlled or stopped entirely" (R. Shaby, "Reversing the anti-refugee discourse with art", *Al Jazeera*, November 1, 2016).

[37] J. Morwood, op. cit., vv. 632-633.

I
COMMENTATIONES

II
STVDIA BREVIORA

III
DISPVTATIONES

IV
VARIA NOSCENDA

V
LIBRI RECENSITI

a) Edições de texto. Comentários. Traduções. Estudos Linguísticos

b) Literatura. Cultura. História

c) *Instrumenta*

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